



Q. How can I define performance improvement expectations so clearly that a troubled employee can't say later that they failed to understand what was required? In my experience, many employees have argued about a discrepancy at the time of follow-up in an effort to sidestep responsibility for a lack of change.

A. Understandably, this behavior can make it difficult to facilitate change or take administrative action. It can seem as though you are constantly chasing the employee either toward productivity or out the door. When discussing performance improvement, take the extra time and make the effort to provide clear examples of what constitutes acceptable performance. This will help employees visualize what compliance looks like, what is expected, and how to achieve it. Meet with employees regularly to discuss progress and do a corrective interview. This will give you the opportunity to provide feedback and address any concerns or questions. Always keep a record of meetings and what was discussed and provide the employee with a copy of this record. Follow your organization's HR and labor policies for managing workers' performance issues. Ultimately, your organization must decide when this process of attempting to correct performance is concluded, but you can refer to the EAP at any point along the timeline.

Q. Is it appropriate for me as a supervisor to invite employees to hang out or go to a bar after work, as a way of improving team cohesion and morale?

A. Managers inviting employees to socialize outside of work might help improve cohesion or morale, but there are risks to doing so that can undermine this goal. For example, it is crucial that your invitation not exclude employees. Also, the invitation should be appropriate and respectful of their differences, and the event, setting, or outing should be in line with your work culture and values. The invitation to socialize should be voluntary and involve no pressure to attend, although this is not necessarily something you can control. A supervisor who feels self-conscious about being refused or rejected might respond in a manner that causes employees to feel obligated, especially if they want nothing more than to bolt out the door at the end of the day for the long commute home. For these reasons, many workforce management professionals advise against socializing after work if any of these associated risks exist.

Q. I think employees often overlook the utility of employee assistance programs for everyday challenges. They think the EAP is only for big problems or a crisis in the organization. How can I help employees consider using the EAP for smaller issues?

A. Everyday challenges, though not always severe, can significantly affect an employee's well-being and productivity. This is the most important message to convey. It is crucial to remind employees periodically about the EAP service and its strict confidentiality provisions. Share this non-exhaustive list of issues that may affect employees, to help them consider using your EAP for support, guidance, counseling, and other resources: caring for aging parent, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, diet, and exercise routines; dealing with the loss of a loved one or coping with other grief; career advancement, skill development, or career transitions; requiring legal advice or financial consultation for non-work-related matters; managing anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns, even if not severe; dealing with traumatic events in their personal life; understanding healthcare options, navigating insurance, or finding appropriate medical services; and exploring concerns about substance use.

Q. What broad categories of difficult or troubled employees am I likely to encounter in my career as a supervisor?

A. Although there are more “categories” than described here, remember that the vast number of employees you encounter will be concerned, thoughtful, and successfully engaged workers. The following patterns of troubled employee behaviors are broad categories often discussed in literature, and they appear consistent with the experience of EAPs. (1) *Passive-aggressive workers*: These employees may state agreement with you but express opposition or resentment subtly, leading to misunderstandings, delays, or incomplete work. During conversations, they may be vague in their emotions, reactions, or intentions. (2) *Underperforming or disengaged workers*: These employees lack motivation, productivity, or enthusiasm for their work. They often produce subpar results, miss deadlines, or demonstrate a lack of commitment to their tasks or the team. (3) *Conflict-prone workers*: These employees tend to be at the center of interpersonal conflicts or disputes. None of these three behaviors point to a diagnosis or root cause, which is why EAPs can play a key role in resolving related performance issues.

Q. I want to get off on the right foot as a new supervisor and develop solid relationships with each of my employees. What are some recommended steps?

A. Employees want meaningful relationships with supervisors, so taking this initiative is a good decision. Take time to introduce yourself personally to each employee if possible. Schedule informal meetings or coffee chats to get to know them on a more personal level. Ask about the employee’s role, ideas for the job, responsibilities, and goals. Keeping a few notes will aid you in future communication regarding work preferences and concerns. You should also observe employees throughout the year, listening to what they say and how they say it. You will gain a keen sense of their work style. Do you have appropriate access to the past performance records? If so, review these files to understand needs, areas of improvement, skills, abilities, and where the employee can be celebrated. Finally, watch how employees interact with each other. You will get clearer insights on cooperation levels, leadership potential, team dynamics, or problems that may later require your intervention. This is an ongoing process, but with an “open door” policy for engaging with employees, you will develop a strong team.



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