



# EAP SUPERVISOR ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

October 2024



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## DEER OAKS PRESENTS

### Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series

*How to Lead a Team that Provides Great Customer Service*

Date: Monday, October 28, 2024  
Time: 1:00 PM-2:00 PM CST

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# PRAISING EMPLOYEES

"Praising all alike, is praising none."

—John Gay, 18th-century English poet and playwright

You work hard and then submit an excellent report, but all your boss says is, "I got it."

No one likes a boss who takes them for granted. Even a good salary doesn't make up for a total lack of appreciation or praise—and hollow praise can be worse than no praise. Managers who effectively motivate people with praise know the difference between sweet talk and demonstrating honest appreciation.

Effective praise tells employees what they're doing right and encourages them to keep doing it. That's why some consider praise superior to punishment as a teaching tool. Praise is loaded with information: It tells you exactly what to do next time. Punishment has a lot less information: It only tells you what not to do.

## Keys to Effective Praising

- Praise should be timely.
- Praise with precision. Be specific about the behavior you're praising. Go beyond, "Great job!" This shows you know what you're talking about and makes your praise credible.
- Communicate the importance of the employee's performance to the organization and its effect on you personally.
- Make eye contact. Smile. Shake hands.
- Don't overdo it. Phony praise is easy to spot, and your employees will resent it.

Praise comes in several shades, ranging from recognizing a solid performance to commending an extraordinary job. Use it appropriately. Don't lavish praise on someone who efficiently performs a routine assignment, but don't fail to recognize that person either. Don't substitute flowery words for other forms of reward for a truly exceptional performance. Above all, mean it when you praise someone.

Make sure everyone gets credit in a team effort. Few things are worse than a manager who ignores an assignment until the team succeeds, then takes all the credit. Always stress the contributions of each member of the team.<sup>4</sup>



The ability to credit others for their efforts is widely recognized as a trait of a top manager. Don't be afraid that your supervisors won't appreciate you if you tell them what a great job your employees have done. The ability to enable others to get the job done is what makes a great manager.

## General Tips

- **Be generous with praise, but only when it's sincere.** False praise is repulsive. So say enough about what the employee did to show that you really understand—and say it convincingly.
- **Don't forget to recognize people who do satisfactory jobs.** Anyone who carries out the responsibilities delegated to them contributes to your success. Recognize good work even if it involves routine tasks.
- **Employees' responses to praise will vary, based on their past experiences and perceptions of you.** Although you should follow our guidelines, understand that each time you use praise you're conducting an experiment of sorts. Use the results to pick those approaches that are most effective, and change your style if it's not working.

## FAQs

**I'm uncomfortable praising employees. Why should I have to praise them? Isn't their salary praise enough?**

In a word—no! It's not enough. Employees don't live by salary alone. Personal acknowledgment, such as praise, recognition, and granting greater autonomy, is an important part of job satisfaction.

Maybe you should examine your own feelings about praise. People who are uncomfortable giving praise often have problems accepting praise due to past experiences that make them distrust it. This devaluation of praise can become an unconscious barrier to its effective use.

**I think I'm using praise effectively, except with one employee. Every time I praise this person, their productivity and work quality immediately decreases. What should I do?**

Stop praising them. Your praise is actually punishing this person. Perhaps the employee doesn't trust verbal praise or holds a grudge against you. You may never know, but try other ways to express recognition. If all else fails, ask the employee's opinion on how best to show appreciation for a job well done.

**I recently started an annual program where I recognize high-performing employees and praise them publicly for their achievements. Performance seems to increase right before the meeting and for a week or so after, but then it levels out quickly. What am I doing wrong?**

The pattern you describe is typical for this kind of periodic praising. Technically it's called a fixed interval schedule—employees only get praised or rewarded at a particular time (once a year). This isn't the most effective schedule for sustaining high performance—who worries about Santa Claus in July? Frequency, rather than magnitude, of praise is most important, most studies show. Increase the amount of praise and vary how and when you do it. This may not be as dramatic as an annual event, but it will be more effective.

## MANAGING CONFLICT ON YOUR TEAM

Conflict is a natural part of work, as it is in all human relations. Handled well, it can be an opportunity to hear new ideas and opinions, and to build a stronger team through deeper understanding of each other. But too often, it is allowed to fester into division and animosity—mostly because managers ignore it out of fear of getting tangled up in the emotions of the situation.



Managing conflict is a critical part of your job as a manager: a skill you need to learn and a responsibility you need to face. Below are some tips that can help you manage it productively.

### When You Encounter Conflict on Your Team

- Don't ignore it and hope it will go away. Address it quickly to prevent escalation and head off its productivity- and morale-damaging effects on your team.
- Remain neutral. Don't take sides. You need to earn the confidence of all parties in the conflict in order to help find a resolution.
- Ask questions to understand what the conflict is about. Don't jump to conclusions based on the first answers you hear. The conflict on the surface may be masking a deeper or longer-standing problem.
- Encourage employees to work it out themselves. An effective team is able to work out conflicts on its own, without a manager's intervention at every obstacle. Offer coaching on how to talk and listen to each other in positive ways, and when to step back if emotions get heated. You might offer to facilitate a discussion if that would be helpful.

## If the Conflicting Parties Are Unable to Find a Solution on Their Own

- **Get a sense of the emotional level of the conflict.** In a "cold" conflict, people snub each other and don't talk. Your role will be to get them to open up and talk to each other. In a "hot" conflict, people express too much emotion. Your role will be to cool them down in order to have a productive conversation.
- **Set clear expectations as to acceptable and unacceptable behavior.** Remind employees that that you will not tolerate behaviors such as yelling, rudeness, or shunning, and that you expect people to treat each other with respect. Disrespectful behavior is a performance problem you need to manage.
- **Listen to both sides.** Let people tell their stories and express their emotions. If the conflict is highly emotional, you might choose to hear out each side separately before bringing them together.
- **Work to get at the root of the conflict.** Have the people involved define the problem for you. Ask questions to get at the real source of the conflict, the underlying need of each side. Work to understand how personalities and communication styles might be contributing to the difference.
- **Encourage both sides to practice active listening.** It's not enough for them to sit silently and wait their turn to talk. In active listening, one person really listens to the other person, empathizing and paraphrasing what they have said to confirm that it has been heard and understood.
- **Ask each side to suggest ideas** for moving toward a resolution.
- **Keep notes on all relevant information,** including employees' behavior and steps taken by all parties to resolve the conflict. These notes may be important later if conflicts recur or you observe a pattern of problem behavior.
- **Seek help from your human resources (HR) representative,** either for guidance on how to mediate the conflict or to ask for someone else to step in as a mediator. You should always alert HR, and invite their involvement when you observe unacceptable behavior, such as physical or verbal abuse or inappropriate language, or when a conflict persists and your attempts to resolve it have failed.

- **Talk with your employee support program.** They may be able to refer you to an experienced management expert, who can serve as a sounding board and help you plan discussions with employees. The employee support program may also be able to help with positive conflict-management resources for your particular situation. Note that your support program will not act as mediator between employees. If employees in conflict are referred to the program, they will talk separately with different specialists.

As you work to understand the conflict, make sure you're not dealing with an issue of harassment or bullying, which may be governed by law and will be covered by your organization's policies and guidelines:

- **Harassment** is deliberate and repeated behavior that annoys, disturbs, frightens, or irritates another person. Remember that harassment is not determined by the intent of the behavior but by how the behavior is perceived.
- **Bullying** is behavior that involves verbal abuse, including insults, malicious gossip, and personal attacks and criticism.

Both harassment and bullying hurt productivity, can cause division in a work group, and can lower team morale. Both can also lead an employee to leave an organization or to file a lawsuit.

Always seek help from your manager, HR, or the employee support program if you have concerns about harassment, bullying, or an angry employee, or if you are dealing with a chronic behavior problem that may require disciplinary measures.

*Source: Morgan, H. (2020; Revised 2023 [Ed.]). Managing conflict on your team (pp. 19–21). In A manager's guide to the employee support program (Z. Meeker & B. Schuette, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.*

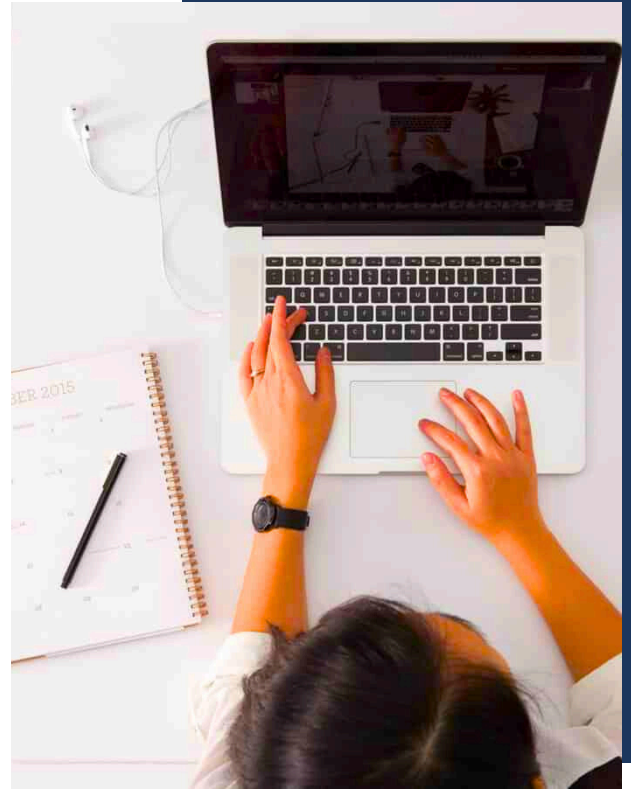
# ASK YOUR EAP!

**Q. I get angry with workers who do not correct their own performance and seem passively resistant to change. I know I should remain calm, but I fear if I don't demonstrate anger and frustration, they won't take me seriously. What's the answer?**

A. In all interactions with employees, demonstrate a calm, structured, and empathetic approach. Ironically, you will be more successful regardless of the situation. Remind yourself to remain calm, knowing that you will think more clearly doing so. If you feel anger during a discussion with an employee, pause before you react. Three to four seconds will seem like an eternity, but you will collect your thoughts and respond more constructively if you do so. The challenge is to focus on the behavior and not the person. This guiding principle helps you disengage from any personality features that may trigger your agitated response. Frame feedback in terms of behaviors and actions rather than personal attributes; that will reduce employee defensiveness. For example, "Alex, I've noticed that the last three reports were submitted two days past the deadline. This delays our project timelines, and we then can't proceed with the next steps." Seek more support for yourself from the EAP and arrange a referral for the worker if needed. Be prepared to consider other administrative steps to help the employee improve performance.

**Q. I am a new supervisor. What initial mistakes might I make in this role, based on your awareness of errors that are typically committed by other new supervisors? I know I should avoid micromanaging, being overly demanding, and isolating myself in a closed office, but can you highlight other potential pitfalls that are less commonly considered?**

A. Aside from the missteps mentioned, new supervisors often make a few other common mistakes, including failing to provide employees with clear expectations for their work, avoiding difficult conversations, trying to be everyone's friend, and not enforcing policies consistently among employees. Not giving clear instructions leads to incomplete work and disappointing results that frustrate the employee and the manager alike. Avoiding difficult conversations associated with employee behaviors leads to unresolved problems that nearly always grow bigger. Attempting to be everyone's friend often blurs the lines between professional and personal relationships, and this can undermine your authority and



complicate decision-making. In short, not enforcing rules and policies equally leads to complaints of favoritism and confusion among workers.

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