



Q. How can I help employees be less territorial and more open to others' ideas, perspectives, and suggestions when they need to work together as a team?

A. Employee cooperation in a team environment requires a work culture that is maintained and nurtured so that cooperation becomes a tradition. Without this supportive environment, teams fracture and individuals become competitive. Conflicts ensue, cliques emerge, and productivity suffers. Symptoms of this fracturing include poor information sharing, lack of mutual help in solving problems, poor communication, and vying for credit. The good news is that humans have innate skills to work in teams. Discover what reinforces lack of cooperation and undermines team thinking. Consider giving everyone a refresher in how teams work and their value. Hold discussions to process specific issues or roadblocks to the team's effectiveness. Next, add practical exercises designed to build more trust. Be sure to set expectations. Make sure teams meet, and reward both team cooperation and individual participation going forward.

Q. What are the most common explanations for why supervisors do not refer troubled employees to CONCERN?

A. Where EAPs are under-promoted, the most common explanations for why supervisors do not refer troubled employees include not thinking of it or not knowing they can. Where EAPs are well promoted, reasons include thinking they wouldn't be effective "in this case" or believing the program would only be a "safe harbor" to protect the employee from administrative action. Remembering to use CONCERN is aided by regular communication (such as a newsletter). Believing the EAP wouldn't work is common among those supervisors who "diagnose" their employees, believing they know what problem ails the employee and thinking counseling is not the right solution. The safe harbor is a misconception. CONCERN policies state that employees can't use the EAP to excuse poor performance or to find refuge from the consequences of ongoing performance problems. Another common explanation for non-referral is confusion on the part of the supervisor who witnesses a dramatic cycle of poor performance or attendance problems interspersed with periods of exceptional or satisfactory performance. This pattern is enough to postpone the effective referral of an employee for years, even decades!

Q. I know supervisors should not be discussing personal problems with employees and instead should refer them to CONCERN. I don't wish to interfere with employees seeking help, but how do I manage becoming a supervisor who no longer listens when I've always played this role?

A. You can still be a warm and approachable supervisor who listens. In fact, nothing could be more helpful to CONCERN, because you are trusted by employees and in an ideal position to facilitate their self-referral. The important issue is avoiding the counseling role. Crossing this line impedes employee motivation to seek proper help from CONCERN. It also dissipates a feeling of urgency needed to hurdle the resistance most employees face in their decision to get professional help. Listen and be encouraging and supportive, but make CONCERN the trusted source of help for the complete answer or solution to their troubles.

Q. We have an employee who comes to work late, and it causes problems for everyone. What's got me stumped is why this person is not confronted by peers. The employee is likeable, and we all know about his heavy drinking, but why this enabling?

A. If your employee did not have an alcohol problem, ironically, he might be confronted more readily by peers. Assuming employees believe the lateness is explained by alcoholism, they may feel unable to be assertive and confront the behavior. Here's why: Alcoholism still suffers from enormous myths and misconceptions. For most of history, alcoholism has been wrongly identified as a personality disorder or the result of moral or psychological weakness. These views remain, and almost everyone is familiar with them, if not consciously then at least unconsciously. Of course, alcoholism is a disease. Moreover, these prior descriptions do not fit the facts as we know them today. Still, these pervasive misconceptions turn alcoholism into an accusation. This is what makes people back off. Because the lateness is believed to be associated with alcoholism, employee anger is often tempered by sensitivity and a sense of helplessness: they enable by remaining silent while hoping for change someday.

Q. When documenting performance problems of troubled employees, what critical factors are important to bear in mind so the documentation is effective when given to an employee in a corrective letter or used later in an administrative action?

A. Most troubled employees are frustrated and defensive because of their inability to self-treat or resolve a personal problem. This leads them not only to practice denial and react adversely to confrontations but also to read a corrective letter or warning notice with an eye toward finding any part of it that could be viewed as inaccurate, untrue, or exaggerated. These parts of the corrective letter will get the most attention. This means your documentation must be accurate, detailed, and written with the understanding that your employee will seek to find fault with it. The most problematic corrective memos omit specifics, use subjective language, focus on employee personality issues, or use psychological terms that refer to the personality of the employee rather than the behavior.

Use the consultative help of your EAP to gain insight on how to avoid these documentation missteps.

Remember: CONCERN: EAP teams with Human Resources to provide another resource for managers and supervisors to consult about how to manage issues with individuals, within and between work groups, and across departments. When you call CONCERN: EAP, ask for a Management Consultation or request to speak to a Clinical Manager.

Here are some quotes from HR Managers who recently called on CONCERN for a Management Consultation:

"I was impressed with someone getting back to me on a Sunday afternoon under urgent and unfortunate circumstances. The counselor was a great help to our employees and was very well received."

"The staff was very appreciative to have CONCERN support on site. Thank you!"

"The counselor was great. He was not only extremely responsive and helpful with our employee matter immediately, but he also followed up with me a few days later. I am thrilled that our organization invests in this helpful resource."

CONCERN: EAP
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