

Supervisor/HR Supplement Newsletter

May 2010
Page 1

Helpful Resources From Your Employee Assistance Program



Get To Know Your Employees!

The more you know about your employees, the better you can work with their individual styles, references and needs to set a climate of motivation within the workplace. This can lead to a high level of productivity, teamwork, and morale.

How Does It Help?

- You find out about their learning style.
- You can use what you know about their interests to match them to tasks they enjoy and do well.
- You see what motivates them.
- You foster mutual trust.
- You learn about special talents they can use.
- You find out what sort of feedback they respond to. Employees appreciate feeling that they're interesting and important as individuals.

Start With Yourself

- Be personable.
- Be occasionally available for meeting away from the workplace.
- Talk about yourself don't offer an exchange of family secrets, but don't be afraid to talk about your family and your outside interests.

Learning Employees' Stories

- Listen sincerely.
- Greet people personally.
- Ask questions: *How's the family?* , *What's going well with you?* etc
- Schedule off-site social or other gatherings.
- Avoid judgment about what employees tell you.
- Stay current with employees' stories.
- Avoid personal questions or an appearance of nosiness. Respect the wishes of an employee who doesn't wish to open up. Sharing stories is a bonding process. The more stories your employees share with you and each other, the more they're likely to see themselves and you as a team with common goals.

Important factors to workplace happiness include:

▶ Working for a company that values work/family balance



▶ The opportunity to pursue personal interests outside work

▶ A work schedule that allows them to see family and friends on a predictable basis

Parlay International ©2010

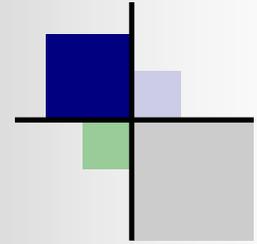
Deer Oaks EAP Services, your Employee Assistance Program, is always available to you and your dependents. If you are struggling with home or work related issues contact your EAP, Deer Oaks, at:

1.866.327.2400

eap@deeroaks.com

www.deeroaks.com

When An Employee Dies From Suicide



Workplaces, like families, are not immune from tragedy. Sooner or later a team of any size will probably have to deal with the death of one of its members. How people in an office or on the factory floor react depends a great deal on how that death occurred—by disease, accident, suicide or crime. A sudden, shocking death can have a greater emotional impact than one that was expected. And suicide can be among the most shocking, as well as emotionally disruptive.

Expect Strong Emotions

With suicide, the natural mourning process is supercharged with emotions of shock, guilt and possibly anger. Russell Friedman, executive director of the Los Angeles-based Grief Recovery Institute Educational Foundation, says “Suicide sometimes is not a surprise”—as in cases when the victim was “obviously in misery” due to some cause such as drug or alcohol abuse, or bipolar disorder. Even then, though, Friedman says suicide touches off “unresolved grief,” a sense among survivors that they did not do all they could to help the victim when he was alive, and they often feel guilty because they’re convinced they should have done more.

Reach Out to the Family

Suicide also carries a stigma, rooted in religious, cultural or social traditions, that makes co-workers uncomfortable in dealing with or talking about the event. Loved ones of a suicide victim can find their grief compounded by isolation when friends avoid encounters for fear of saying the wrong thing. This may be the worst thing they can do. Robbie Miller Kaplan, author of the book *How to Say It When You Don't Know What to Say*, says co-workers should make sure to “participate in all the mourning rituals” such as memorial services and receptions. “The mourning rituals are a comfort to the bereaved,” she says, “but they are a comfort to those in the workplace, too.”

The Manager's Role

Managers can do their part by talking about the victim in a caring and compassionate way, and offering help to the family (which will probably have some benefits paperwork to do along with their other burdens). They also need to give workers plenty of opportunity to vent their feelings. “This doesn’t mean that a manager needs special training,” says Michael L. Buckman, a senior vice president with the career management firm Lee Hecht Harrison. “But a manager needs to know that people around the victim may be harboring some tough emotions and should be allowed to express them.”

Supervisors should also watch for post-traumatic symptoms among employees, Buckman says. Is an employee starting to show up late to work? Does she suddenly seem tired or forgetful? “If a person’s pattern changes in some way, that can be a sign that this person can be having some kinds of issues with the incident,” says Buckman. (continued on pg.3)



Supervisor/HR Supplement Newsletter

May 2010
Page 3

Helpful Resources From Your Employee Assistance Program

(Employee suicide continued)

How long should it take for a team of workers to get emotionally back on track? If a supervisor has encouraged workers to talk openly—and they do—Buckman says one can usually spot the “acceptance” phase of grieving when they stop talking so much about the suicide and the victim. Bob VandePol, president of Grand Rapids, Mich.-based Crisis Care Network Inc., says it’s hard to set a recovery timetable because different co-workers can have widely different responses to the suicide. “You can anticipate a wide range of recovery times following a traumatic event such as a suicide,” VandePol says. Some people will be intensely sad, others might be angry, others—those who may have only been casual acquaintances with the victim—will get right back to work. But he says supervisors should be ready for emotions to well up well after the event, as on anniversaries, seasonal get-togethers such as holiday parties, or the completion of a big project in which the victim had played a major role



VandePol, whose firm provides critical incident response services nationwide, advises supervisors to follow an “ACT” strategy:

“A” stands for, “Acknowledge and name the tragedy”: Don’t shy away from using the word “death” to describe what happened, and be ready to understand and accommodate the wide range of responses—grief, anger or indifference—that fellow workers are likely to feel.

“C” is for “Communicate competence and compassion.” That is, show you are tough enough to handle the crisis and keep the workplace on track, but be compassionate toward the mourning co-workers at the same time.

Manage the “T”—the transition—by getting individuals to help if they need it (such as an employee assistance program) or getting them back to normal work in stages. VandePol says it’s good to bear in mind that employees can be more mistake-prone after a traumatic event, so it can be a good tactic to focus them first on relatively simple, concrete tasks. “If you fall off a horse, get back on a pony,” he says.

Source: Russell Friedman, executive director, Grief Recovery Institute Educational Foundation, Sherman Oaks, Calif.; Robbie Miller Kaplan; Michael Buckman, senior vice president, Lee Hecht Harrison, Chicago, Ill.; Bob VandePol, President, Crisis Care Network Inc., Grand Rapids Mich.

Deer Oaks EAP Services, your Employee Assistance Program, is always available to you and your dependents. If you are struggling with home or work related issues contact your EAP, Deer Oaks, at:

1.866.327.2400

eap@deeroaks.com

www.deeroaks.com

Supervisor/HR Supplement Newsletter

May 2010
Page 4

Helpful Resources From Your Employee Assistance Program



Ask your EAP!

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have related to their employees and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to EAP for a Management Consultation .

Q. Can Deer Oaks help our work unit learn more about treating each other with respect? Respect means a lot more than tolerance for one's ethnic or racial differences, right? I think at least some in our department need it. Where do we start?

A. **Speaking with Deer Oaks** about respect and how to manage your work environment to promote a respectful workplace is a good place to begin. We will explore with you different ways to assess your needs and deal with your concerns. The EAP professional may discuss how to address specific employee performance issues and how to make an EAP referral based on job performance concerns. He or she will also explore various EAP presentations that may be beneficial. Respect means many things. Some work groups may have problems with diversity and respect but have no problems with things like rumors and gossip that damage morale. Another work group may respect diversity but may have developed a demeaning, critical style of interaction that is harmful and non-productive. Getting an overview of your work unit's culture and needs is a necessary starting point.

Q. Our agency has experienced a lot of change, including layoffs. The unit I manage hasn't had layoffs yet, but the future is uncertain. My employees keep asking me questions that I cannot answer. As stress builds, I find myself avoiding talking to my staff. Can Deer Oaks help?

A. During periods of workplace uncertainty, employees often exhibit a strong **need to know**. Experts who study stressful work environments, such as many workplaces are currently experiencing, emphasize the benefits of ongoing communication. Consider these suggestions: 1) Provide whatever information you are authorized to give truthfully and candidly. When managers are credible, trust is built and rumors are diminished. This creates a more productive work environment. 2) Seek suggestions from employees for improving work flow. Involving employees in the decision-making process provides a sense of greater control, which can help stabilize a work unit in spite of future uncertainties. 3) Review changing job responsibilities or roles. Give regular feedback, addressing performance problems and validating jobs well done. 4) Remind your employees often that their work matters and is appreciated. 5) Don't forget to take care of yourself during this stressful time. Remember, the EAP is a resource available to all employees, including supervisors and managers.

Copyright ©2010 by The Frontline Supervisor.

Information contained in this newsletter is for general information purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. Some of it might not apply to your particular company policies and programs available. This information is proprietary and intended only for eligible EAP members. For specific guidance on handling individual employee problems, consult with Deer Oaks, at: 1.866.327.2400 or at www.deeroaks.com