



Q. Regarding diversity in the workplace, what is the purpose of educating employees to understand the cultural norms of foreign-born employees while training employees from other countries in the expectations of the cultural norms in the USA?

A. The goal of diversity awareness when training foreign-born, new workers to understand American customs or providing your American employees with awareness of cultural differences is not to eliminate manners of communication to which either group are accustomed. . You will not expect your American employees to adopt or practice the cultural norms of another country, but educating them about what they are reduces the likelihood of improper statements, harassment, miscommunication, tension, and impersonal comments or questions that foul relationships between workers. So education works both ways. Body language, for example, varies widely among different cultures. Without some awareness training of your employees, how might they react, for example, to a coworker who does not smile back when greeted? For an interesting review of issues regarding personal space, touch, tone of voice, eye contact, silence, facial control, and feedback, check out some of the resources at DiversityCouncil.org.

Q. As a new supervisor, I lack leadership experience and struggle with communication, delegation, and generally just trying to feel secure in my position. I admit to also feeling intimidated by those I supervise. Can CONCERN help?

A. Yes, CONCERN can help. You are describing a lack of basic skills and know-how, but additional issues you touch on are worth examining as well. These include anxiety, fear, and insecurity about participating in the supervisory role. All these issues are probably surmountable, but “book knowledge” may be only part of your solution. The personal issues may interfere with your ability to apply whatever you learn, and there may be certain skills that are more difficult to learn than others. These may point to a need for counseling or perhaps coaching by another supervisor with the experience to assist you. CONCERN can lead you to information about the supervisor role but also help you not undermine whatever you learn. There are many ways to acquire the material you seek online or through books and possibly courses, including those available on the CONCERN website. As you improve your ability to manage workers, the EAP can help you tackle periodic roadblocks to success and job satisfaction.

Q. Can you give me quick tips on giving feedback to employees, specifically, how to respond to their defensiveness and what to say or not say in response that will increase the likelihood of their finally accepting what I have to say?

A. Feedback is more complex than it first appears. Not only is there a process for giving feedback, but there is also a bit of art to responding to defensiveness. Most employees do not relish constructive criticism, despite its value, so listen calmly to what your employee has to say and be understanding. With empathy, say, “I understand your point.” Receptiveness to feedback (or something akin to it) is then likely to follow, helped by your noninterference with the venting process. Do not equate defensiveness with denial or complete rejection. After all, your feedback is truthful. What follows is likely to be your employee’s asking, “Can you explain more about what you mean?” This is an indication that acceptance is near. Your goal is not 100% agreement with your feedback but agreement that your feedback includes things to be considered. That’s a win.

Q. An employee says her husband is violent. She won't go to CONCERN because she thinks he'll read her mind and know about it. Some employees are worried for her, but he is the only spouse who has brought roses to the office! Frankly, he seems nice. What do you think is going on?

A. There are many possibilities, but you should still encourage her to visit or phone the EAP to discuss her situation, even anonymously if that's what it takes. A sudden crisis or incident may increase her motivation, but if she is a battered spouse, the reluctance you see now is not inconsistent with how victims of abuse sometimes react. This "battered spouse syndrome" frequently includes a belief or "omnipresent" feeling that the batterer is superior or in control of the victim. The victim may believe she is being watched. This PTSD-like response demonstrates true fear. Batterers sometimes demonstrate a pattern or cycle of growing tension, releasing it through battering, blaming the partner, and then demonstrating remorse and overindulgence (e.g., bringing roses to the office) to make up for the violence. The cycle then repeats. Do not eliminate the possibility of formally referring her to CONCERN based on the impact her concerns are having on your work environment. It sounds drastic, but such a referral would be EAP-appropriate, and it could save lives.

Q. I think it's important to coach my employees properly, and because we work in a customer service environment, being assertive is simply a skill that folks need to learn. I don't want to counsel employees about their personal problems, but drawing the line can be tough. Any tips?

A. Certainly there is nothing wrong with teaching your employees assertiveness skills. The depth to which you explore this subject, however, may touch on or generate psychology-related discussions. And there is nothing wrong with that either, if you know your limits. It's important not to wander into diagnosing employees or their intrapsychic issues associated with resistance to being assertive. Refer such matters to CONCERN via self-referral. Also, be aware that it's tempting to analyze people and consider or explore their psychology.

We all do it, but as a supervisor, you possess significant authority, and employees won't easily reject inappropriate attempts to drill down and ask personal questions or explore their personal issues, which could bring problems later. So proceed with awareness.

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 cannot say enough positive things about the Clinical Manager, but he is the best! He is always there to support us during very difficult times and I always appreciate his kind demeanor, knowledge, professionalism, and assistance."

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

"I have worked with a variety of different EAP providers and the service and caring I receive from CONCERN is head and shoulders above the rest. I don't hesitate in the least to refer my employees to CONCERN and have found it very helpful in assisting with employees at our site."

CONCERN: EAP
800-344-4222
www.concern-eap.com