

# Solutions for Supervisors

from your

## Affiliated Employee Assistance Program

1.800.769.9819  
[www.affiliatedeap.com](http://www.affiliatedeap.com)

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

December 2011

**QUESTION:** Since employees don't (and can't) always know what's going on behind the scenes, what are some tips on how to handle the misperception that a co-worker's performance problem isn't being addressed?

**ANSWER:** This can be a challenging situation. Perception (or misperception) can be a powerful and potentially damaging force in the workplace. However, respect for employee privacy is also of utmost importance. After all, CONFIDENTIALITY is the foundation of any healthy "due process". Secrecy is the scourge of manipulation and deception. The key is to protect confidentiality and maintain appropriate boundaries while creating an environment of trust and appropriate transparency.

The first step in addressing staff perceptions is to make sure that staff members are generally educated about the organization's performance management process. It can provide comfort and reassurance to employees to know that there is a structure and process in place. It is also important to assure employees that the process is consistently and fairly applied to all employees. Ideally, clear messages about expectations and accountability are conveyed to employees starting on their first day of work at the organization and should be communicated periodically thereafter.

The surfacing of apparent misperceptions can provide an opportunity to revisit and clarify any concerns about the process. Discussing and emphasizing the importance of the confidentiality afforded to ALL employees can be helpful. After all, when you ask most employees if they'd want everyone in their department or organization to know the specifics of their performance or disciplinary plan (if they had one) they usually say "no", and with good reason.

There are various ways for a supervisor to address employee concerns:

- Have an "Open Door Policy". Remind employees that your "door is open" should they have concerns. Listening to their concerns openly can assist in building trust. Remind them of the organization's performance policies and procedures in general terms and reassure them that management utilizes them fairly and consistently. Be careful to maintain confidentiality. *(continued on reverse)*

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

## 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 Liz Ashe, Director of Training at:

**1-800-769-9819**

Or visit our website:

[www.affiliatedeap.com](http://www.affiliatedeap.com)



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

**1-800-769-9819**

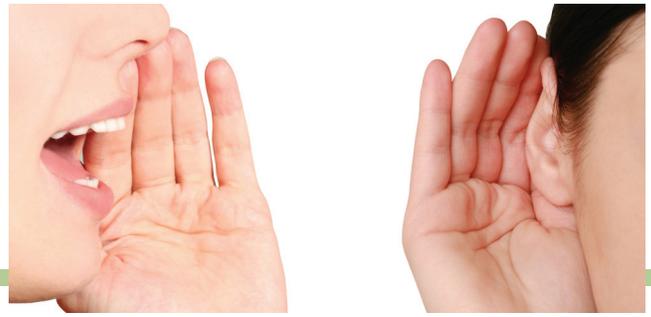
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# Solutions

continued



- Hold a team meeting to review these policies. In that meeting you can also identify the worksite job performance issue in broad terms unrelated to specific events or persons and encourage a general discussion. Try to keep the meeting positive and solution-focused.
- Draft a brief memo to all employees. State a clear behavior (not the specific incident) and pose a teaching question. If you observed this happening how would you respond? What would you want a co-worker to do? How would you expect your supervisor to handle this? Ask each employee to share their answers with you. Ask for a volunteer to lead a discussion for 10 minutes at a department or team meeting.
- Ask open-ended questions regarding job performance and the workplace atmosphere at informal moments of conversation. This provides an opportunity to convey your concern for team morale and your availability.
- Bring in an “expert” (management, EAP, or outside consultant) to address the general issue at a department meeting, training, or company event.

As a supervisor, it is important to address misinformation or concerns about team morale. However, it is also important to respect the privacy of each employee. Because of the importance of confidentiality, employees simply cannot know everything that is going on “behind the scenes”. And while you want to try to address misperceptions, you ultimately cannot control what others choose to believe. If the negative perceptions of some staff begin to impact their performance and team productivity, you may need to speak directly to that employee to clarify performance and role expectations.

**QUESTION:** How do I discourage gossip and rumors at work?

**ANSWER:** It can start out innocently enough with someone saying, “Isn’t it too bad about Carol?” Clueless, the person replies, “What about Carol?” “Don’t you know about her son?” When the person answers in the negative, the co-worker seizes the moment to fill them in on all the details of Carol’s son’s recent encounters with law enforcement. And before the person has finished pouring their coffee, they’ve enabled gossip and rumor mongering that too often contaminate a workplace.

Since no one benefits from gossip, there are several steps you can take to avoid and eliminate this career-killing behavior.

Don’t do it yourself - ever. No, you aren’t talking about people for their own good. You’re gossiping. If you really want to help someone, talk to the person directly. You have an obligation as a supervisor to set the tone and culture for the rest of your department/organization. If someone tries to gossip with you, you can:

1. Change the subject.
2. Directly state, “I’m not comfortable talking about this person.”
3. Directly state, “I don’t like talking about other people because I don’t like them talking about me.” That’s a conversation ender for sure!
4. Reply, “I hadn’t heard that about \_\_\_\_\_. Let’s go ask him/her.” (Watch the person disappear when you say that.)

When someone is gossiping about you or someone else, go with the direct approach. Say something such as, “I understand that you’ve been saying the following.” Then briefly summarize what you have heard. Next, say, “I would appreciate your going to the person directly with any questions or comments rather than talking with our co-workers.”

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