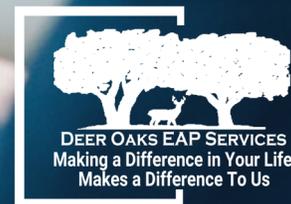




# THE SUPERVISOR/HR NEWSLETTER



HELPFUL RESOURCES FROM YOUR  
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

OCT.  
2020

## OCTOBER ONLINE SEMINAR

### *The Mental Strength Workout*

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## Deer Oaks 2020 Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series *Employee Engagement*

*Advanced Communication Skills that Improve Employee Motivation*  
February 3rd, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT

Register: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/794103984746779139>

*Successful Approaches to Difficult Employee Conversations*  
May 4th, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT

Register: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/444956266369821443>

*Maintaining Effective Communication Channels*  
August 3rd, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT

Register: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5196350630268998915>

*Advanced Coaching Skills for Leaders*  
November 2nd, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT

Register: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8703449675246617347>

# Career Development Planning

Career development planning benefits the individual employee as well as the organization by aligning employee training and development efforts with the organization's mission, goals, and objectives. An individual development plan (IDP) is a tool to assist employees in achieving their personal and professional development goals. IDPs help employees and supervisors set expectations for specific learning objectives and competencies. While an IDP is not a performance evaluation tool or a one-time activity, IDPs allow supervisors to clarify performance expectations. An IDP should be viewed as a partnership between an employee and their supervisor, and involves preparation and continuous feedback. Many agencies require IDPs for new and current employees, and encourage employees to update them annually.

When using an IDP, supervisors develop a better understanding of their employees' professional goals, strengths, and development needs. Employees take personal responsibility and accountability for their career development, acquiring or enhancing the skills they need to stay current in their roles. Some of the benefits of an IDP are to

- Provide an administrative mechanism for identifying and tracking development needs and plans
- Assist in planning for the agency's training and development requirements
- Align employee training and development efforts with its mission, goals, and objectives

There are no regulatory requirements mandating employees complete IDPs, although many employee and leadership development programs require IDPs. Completing IDPs is considered good management practice, and many agencies have developed their own IDP planning process and forms. While there is no one "correct" form for recording an employee's development plan, an effective plan should include, at minimum, the following key elements:

- *Employee profile* – name, position title, office, grade/pay band
- *Career goals* – short-term and long-term goals with estimated and actual completion dates
- *Development objectives* – linked to work unit mission/goals/objectives and employee's development needs and objectives
- *Training and development opportunities* – activities that the employee will pursue, with estimated and actual completion dates (These activities may include formal classroom training, web-based training, rotational assignments, shadowing assignments, on-the-job training, self-study programs, and professional conferences/seminars.)
- *Signatures* – supervisor and employee signature and date

## Executive Development Plans

While there are no regulatory requirements for IDPs, many senior executives are required to have a plan for their continued training and development. Facing constant challenges, changing technologies, and a dynamic environment, executives must pursue ongoing professional executive development to succeed and grow. It is crucial that executives continue to strengthen and enhance their core qualifications, broaden their perspectives, and strengthen their performance.

Executive development plans should outline a senior executive's short-term and long-term developmental activities, which will enhance the executive's performance. These activities should meet organizational needs for leadership, managerial improvement, and results. These plans should be reviewed annually and revised as appropriate.

*Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). (n.d.). Career development planning. Retrieved September 5, 2019, from <https://www.opm.gov>*

# Successful Approaches to Difficult Employee

Misunderstandings, disagreements, and even occasional conflict are a normal part of every manager's relationship with their employees. Since the quality of manager – employee relationships is a key factor in employee morale and productivity, how a manager handles difficult conversations with their staff members is a crucial part of their success as a leader.

## Don't rush through difficult conversations

Any conversation that is highly emotional, where the stakes are high, or are in any other way stressful to either the manager or the employee are going to be challenging. It's important for managers to realize that these conversations need to be approached carefully and skillfully and should not be rushed through. Because leaders are typically very busy, there is often a tendency to have brief, rushed conversations that can be ineffective and even damaging to the employee–manager relationship.

## Prerequisites to a successful conversation

It's important to choose the right time and place to have the conversation. If the topic to be discussed is potentially stressful, be sure to allocate enough time. Fifteen (15) minutes is a good rule of thumb for a conversation that has potentially stressful content. If a manager doesn't have at least 15 minutes to allow the employee to discuss the topic thoroughly with them, it's better to choose a different time for the interaction. Also remember to choose a location that's comfortable for both you and the employee. Your office may not be the best place. A neutral location like a coffee shop might be more comfortable for the employee.

## Effective approaches

Once you've chosen the right time and place, below are some tips for having an effective conversation with the employee:

- *Speak the truth respectfully* – Always remember to be respectful as you interact with the employee. Even if you disagree with him/her, do it respectfully. The employee may not get what he wants from the conversation, but if you are respectful to his opinions, etc., he will typically still see you as a supervisor who is trying to be reasonable and fair.
- *Seek first to understand, then be understood* – Let the employee go first in the conversation. Hear him out. Don't interrupt as he expresses himself. Dale Carnegie Training says that a caring manager is the key to having an engaged employee. There's no better way to demonstrate caring than by listening well to your employees.
- *Take a positive approach* – Go into the conversation being as positive as possible. Even if you have to discipline the employee for a performance problem, try to do it in a constructive, positive way. Be encouraging (i.e., "we all make mistakes" or "let's see this situation as a growth opportunity"), to help the employee remain hopeful and motivated to move forward.

Source: Greg Brannan, Director of Business Development & Training, Deer Oaks EAP Services, LLC

# Ask Your EAP!

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have regarding employee issues and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to the EAP for a management consultation.

*Q. Social distancing and wearing masks are tiresome. Some employees handle it better than others. I worry about the effect the pandemic is having on mental health, especially for those who are fragile and less resilient. What can supervisors do to help?*

A. Employee assistance programs are on the front lines in meeting the needs of employees, so refer to the EAP as the best first step. An increase in mental health problems associated with the pandemic is in the news. Medical experts are closely watching the big four: depression, alcohol use disorders, substance abuse, and anxiety. Suicide can be a consequence of any of these conditions. If you are interacting online, you may spot signs and symptoms of a troubled employee. While you can't diagnose, you can ask how they are doing. Do so especially if you witness 1) Withdrawal—the avoidance of others and pulling away from work assignments; 2) Poor availability, and needing increasing time off; 3) Visible irritation, or a short fuse in online meetings; 4) Looking confused, distracted, or unable to focus in a conference call. Consult with the EAP whenever you are concerned about a worker because if a referral is needed later, it is likelier to happen. Source: [www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/05/04/mental-health-coronavirus/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/05/04/mental-health-coronavirus/)

*Q. In supervisor documentation, what is the difference between describing and interpreting unacceptable behavior?*

A. Descriptive documentation leaves no room for misinterpretation. There is no need to read between the lines. An example of descriptive documentation would be “Bill left the room quickly, appeared angry with a scowl, and shut the door behind him with great force, frightening employees. Two similar events involving Bill occurred prior to this one.” Interpretive documentation is less measurable, more subjective, and biased. It falls short in the ability to support administrative actions, and as such, undermines the ability to correct performance. Example: “Bill’s toxic attitude toward members of his team is persistent, and this was again demonstrated at 4:00 p.m., when he brazenly slammed the door in everyone’s face after a heated exchange with his team. This happens constantly.” The second piece of documentation is emotional and visual, but arguably less concrete. It may be more satisfying for the supervisor to write, but it could also lead to more disagreement about what actually occurred.

*Q. Is it okay for supervisors to discuss psychological techniques for feeling better when employees are having a bad day, or offer employees tips on coping with stress? What about sadness over a relationship breakup? Sometimes referring them to the EAP does not feel like the right response.*

A. Conversations with employees may broach personal challenges faced at work and at home, relationships issues, or internal personal struggles. Offering practical tips for coping with stress that you have personally found useful, or demonstrating empathy along with suggesting stress-relieving ideas, does not interfere with your role as a manager or cross boundaries that would impede your employee seeking help with a personal problem at the EAP. Suggesting employees take a break, calm down, look at things a different way, or check out a book you have found helpful is not what's referred to by those who suggest “avoiding diagnosing or counseling workers.” Do promote the EAP, however, and discount your suggestions as ultimate solutions, and avoid ongoing advising on problems. Never hesitate to contact the EAP with a question about your role and what's appropriate, and for guidance on what to say or do next with an employee's concern.

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