

The Successful SUPERVISOR

2011

May

Tips from  LifeSolutions

To say that we live in uncertain times may be considered an understatement by some. In addition to ongoing change in the workplace, there remains some uncertainty about the current economic climate, even though there are signs of improvement. Anxiety about uncertainty can impact an employee's job performance as well as overall health and well-being. This month the Successful Supervisor will focus on the role of the supervisor as a workplace anchor. As always, we are interested in your feedback and/or questions. Please e-mail your questions and comments to the EAP at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com or contact an EAP account manager at 1.800.647.3327.

Sandra Caffo, LCSW/MFT, CEAP, LifeSolutions

I have a wonderful group of people who have worked together for years. I'm noticing that folks seem distracted. They're not interacting like they used to and generally want to just do their jobs and be left alone. I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do. Productivity is fine.

It's great that you are being proactive in thinking about your employees *before* performance issues develop. Your question is an important one. Uncertainty is often a challenge for people. We are hardwired, it seems, to look for comfort and stability. In the absence of stability, there can be a tendency to become self-absorbed and tentative in day-to-day interactions. No one is to blame for this; it's simply part of being human.

What that means is the supervisor can't fix the situation. However, there are some tips a supervisor should consider to maintain a positive and supportive workplace for employees.

Accept and Acknowledge that Emotional Reactions Are a Natural Part of Dealing with Uncertainty

With uncertainty often comes a narrowing of focus. One or more employees may be absorbed in the details of whatever is going on. That's fine. The supervisor's role is to accept the way in which different employees manage their work and to stay focused on job performance.

- ◆ Some supervisors who have a strong desire to help get anxious themselves when employees are struggling with something.
- ◆ If a natural opening occurs, it's fine to say you've noticed a change and that you're available if needed.
- ◆ Making an offer allows the employee to stay in control of personal issues and of the decision to reach out or not.
- ◆ A key to moving through uncertainty is finding a way to gain a sense of control of one's next steps.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

As our attention narrows, so does our ability to take in and process information. Repeat information many times to allow for differences in how well employees may be taking it in.

- ◆ Communicate verbally, in writing, in individual meetings, and in team meetings until the staff understands.

Recognize the Signs of Distress in an Employee and Contact LifeSolutions and Your HR Representative

- ◆ You know your staff well. When inattention begins to affect the job or a sad demeanor is accompanied by arriving late or an increasingly negative attitude, it is time to act.
 - Consultation is an ongoing part of what LifeSolutions offers to supervisors and the workplace.
 - Is now the right time to approach the employee?
 - If so, what is the best way to approach the employee?
 - What is the best strategy to present LifeSolutions as a resource? LifeSolutions has information, resources, and the ability to provide support and direction along the way.
 - Consulting with LifeSolutions will help you to address these concerns and any others you may have.
- ◆ Human Resources (HR) is also a source of support and guidance along the way. There's no such thing as calling too early to get an HR perspective.

Take Care of Yourself

- ◆ The airlines tell passengers to put their own oxygen masks on first when needed so that they are in a position to assist others who need help. The same is true for supervisors. You need to prioritize self-care in order to be effective. These tips can help.
 - Find appropriate outlets for your concerns about uncertainty, including contacting LifeSolutions for yourself.
 - Avoid sharing frustration with employees. Frustration goes contrary to a calm work environment. Words like "I hear you" or "I'm sorry things are so tough right now" allow you to be supportive in a positive way.
 - Do what works for you to manage stress and stay healthy. This includes paying attention to your eating, sleep, and exercise patterns and to maintaining your personal contacts.