

Solutions

for Supervisors

from your

Affiliated Employee Assistance Program

1.800.769.9819

www.affiliatedeap.com

A publication provided by your organization's EAP (Employee Assistance Program) to help you with common employee dilemmas and/or problems.

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Managing During Times of Uncertainty and Change

QUESTION: Our organization is undergoing lots of changes and my staff is really struggling with all of the uncertainty. How do I, as a manager, help my team deal with the stress of all of these changes?

ANSWER: We all know that change is inevitable and, usually, necessary. However, that doesn't mean everyone likes it. While some people thrive in change, most people do not; especially because where there is change there is also uncertainty. Common human responses to change and uncertainty; avoidance, anger, confusion, and energy drain can greatly impact an individual employee's productivity as well as team dynamics and performance. Here are some guiding principles to keep in mind as you help your team navigate the unknown:

Look in the mirror: Supervisors are people too and subject to the same human responses to change as anyone else. Ask yourself how you tend to cope with change? And how are you coping with your organization's current changes and uncertainty? Perhaps you find yourself more irritable, less tolerant with others. Or are you pulling the proverbial "head in the sand" move? If you, as a leader, are not willing or able to constructively confront and manage change and uncertainty, you are unlikely to be successful in motivating your team to either. As author Stephen Covey says, "What you do has far greater impact than what you say."

Be Available: If your staff is already facing many unknowns and or changes, they need to have a forum to air and share their concerns. By making sure that staff members know you are available to hear their concerns, you can greatly reduce their stress. Even if you cannot always offer them a sure answer about what is going to happen, by listening you are letting them know their concerns are being heard. Letting an employee know that you understand that they are worried and normalizing that change is difficult—that feelings of anger, grief, fear or confusion are normal ---can be grounding and help an employee refocus on work.

Remember that EAP is here to help in any way that we can - call on us for consultation and assistance

Educational Programs for Supervisors

Affiliated EAP offers many educational programs designed to help leaders become more effective in supervising their staff. For a complete course listing or to schedule training, contact us at:

1-800-769-9819

Or visit our website:

www.affiliatedeap.com



For more information about how to best handle employee work performance problems, call your EAP at:

1-800-769-9819

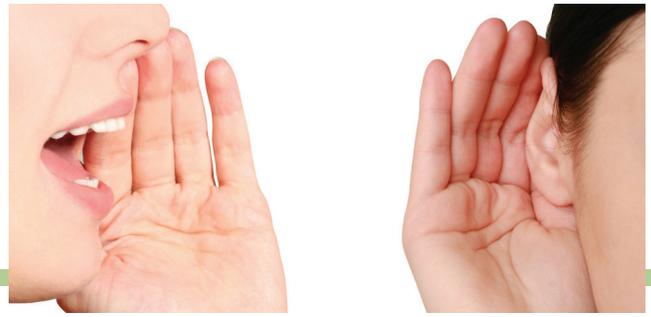
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Solutions

continued



Communicate: Information and understanding can give people a greater sense of control and reduce anxiety. Explain the rationale behind management decisions and changes being made, whenever possible (and if you do not feel clear on them yourself, talk to your supervisor). Transparency and sharing of important information helps employees feel respected and included. It can also instill greater trust in the organization and management. Be careful to avoid being negative about management's decisions; employees take their cues from you. Try to give consistent and regular updates to staff, especially those potentially impacted by changes. Reliable updates and communication can also keep things based in reality. As a famous Winston Churchill quotes goes, "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on." Same with office rumors when management remains mum. Even if you don't know what it happening, staying in touch with employees can be stabilizing.

Remain as focused on successful outcomes as possible: If you have ever seen the skit on Saturday Night Live, you know what happens when Debbie Downer enters the conversation; instant energy drain. Obviously, you as a supervisor don't want to be a Debbie Downer nor do you want to enable one of your staff members to act that part. It drains energy and is corrosive to team rapport and productivity.

This is not to say that it is helpful to deny the inherent challenging realities of change. With change comes loss; loss of "the way things were", the elimination of jobs/roles/products, and/or of a team structure. As a leader you want to both acknowledge and respect that people adapt to change differently. However, a

tendency towards "negativity bias" –a psychological phenomenon whereby people tend to focus on what they perceive as the negative—can prevent them from seeing the wider frame. After all, change also often provides opportunity, especially for those who are available to take advantage of it. One task of a leader is to motivate people to see those opportunities—to create new, more sustainable products or processes. Consistently offering reminders of advantageous outcomes from past changes are important. Regularly underscore the shared goals of the organization and, when appropriate engage employees in being solution focused and creative in addressing challenges. Playing to peoples' strengths is effective in both good times and challenging times.

Balance Compassion with Firmness: As noted above, being available and compassionate to your staff during difficult times is important but, work also has to get done. If an anxious staff member is over-utilizing your "open door" policy or overly negative with other staff, you can validate that coping with uncertainty is difficult but that focusing on the job and organization's goals is also necessary ---the ship still needs to sail, even in the stormiest of seas. As a supervisor, you can be compassionate and available but, also let people know that an environment of fear and negativity will not help anyone successfully navigate the process. Encourage people to practice self-care. You can also remind staff that EAP is a confidential resource for them if they are having difficulty managing their own stress levels. And remember that EAP is a resource for supervisors as well.

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