EAP SUPERVISOR ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

May 2023

DEER OAKS PRESENTS

Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series

Emotional Intelligence for Supervisors

When: July 10, 2023 at 1:00 PM CDT

REGISTER

Table of Contents

Developing Strong Time Management • P. 2

Managing Employee Burnout • P. 4

Ask Your EAP! • P. 6

DEVELOPING STRONG TIME MANAGEMENT

Have you ever looked at a posting for an open job position and seen the following phrases: "self-starter," "fast-paced environment," "deadline-driven," or "ability to work independently?" What these and similar phrases are asking is: how good are you at managing your time?

Soft skills like these are important; people skills like communication or working on a team are just as valuable to a future employer as technical training. With a few exceptions, jobs cannot be worked entirely alone. You'll need to be able to interact with coworkers or customers one on one or in a team setting. Other soft skills like a positive attitude and organizational skills reflect your strengths as an individual employee.

This article will look at the importance of time management and ways to support a more efficient workday.

What is time management?

Time management is actually a set of smaller skills that help make you an efficient and effective employee. Because there are only so many hours in a workday, it's important to understand how to make the most of each hour and how to create systems that work for you:

- **Prioritizing**—It's possible that a workday may have more tasks to complete than you have time for. An important time management skill is understanding your limits and how to prioritize tasks. Knowing how to look at a list of tasks and rank their importance based on company impact, approaching deadlines, or complexity is something employers look for in their employees. Being able to set realistic work goals for your day and achieving them not only brings you personal satisfaction, but also shows your employer that you take a professional approach to your career.
- **Scheduling**—Once you've ranked the tasks on your list, the next step in good time management is scheduling. Maintaining a schedule and implementing a system for that schedule, like a planner, email notifications, or scheduler program can help build routines in your day, which leads to less wasted time. If you know you have a meeting at 9:00 a.m. and get a reminder at 8:30 a.m. to attend the meeting, you're less likely to be late and disrupt the flow of the meeting. Scheduling can also help with prioritizing equally important tasks. For example, if you need to work with a coworker on a specific project, but the only time you're both available is next week, that means you can move the project lower down your list and prioritize tasks you can complete on your own this week.
- **Workload management**—Finally, time management means discussing and setting reasonable expectations. Staying organized through to-do lists, scheduling systems, and prioritizing can make large workloads more manageable. However, working at your top speed all day, every day is not sustainable. Break down larger projects into smaller milestones with realistic deadlines leading up to the larger, final deadline. Taking breaks throughout the week lets you recharge and refocus on new tasks. Have transparent conversations with your supervisor about their expectations for you and tasks or projects you need support with. The ability to delegate is not a sign you're unable to do the work; it's an important skill employers look for in their future leaders.

Tips to Improve Time Management

Though soft skills, or people skills, aren't as easily taught as hard, technical skills, there are ways to practice and improve your abilities. Here are some tools that may help support your time management:

- **Create a routine.** Routines give you stability and eliminate the time wasted trying to answer the question, "What comes next?" By establishing and sticking to a routine, you're less likely to forget the tasks you need to complete every day.

- **Plan your day.** As part of your daily routine, set aside time to plan the rest of your day. Once you've prioritized your to-do list, create a schedule, and plan for how and when you'll start and complete each task.

- **Track your timeframes, and adjust as needed.** Occasionally, time yourself on certain projects, but don't try to race the clock. Go through tasks at your normal, comfortable pace. Be honest about how long certain tasks take. If you only allow 15 minutes for a reporting task on your schedule, but the report normally takes you closer to 30 minutes to complete, you're not setting a realistic goal for yourself—and your frustration may make you even less productive on other tasks later in the day. Make adjustments as needed to your scheduling, and discuss with your supervisor if you find you need additional time on all your tasks. They may be able to help streamline some processes or adjust your workload.

- **Use time management tools.** Most email programs also have task-tracking and calendar features. Many companies provide their employees with collaborative software that help them track big and small projects. Otherwise, find a pen-and-paper planner system that works for you. For some, a combination of all of these tools is the best method for staying on top of the things you need to do at work and at home. Remember, this is not a one-size-fits-all solution. You may have to go through some trial and error to find the system that works for you.

Remember—No one is born with good time management skills, but with practice and the right tools, you can master this important skill.

Source: *Social Security Administration (SSA), Ticket to Work. (2021, September 29). Developing strong time management [Blog post] (C. Meeker & B. Schuette, Eds.). Retrieved October 14, 2021, from https://choosework.ssa.gov*

MANAGING EMPLOYEE BURNOUT

Burnout may depend as much on individual employees' personalities as on the workplace.

Employees who push themselves hard probably have set high goals for themselves for years; what you see is the cumulative result of being exhausted by achievement. These people can become drained from the sustained excitement and adrenaline levels of challenging themselves.

Employees who measure their progress in the organization against their own internal timeline may be comparing their work lives to that of a parent, sibling, or friend ("When my mother was 35, she was already ..."), or perhaps they are thinking about their own goals and what they want to achieve by a certain age. If this kind of anxiety is the trouble, the employee may need help assessing whether or not the expectations are realistic. These employees may need encouragement to help them set reasonable short-term goals.

Burnout can also come from stresses in employees' home lives.

Employees who feel they have too much going on in their lives are increasingly common. When a heavy workload is added to many family responsibilities, the result can be absenteeism, plummeting productivity, and burnout. Talk to the employee about how home life may be influencing work and vice versa. Investigate possible solutions, including flextime or job sharing.

Employees who feel fatigued are also common. Fatigue and depression are among top reasons that people say they go to physicians. Encourage the employee to seek medical attention, if necessary. If feasible, create the opportunity for the employee to get exercise during the day.

Burnout that affects a number of employees and is the result of workplace stress may benefit from intervention strategies.

- Work to clarify responsibilities, so that each worker's duties are well defined.
- Set up a "Stress Relief Suggestion Box," so employees can participate in addressing the causes and levels of office stress.
- Support employees' healthy choices. Create support groups for people who are trying to quit smoking, or offer free and healthy office snacks.
- Promote stress awareness through reminders in a newsletter or email.

Employees may benefit from knowing that their well-being is important to their employer. If employees know that you care about their stress levels, it's more likely that they'll respond well to intervention strategies. Valuing employee health is especially important in work cultures that glamorize the ability to handle heavy workloads. Remind your employees that relieving their stress is important, too.

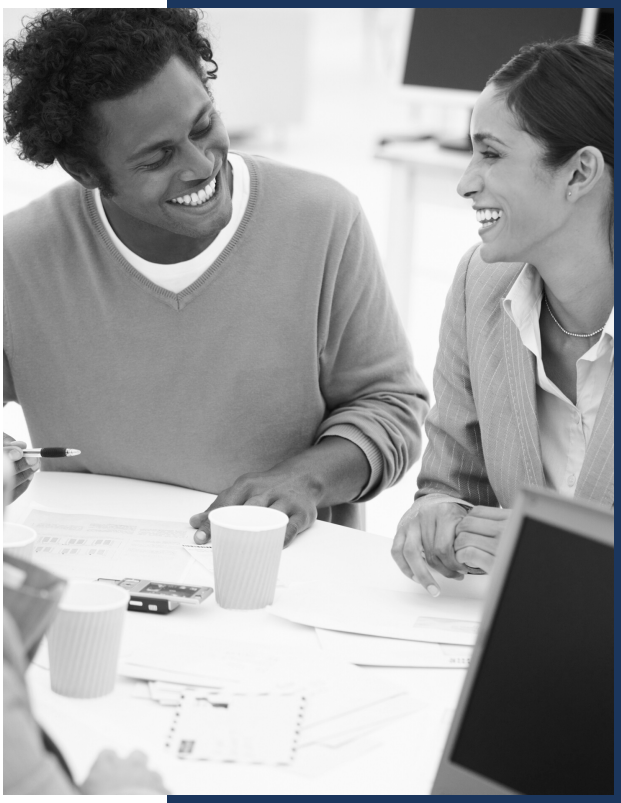
How can employers help to prevent employee burnout?

There's no one-size-fits-all answer, but here are several strategies.

Make sure it's not your fault.
Ask whether something is wrong with the job when an employee suffers burnout, especially when it happens to several employees in the same job. Understaffing, long hours, high stress —all are conditions that can eventually overwhelm even the best employees. Make sure it isn't the job that needs fixing before you try solutions that focus on employees.

The Minisabbatical Solution
For employees who push themselves, low-pressure assignments usually aren't the answer; an unchallenging assignment will probably be seen as an insult. Instead, try offering this type of employee a short-term sabbatical (two to six weeks long). The employee should be encouraged to pursue an activity that refreshes his or her motivation and creativity. You might advise your employee to take a class, do research, or pursue professional development offsite.

The Executive Involvement Solution
For employees who feel like their ambitions are hitting organizational walls, being asked to participate in development and decision-making can often help relieve burnout. Some managers recruit their most talented people to become part of an executive council that assesses the organization's future, plans effective customer service, and advises senior managers on how to get the most from the work force while building morale and team spirit. When talented people are brought into the highest levels of creative planning and decision-making, they have a reason to keep their skills sharp and to resist burnout.



The "Cafeteria" Solution
Organizations can ease the burnout-inducing burdens of family responsibilities without breaking the budget by installing so-called cafeteria benefits plans. You can give employees a menu of benefit choices. They can then determine which combination of programs will help them to meet their family or personal responsibilities.

Typical cafeteria benefits plans include the following:

- Resource and referral services for child care and eldercare (this is often offered through your employee assistance program, or EAP)
- Onsite or offsite child care or elder care facilities (often shared with other area companies)
- Provisions for sick-child visitation and day care by a medically trained caregiver
- Substance abuse assistance (the EAP may also be able to assist here)
- Alternative work schedules (including compressed workweeks, flextime, and telecommuting)

The Caring Organization Solution
Promote an organization-wide culture of health, in which all employees are urged to take physical and emotional well-being seriously. The organization can provide stress-reduction seminars, exercise and weight-reduction sessions, healthy food in the cafeteria or break room, and a general atmosphere of openness and sharing about personal feelings and physical problems. Accommodations can be as simple as understanding that a group of exercising employees needs an additional 15 minutes at lunch twice a week to complete their regimen or that a smoke-free workplace, including restrooms, will help employees who are trying to kick the habit.

Source: *Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2021). Managing employee burnout. Raleigh, NC: Author.*

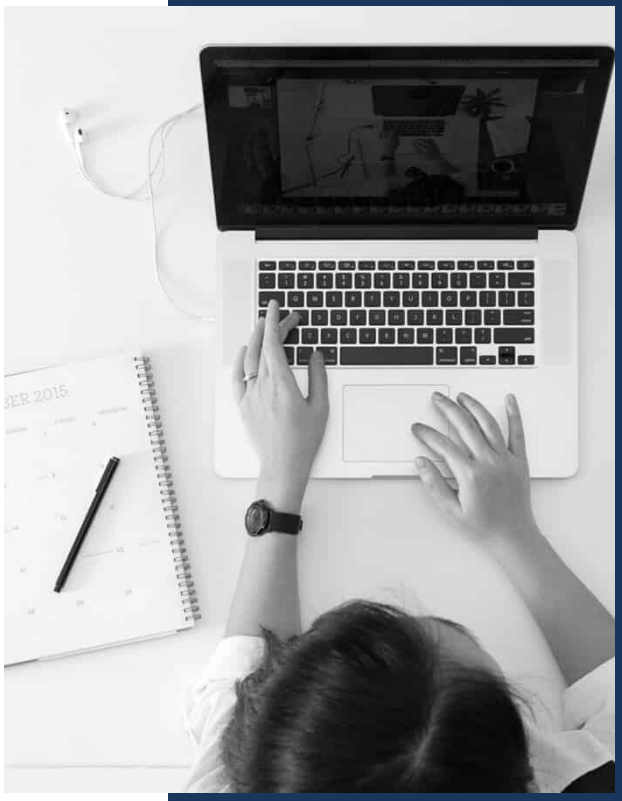
ASK YOUR EAP!

Q. My primary concern as a supervisor is whether the work is getting done, but I am hesitant about pressuring workers – the fear being that pressuring them and interfering with work-life balance will prompt thoughts of quitting. What's the solution?

A. Holding employees accountable is important, but it's equally important to not make them feel overwhelmed or micromanaged. Here are some tips: (1) Communicate about communication: Start by clearly communicating your desire to avoid communicating with them in such a way that routine follow-up is misperceived as undue pressure or dissatisfaction. This will lessen their anxiety when you do inquire about progress or completion. (2) Set clear expectations: Start by communicating clearly about what you expect from your employees but use a participative approach where they can help decide deadlines. Key: Be sure employees have what they need to succeed. This helps them take ownership for completing work on time. Don't follow up only about deadlines and progress. Also have frequent follow-up about resource needs, process questions, and problem-solving. Another key: If you model being on time with your work, and staying on task, you will influence workers to do the same and will ultimately have to follow up less.

Q. I believe I could benefit from understanding more clearly what employees say are their main complaints about supervisors. What does survey research show?

A. An Interact/Harris poll of 1,000 U.S. workers in 2015 showed consistency with virtually all similar research, that communication issues topped the #1 complaint of employees. But this is only half the story. Delving deeper, these communication issues seem to separate themselves into nine major areas in order of how common they appear among supervisors. 1) Not recognizing an employee's achievements; 2) Not giving clear directions; 3) Not having time to meet with employees; 4) Refusing to talk with subordinates; 5) Taking credit for others' ideas; 6) Not offering constructive criticism; 7) Not knowing employees' names; 8) Refusing to talk with people on the phone or in person; and 9) Not asking about employees' lives. Imagine how easy it is to identify or discover whether any of these issues apply to you and how simple it might be to improve on any of them.



Information contained in this newsletter is for general information purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. Some of it might not apply to your particular company policies and available programs. This information is proprietary and intended only for eligible EAP members. For specific guidance on handling individual employee problems, consult with Deer Oaks by calling the Helpline.

Copyright © DFA Publishing, LLC