

# A Supervisor's Resource for Change



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The Faculty & Employee Assistance Program (FEAP) is a resource for all employees and their dependents experiencing personal or family problems. Your supervisory responsibility to develop employees and monitor their performance puts you in a pivotal position to observe changes in behavior and the emergence of personal, family, or drug and alcohol problems. Encouraging employees to take the first steps in using available resources to address these problems may be the most important role you will play in their lives.

As a supervisor, you are also held responsible for getting the job done and for doing so safely, efficiently, and effectively. One of the ways your chances for success are enhanced is by maintaining a working environment in which employees can focus their energies on the task of the job, and not be distracted by destructive attitudes and behaviors. The FEAP is also concerned about the health and well being of work groups. It is a uniquely valuable resource for you if you suspect or have identified problems within work groups.

You are encouraged to get acquainted with the FEAP and its staff so that you can take advantage of this resource. This manual is designed to assist you in this process. The FEAP staff is also available.



FACULTY *and* EMPLOYEE  
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

As a supervisor, you are not only responsible for getting the work done, but also are responsible for providing the environment in which employees can work to their highest potential. Some employees work best with a minimum of guidance and direction while others need more attention. These individual differences may be due to training, experience, or psychological needs. An effective supervisor is thoughtful about these factors in planning work assignments.

Beyond sensitivity to the individual needs of employees, you need to develop an increased awareness of the needs and character of the work group as a whole. Some groups are efficient and productive, even creative, while others are more troublesome, less cooperative, and more resistant to change. Some work groups feel good about themselves, while others do not. Individual members usually reflect these differences. You expect the attitudes of individuals to affect the efficiency and productivity of the group. It is equally true that the attitudes of the group affect the efficiency and productivity of individuals. Well-functioning groups enhance individuals' self-esteem and disturbed groups undermine individuals' self-confidence.

When a work group forms and develops character, different members of the group are assigned and assume certain roles. This occurs naturally without awareness that it is happening. For instance, one member may be the one to complain or challenge the authority of the supervisor or management. If you are aware of an individual who is more likely to give you a hard time, take notice. If the rest of the group did not want him or her to complain they would, in all likelihood, quiet the complaints from that person to counter the communication from the first. The complainer may be your valuable source of information about the atmosphere of the group.

Members of groups develop impressions of their colleagues. When someone's behavior changes, the others notice it and try to explain the change. For instance, a person may be depressed and more difficult to get along with more than usual. Group members formulate a variety of conclusions to account for the change. One may surmise material problems or another member that a child is not doing well in school. Well-functioning groups will determine the real cause of the problem, offer realistic support, and promote healthy solutions. Groups that are not as trusting or well organized may build unreal stories about troubled members. These stories are often based on assumptions that may never be checked out. They will always have a grain of truth with some distortion, so reality is hard to determine. These misunderstandings sow the seeds of conflict and distrust within the group.

A troubled workplace can cause unnecessary strain on individual members. The work environment no longer supports creativity and productivity because of the amount of distraction, time, and energy spent in understanding what is happening. The more the group is free of dealing with distortion, the more effective it can be. A good supervisor limits the negative impact on the group by early intervention with a troubled employee.

Your responsibility as a supervisor is to notice and respond to the hidden forces that may cause a potentially ideal workplace to splinter or fail to achieve its potential. This means increasing awareness of forces that determine group behavior and providing a supportive environment for their actions.

Good supervision is a challenging task. It involves knowing about your own feelings so you function well and with confidence. It involves knowing the needs of each employee. Good supervision also involves being aware of group behavior because of its significant influence on the total group function.

At some time in their lives, most people in this increasingly complex world face difficult challenges, which may be overwhelming. Perhaps they have lost a loved one, are facing a difficult move, are going through a separation or divorce, have a troubled child, or are struggling with appropriate care for an aging parent. A family member may have a substance abuse problem, chronic depression, or recently have had a traumatic experience. Whatever the cause, most people have predictable symptoms when they are feeling helpless and out of control. Most individuals behave in habitual ways except when they are experiencing a crisis or major life change. Everyone experiences some of these symptoms occasionally. However, anytime an employee's behavior develops into uncharacteristic patterns, there is cause for concern. **The following is a checklist of behaviors signaling a potential problem:**

#### **Patterns of Absenteeism & Tardiness**

- Late arrival and early departure
- Long lunch breaks
- Monday and/or Friday absences
- Absences before and after paydays or vacations
- Increased absences due to illness or accidents

#### **Patterns of Abnormal Interpersonal Relationships**

- Withdrawal from co-workers
- Overreaction to real or imagined criticism
- Inappropriate outbursts of tears, anger, or laughter
- Unreasonable resentments
- Complaints from co-workers, associates, or the public
- Borrowing money from associates
- Increased difficulties with spouse, children, and friends
- Helplessness
- Taking advantage of people

## Health & Safety Hazards

- Increased accidents on and off the job
- Careless handling of equipment or machinery
- Disregard for own or others' safety
- Taking needless risks to compensate for low productivity

## Physical Symptoms

- Weight change
- Chronic fatigue
- Insomnia
- Red, bleary, or dilated eyes
- Swollen face
- Slurred speech
- Memory loss
- Unsteady gait
- Increased physical complaints or illnesses
- Frequent headaches
- Stomachaches, ulcers, gastritis, or colitis

## Patterns of Unusual Behavior

- Fluctuation in work quality or quantity from good to inadequate
- Irresponsibility in completing tasks
- Careless and sloppy work
- Inability to concentrate
- Increase in wasted materials or damaged equipment
- Procrastination
- Paranoia or unusual suspiciousness
- Emotional instability - mood swings
- Increased agitation
- Frequent periods of anxiety or tenseness
- Depression or lethargy
- Uncooperativeness
- Carelessness about personal appearance
- Preoccupied most of the time
- Emptiness - loss of direction
- Negative attitude

## Role of the Supervisor

Your success as a supervisor depends on the motivation, productivity, and personal well-being of each employee on the staff. One troubled employee can significantly affect the entire workplace. Prompt attention to developing problems can save a great deal in terms of personal difficulty for the employee as well as lost productivity. Early recognition of problems, intervention, and support during early stages of treatment are keys to effective results.

In most cases, the employee's job is the last area to be affected when experiencing problems. This means the supervisor needs to be more sensitive to subtle, less obvious changes in behavior that may signal a potential problem. Tardiness, absenteeism, angry outbursts, intoxication, and missed deadlines are easily recognized. However, symptoms such as procrastination, increased irritability, withdrawal from peers, and lethargy are easier to ignore or rationalize during the early stages of a developing problem. Anytime negative behaviors develop into a pattern, there is cause for concern. Often a gut feeling that an employee is troubled can be a significant clue.

A supervisor is often in a powerful position to motivate an employee to address personal problems and change his/her behavior. In the case of a substance abuser, a supervisor's intervention may save the life of a person suffering from a potential fatal illness. The paycheck is a powerful incentive for an employee to become emotionally healthy or to stay or become drug free. Inadequate performance breeches the employee contract and legitimately leads to the opportunity for confrontation by the supervisor. Job security in most cases is adequate motivation for change.

**The supervisor can best help a troubled employee by sticking to work performance and absenteeism issues.**

Proper documentation of declining performance helps the supervisor stay objective and focused on work related issues. A supervisor who becomes too emotionally involved with an employee's personal problems will find it increasingly difficult to take disciplinary action when needed.

**Documentation, confrontation, honest feedback about behavior and job performance, and clear expectations and consequences are acts of caring.**

Troubled employees are usually feeling helpless and out-of-control. Holding employees accountable for their behavior helps them take charge of at least one area of their life - their job - and opens the door to take control of other areas. Although they may be angry initially, most people are relieved to have their problems come out in the open.

A supervisor's positive expectations, as well as, support and understanding, can facilitate a faster recovery. People usually live up to what others expect of them. Employees need understanding and encouragement to follow through on treatment. They need constructive feedback about their performance and behavior prior to and following treatment, as well as a realistic time frame to solve their problems. At all

times, they need respect for privacy and confidentiality. They need clear, well-defined expectations and corrective action if old behaviors return.

The employee needs to know the Company is committed to rehabilitate, not terminate. It is in the best interest of the Company to support treatment which would restore a valuable employee to previous or perhaps greater performance levels. A recovered employee who returns to his/her potential is not only an asset to the workplace, but a symbol of the Company's concern for its people.

"If you do what you've always done  
you'll get what you've always got."

### Supervisors as Enablers

Dealing with a troubled employee almost always creates tension in the supervisor. When living or working around a troubled person, everyone gets affected in some way. A supervisor often feels caught in the middle of feeling sympathetic toward the employee's problem and the pressure to get a job done well. The supervisor's problems are similar to those facing the employee's family and friends. First, it is easy to ignore symptoms, especially if the person has been a valued, trustworthy employee. You tend to carry around a mental image of the employee based on past good performance. A supervisor often goes through this denial phase, overlooking problem behavior because "this is the best employee I've got when things are going well." You feel if you just wait a little longer, the problem will go away. Second, identifying a problem with which you have had no experience and with no obvious solution is difficult. You want to do something about the problem, but you do not know where to begin.

You may often feel helpless and confused in your role as supervisor. You are usually angry or frustrated with a troubled employee for broken promises, repeated cover-ups, and increasing unreliability. Sometimes you are fearful of handling personal problems in the workplace, or feel guilty about putting more pressure on someone who already has enough problems. You may fear confrontation, criticism, or losing control. You may feel unsure of how you are handling the situation, or take on an employee's failures as your own. A troubled person typically blames others for his/her problems, including the supervisor. This can reinforce any self-doubts the supervisor may already have about how to handle the situation.

With this increasing emotional strain, the supervisor becomes one more "victim" of the troubled employee's problem. Even though you may have the knowledge and skills to make an appropriate referral, your emotions may interfere with objective, constructive action.

An enabler is someone whose actions shield and protect people from experiencing the full impact and consequences of their behavior. An enabler helps those people

continue acting in self-destructive ways and maintaining the delusion that they do not have a problem.

How do you enable? Each time you compensate for the employee's irresponsibility, you are enabling. When you live with and accept a variety of excuses, you are enabling. For instance, giving the employee less work, transferring the employee, covering up absences, and redoing work keep the employee from facing the problem. Family members, co-workers, and supervisors who perpetuate these enabling behaviors become part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Sitting down face-to-face and confronting employees with well-documented evidence of unacceptable performance is the first step toward helping employees take responsibility for their actions. **The supervisor does not need to know what the problem is.** What is important is to break the cycle of enabling by holding the employees accountable for their actions and behavior. When appropriate, it may mean referring to the FEAP as a valuable resource for change.

#### Enablers:

- Cover up for employee's declining job performance.
  - Deny the existence of the problem.
- Overlook symptoms of the troubled employee.
  - Avoid confronting the employee.
  - Feel confused and helpless.
- Do not hold the employee accountable for behavior.
  - Try to "fix" the employee or the situation.
  - End up feeling angry, resentful and used.
- Become part of the problem, not part of the solution.

### Supervisors' Contact with FEAP

It is important to remember that the role of the FEAP is to be a resource for help or change for ALL employees AND supervisors when they are dealing with a crisis. The timing or way in which the FEAP is contacted will depend upon the circumstances. Supervisors are encouraged to consult with their management and a Human Resources representative throughout the process of dealing with a troubled employee. Consultation with the FEAP adds one more resource to the supervisor's team. **The ways to contact the FEAP include:**

## **1. Self Referral**

Employees and their dependents may contact the FEAP independently. This is a confidential contact by phone, email, or in person and does not require any involvement from the supervisor or Human Resources, unless it is an employee needing in-patient substance abuse treatment or medical leave.

## **2. Supervisor Consultation with FEAP**

Sometimes a supervisor is unsure if there is a problem with an employee or within the workplace and just needs some help in clarifying the situation. Other problems are more obvious and consultation with the FEAP gives the supervisor an opportunity to discuss observations and concerns, clarify the problem, and explore his/her own feelings and reactions that may be interfering with possible solutions. A supervisor can explore options for change such as better utilization of his/her management skills or recognition of the need for professional assistance through a formal or informal referral to the FEAP.

## **3. Informal Supervisor Referral**

All employees may have times when they experience personal or family problems that become overwhelming. They may discuss these problems with their supervisor or their co-workers. This is an opportunity for the supervisor to show concern for the employees and acquaint them with FEAP as a resource for help. An informal referral is based on personal concern for the employee and does not require documentation or direct contact with the FEAP.

## **4. Formal Supervisor Referral**

This referral is based on documented performance problems and should be suggested when an employee is not responding to normal supervisory efforts to solve the problem. The performance problems could be chronic, developing over a long period of time, or a current crisis that affect the employee's ability to function or threatens the safety of the workplace.

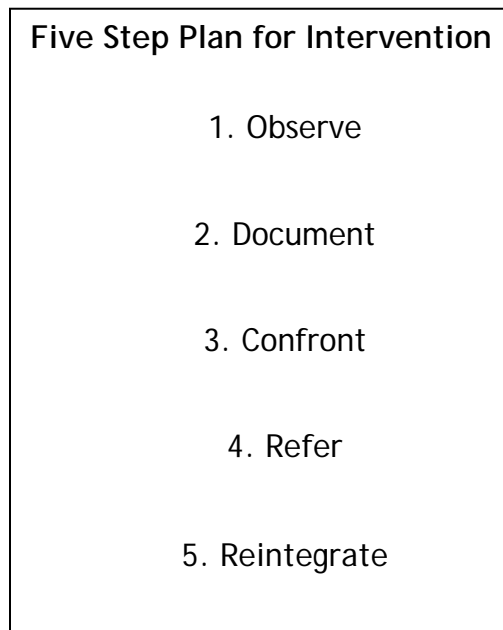
An effective supervisor monitors the employee's performance and gives appropriate feedback to effect change. Most employees, when given corrective feedback, will make the necessary changes. However, when an employee is unable or unwilling to change, the supervisor should consider a formal referral to the FEAP. This provides the employee with an opportunity to resolve the problems that may be interfering with his/her ability to perform at an acceptable level. Obviously, all troubled employees do not need the FEAP, but a supervisor may want to consider a FEAP referral for any employee facing disciplinary action.

With a formal referral, the supervisor should contact the FEAP prior to the employee's appointment to provide clear information about the reasons for the referral and to set up the communication link between the supervisor and the FEAP. When the supervisor

has effectively documented the problem and has given a clear message to the employee that the behavior must change, the employee will usually accept the referral. Whether the employee accepts the referral to FEAP or not, the supervisor should hold the employee accountable for the expected changes and follow through with logical consequences.

In the case of an immediate crisis where the employee is out of control or unfit for duty, the supervisor should consider several options including:

- Removing the employee from the workplace pending medical clearance
- Referring the employee to the FEAP for an evaluation and/or
- Following the site procedures around alcohol/drug testing



### 1. Observe

In most cases the troubled employee will gradually develop a pattern of negative behaviors indicating an underlying, medical, substance abuse, personal, family or workplace problem that needs attention. With practice, a supervisor can become more aware of the early, but repeated signs, despite the efforts of the employee to conceal them. Everyone may experience some of these symptoms occasionally. However, when the supervisor observes a developing pattern of symptoms over a period of time (several weeks or months), it is time to take action.

## 2. Document

A collection of data is hard for the employee or supervisor to ignore. Recording the facts accurately helps make a fair and impartial assessment of job performance. Start documenting as soon as you notice a pattern of problem behavior. Include the date, time, place, participants, and nature of each incident as well as any significant remarks by the employee. State any action taken and a realistic time frame for performance to improve. A copy of the documentation should be given to the employees and to Human Resources for the employee's personnel file. This process is not to be viewed as "building a case" but rather is focused on helping an employee take responsibility for his/her behavior.

## 3. Confront

Confrontation is nothing more than giving accurate feedback about another individual's behavior. Confronting the employee with your concerns and collection of documented data on declining job performance usually precipitates a situation which motivates the employee to make changes. It means you are no longer supporting the employee's denial system and no longer being an enabler. **It takes courage to confront.** Honesty is vital in breaking through denial to self-discovery and growth. Confrontation is most useful and successful when it is spoken with concern and followed by concrete examples.

Prepare for the confrontation. Choose a private setting, allow ample time, and prepare for resistance or hostility. Be clear, firm, and specific about inadequate job performance, job expectations, and signs of emotional distress. Give a realistic time frame for performance to improve. Discuss the problem in a positive, non-threatening way. Ask the employee for ideas on how to solve the problem.

**Do not try to diagnose or moralize.** You are most helpful when you limit the discussion to job performance. Show concern without accepting excuses. Express your desire to resolve the problem, not to punish. Expect results. A positive, supportive attitude is a powerful motivator for healthy change.

## 4. Refer

A formal referral to the FEAP should be made by the supervisor when emotional problems or inconsistent job performance persist despite normal supervisory action. The referral is a natural step when confronting an employee with serious performance problems. The earlier you refer, the better chance for recovery. Do not wait until the situation has reached a crisis. Remember, the FEAP is available for consultation to clarify the problem and help you with the confrontation, or referral process. **With a formal referral, the supervisor must notify the FEAP prior to the employee making an appointment** to provide the counselor with the circumstances surrounding the referral. In addition, the FEAP will notify the supervisor when the employee has followed through with the referral and will keep in contact regarding the employee's

cooperation and progress in overcoming the problem. In substance abuse cases, the supervisor has a more extensive role, participating in a return-to-work meeting and receiving regular feedback from FEAP regarding the employee's aftercare.

## 5. Reintegrate

For an employee who require substance abuse treatment and in some other cases when the employee has been off work, a return-to-work meeting will be scheduled including the employee, supervisor, Office of Employee Relations, and FEAP counselor. This gives all parties an opportunity to clarify follow up procedures, voice concerns, and ease the employee's transition back into the workplace. An employee is often ashamed or embarrassed about his/her need for mental health or substance abuse treatment. He/she is fearful and uncertain about how others at home or at work will react to the cause of their absence. Awareness of this on the part of the supervisor may ease the difficulty of reintegration.

With all formal referrals to the FEAP, it will be important for the supervisor to continue to monitor the employee's behavior and performance and give appropriate feedback. Focus on improvements as much as possible. Be supportive and understanding while remaining firm about job expectations. Take corrective action if needed, and at all times hold the employee accountable for his/her behavior. Expect success and communicate your positive expectations to the employee.

*"Help people reach their full potential; Catch them doing something right."*

## Do's and Don'ts of Confrontation

1. **Do** act promptly. Ignoring the situation will not help the employee solve the problem and will delay the solution.
2. **Do** let the employee know your motivation comes from caring and concern.
3. **Do** confront the employee in a confidential, private setting.
4. **Do** state clearly the company's concerns with job performance, not the nature of the employee's problem.
5. **Do** clearly explain the company's job performance expectations and requirements.
6. **Do** document all incidents. A collection of recorded data will be hard for the employee to ignore.
7. **Do** document all supervisor-employee discussions and recommendations.
8. **Do** explain the FEAP as a company benefit and resource for help.
9. **Do** expect success. People usually live up to what others expect of them. A supervisor is a powerful motivator for improvement and can facilitate a faster recovery.

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1. **Do not** try to diagnose the problem.
  2. **Do not** moralize or criticize. Clearly state the documented facts about the employee's behavior without judgments.
  3. **Do not** be fooled by the employee's sympathy-invoking tactics. They may be experts at this.
  4. **Do not** confront the employee when you are angry. Wait until you are under control.
  5. **Do not** enable or make excuses for the employee's deteriorating behavior and productivity.
  6. **Do not** transfer, promote, or retire employees as a solution to the problem.
  7. **Do not** make disciplinary threats. Give the employee firm, clear choices and be prepared to stand firm.

## Communication between FEAP and Management

There is often confusion about the notification process and how much information a supervisor and HR should know when an employee is off work for mental health problems. The supervisor and HR need to know the absence is legitimate and approximately how long the employee will be off work so the position can be covered. If the employee tells his/her supervisor or HR of the problem, the FEAP can communicate directly with the supervisor to coordinate the absence. This is how it is handled in most cases. However, if the employee wishes to keep the information confidential, the FEAP will notify the supervisor and HR without identifying it as a mental health problem.

With formal supervisor referrals and substance abuse cases, there is an open line of communication between the supervisor, HR, FEAP, and the employee. The FEAP gives feedback to the supervisor regarding the employee's progress and commitment to treatment. Communication is limited to the employee's work performance and ability to work safely and effectively without disclosing details of the employee's personal life. In substance abuse cases, the FEAP also coordinates the back-to-work meeting and keeps the supervisor or HR informed of the employee's compliance with aftercare treatment.

The FEAP respects the employee's confidentiality. However, if the employee is suicidal, homicidal, a danger to the workplace, or if child abuse is known or suspected, the FEAP will take whatever action is necessary to keep the employee and others safe.

"What happens to good people  
when bad things happen to them?  
They become better people!"

-Robert Schuller

## The Referral Process

Whether you are making a formal referral based on documented performance deficiencies or an informal referral because of your observation about the employee's emotional distress, both processes have some similarities. Be clear and specific about the information that has led to your action. Let your employee know that your motivation comes from caring and concern.

Remember that you are just providing him/her with another option to help remedy the problem in his/her life (all referrals are voluntary). In a formal referral, the consequences of noncompliance or lack of behavior change should be clearly stated and documented.

Listed below are two brief scenarios demonstrating the referral process:

## Informal Referral

**Supervisor:** Sam, I'm worried about you. You've told me about the divorce you are going through and I've noticed how down you've been.

**Employee:** Oh, I'm o.k.

**Supervisor:** I'm sure you are o.k. in a lot of ways, but going through a divorce is really rough. If I were in your situation, it would help to get some extra support. I wish you would contact the Faculty & Employee Assistance Program to see if they could help.

**Employee:** You mean that group for alcoholics?

**Supervisor:** Yes, the FEAP is for people with substance abuse problems, but they help employees and families with personal or job-related problems too. They are a group of professional counselors hired by our employer to help you with situations just like what you are going through. Your contact with them will be confidential and it's easy to set up an appointment with them. Would you like their phone number?

**Employee:** Well, I'm doing my job all right, aren't I?

**Supervisor:** Yes. But my concern is how to support you during this tough time. We all need help sometimes. Here is the FEAP phone number. I encourage you to call them.

## Formal Referral

**Supervisor:** Sam, we have met three times now over the last two months. My records show you were late two times last week and you have still not turned in the monthly report due two weeks ago.

**Employee:** Joe, I just need more time. I wish you'd get off my back. You know my wife's been sick. I've got a lot on my mind. Besides, my old supervisor didn't expect me to be here until 7:30.

**Supervisor:** We've gone over this before, Sam. You agreed you would get to work on time and you know that I am keeping track of your reports.

**Employee:** Well, I'll work on it.

**Supervisor:** That's great. I'm glad you are going to make some changes. I know you are having a hard time with your wife being sick. But, I feel that the problems at home are affecting your work. I would like you to contact our Faculty & Employee Assistance Program. I think they could help you.

**Employee:** Why do you want me to do that?

**Supervisor:** I'll tell you a little about the program. The FEAP is a group of professional counselors who are here to help employees and their families with personal or job related problems. The reason I want you to contact them is because we have been working on these problems for a long time and I haven't seen any improvement. I don't know much about your problems and I don't need to know. However, if your work performance doesn't improve, I will have to take disciplinary action and it may lead to termination.

**Employee:** So, I don't have any choice. If I don't go, I will be fired.

**Supervisor:** No, the choice is yours. But I do expect the changes. I believe an FEAP consultant may be able to help you. Your conversations with the consultant will be confidential, but I am going to let them know I've referred you. They will also let me know whether or not you made an appointment. I am documenting this conversation and will note it in your file. Also, I will give you a copy. You are a valuable person in our group and I really hope you will do whatever is necessary to solve your problems. I need you here working at full speed. Here is the phone number for the FEAP.

## **Closing Comment**

The reality of holding an employee accountable for his/her behavior is that on occasion an employee may lose his/her job and that you will be part of that decision. Building cases and terminating an employee is obviously not your intention or your role.

As a supervisor, your primary role is to develop and empower those reporting to you and to ensure that they are valuable contributors to the business. At times this is a difficult task.

The FEAP counselor is your partner in the very rewarding task of helping your troubled employees become successful contributors in the most appropriate and caring way.