

A Manager's Guide

to the
Employee
Support Program



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Introduction

You are the person in the middle. Above you are the leaders who decide on your organization's direction, strategies, and priorities. Below you are the people who do the work.

Your role as a manager or supervisor is to lead and motivate your team in work that advances the strategic direction of your organization and meets customer needs. That would be easy if you had a team of perfect employees who always knew exactly what to do, who had no emotions or interpersonal conflicts, and who never had personal problems or distractions from outside of work. But you don't. You manage people. And people have problems, emotions, distractions, conflicts, fears, and bad habits, while also being inspiring, creative, caring, funny, and loyal. They have ups and downs in their lives, and face unexpected disruptions that can throw them off track.

Being an effective manager requires attention to both the tasks of work and the emotions and motivations of people. In order to inspire your team members to do their best work, and to help them keep going when personal and work challenges get in their way, you need a special set of skills, many of which do not come naturally and must be learned. They include knowing how to

- have direct and productive conversations with an employee about performance
- motivate employees and manage team morale
- build team resilience and help team members learn resilience skills
- help employees manage stress and overload
- deal with tensions and conflict on your team
- convey bad news to the team when needed during downsizing
- manage an employee's extended absence from work
- handle cases of employee substance use
- deal with the risks of suicide and workplace violence

You also need to understand where to turn for support as you learn these skills and as you face new challenges in managing your team.

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Introduction

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This guide is an overview of positive management practices and some of the more difficult situations you are likely to face in managing people, with suggestions about where to seek help. These resources include

- Your human resources (HR) department, which can advise on ways to manage declining performance and on potential workplace accommodations (flexible scheduling, remote work options, etc.) to address needs related to health or disability.
- The employee support program, which offers emotional and practical help to your employees and to you on issues like stress management, anxiety, dependent care, and wellness.
- Manager Assist, a part of the employee support program that is specifically for you. A Manager Assist specialist can advise you on the more challenging aspects of managing people, such as dealing with conflict on your team or a problem with substance use, as well as on the positive aspects, like building a high-performing team.

This guide should not be read as a substitute for consultation with your HR department. In fact, you'll find suggestions throughout on when to consult with or involve an HR representative. It is offered as a source of practical information on handling some of the more emotional aspects of people management, the ones that are likely to be highly sensitive or uncomfortable the first time you deal with them.

How the support program can help

Employees face challenges that can affect their work performance. These challenges can include

- feelings of stress and overload at work
- concern about the care of a child or older family member
- interpersonal conflict at work
- problems in personal relationships outside of work
- concerns around safety at work or in the community, or for the safety of loved ones

- feelings of depression or anxiety
- legal or financial worries
- personal and family matters, such as a child's school performance, time needed to plan a vacation, or the need to find a therapist

When is an employee's personal problem a problem for you as a manager? When it affects work performance.

Managers can err in two ways when faced with these situations. If you are wary of dealing with employees' emotions or of getting drawn into personal matters, you may ignore issues that require attention. Or you may find yourself drawn too deeply into a problem-solving role, beyond the scope of your job.

When an employee is feeling overwhelmed by workload, or when interpersonal conflict on your team is affecting work

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How the support program can help

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performance, you do need to be involved in helping to find solutions. But in other cases, it's better to maintain boundaries as a manager—to manage performance with clear expectations, appropriate training, and regular feedback—and to encourage the employee to seek help from the support program to address emotional issues and problems outside of work.

This guide will describe different ways in which the employee support program can help both you and your employees. It will also help you steer an appropriate path when faced with emotional and personal issues that affect your employees' and your team's work performance.

The employee support program can help your team members

- find child care
- locate services and support for a child with special needs
- find community services or housing for a parent or older relative
- learn effective ways to deal with stress and anxiety
- deal with money worries and debt problems
- handle legal issues
- find time-saving services
- navigate a move

- cope with grief and loss
- get help in dealing with alcohol or substance addiction
- find a counselor to help deal with depression

A Manager Assist specialist, as part of the employee support program, can help you come up with practical strategies when you are faced with difficult or sensitive situations, such as how to

- resolve issues between employees
- deliver bad news
- address low productivity
- inform employees of downsizing or redundancy
- provide constructive feedback
- motivate individuals and teams
- manage difficult personalities
- address bullying behavior

Manager Assist can also provide coaching to help you develop management skills, including:

- conflict resolution
- time management
- communication
- developing emotional intelligence
- managing multiple generations
- business etiquette
- managing intercultural teams
- motivating individuals and teams
- working remotely

Assessing your people management skills

How confident are you in your people-management skills? In your ability to motivate the members of your team, to communicate expectations clearly, to give productive feedback in ways that are heard and understood, and to deal with tough emotions in the workplace? This quick self-assessment can give you a sense of your strengths and the areas that may need work.

After each of the following statements, choose the answer that best describes your behavior as a manager.

1. I try to understand what motivates each of the people I manage.
 Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never
2. I explain company goals and directions to the members of my team, frame them in a positive way, and help each member of my team see how their work supports those objectives.
 Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never
3. I set clear expectations for the work of each member of my team, and make sure they have the training and tools to meet those expectations.
 Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never
4. I give frequent, positive feedback to team members when they meet or exceed expectations, and constructive coaching when they fall short.
 Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never
5. I am able to mediate conflict among team members, and between team members and myself, in ways that lead to productive outcomes.
 Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

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Assessing your people management skills

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6. I schedule one-on-one meetings with team members and use the time to build rapport and trust by getting to know them. During this time, I discuss how their work is progressing, what is working, and what is challenging. I use this time to provide feedback and encourage resilience.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

7. I schedule regular team meetings and use them to report on progress towards goals, confirm and re-set priorities, and encourage discussion.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

8. I encourage the people I manage to come up with new ideas and new ways to approach a project or challenge.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

9. I offer every member of my team opportunities to learn and grow at work.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

10. I recognize the signs of stress and overload in myself and in the people I manage, and I engage in discussion that provides strategies to build personal resilience.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

11. I use the resources available to me, including HR, the employee support program, and Manager Assist, to help deal with tough situations at work.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

12. I lead by example, modeling work performance, respect for others, stress management, and a healthy balance of work with personal and family priorities.

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

The previous statements touch on the different topics that will be covered in this guide: managing performance, creating a positive work environment, managing stress and overload, dealing with interpersonal conflict, and seeking help when faced with difficult and sensitive work challenges.

As a manager, you can use this assessment to identify areas you want to pay more attention to. Take a look at your answers. After which statements did you answer “sometimes,” “rarely,” or “never”? These are the areas you may want to focus on as you read through this guide. Use your answers as a tool to gauge your strengths and your opportunities for development and growth. Remember that the most successful managers continue to learn and grow throughout their careers.

Managing performance



Your most important job as a manager or supervisor is to manage the performance of the people who report to you. To do this, you need to

- translate the goals of the organization into priorities and goals for each member of your team
- ensure that your team members understand their individual goals and the performance expected of them
- ensure that your team members have the skills and tools needed to do the work that is expected of them
- monitor your team members' performance by observing the results of their work and their contributions to the work of the team
- give regular feedback on each team member's performance—positive when goals are met, and constructive when performance falls short

When a team member is not meeting expectations, you need to

- explain the gap between the desired result and what the employee has delivered
- identify what needs to change, and the timeline for the employee to make that change
- provide ongoing coaching, and arrange for additional training as needed
- if appropriate, offer information about help available for personal issues through the employee support program

Performance management requires regular, clear communication with your employees, and it sometimes requires that you have direct conversations that can be uncomfortable.

If you find that you are reluctant to face an employee's performance issue and are putting off having the needed conversations, consider tapping into the resources available to bridge this gap. Not being honest and direct is unfair to the employee who needs the feedback, as well as to other team members who rely on their coworker's performance. This may result in a collective decline in job satisfaction. A Manager Assist specialist can help you get past your reluctance and plan for the conversation.

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Managing performance

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When you notice and address performance issues quickly, you give the employee a chance to get back on track before problems become habits. You also help the employee recognize how issues outside of work may be affecting work performance. Employees are often relieved to have an open and honest discussion about work problems, as it gives them a chance to work with you or others to find solutions. When you ignore performance problems or let them continue for too long, they can affect the morale of the entire team. By managing performance well, you show that you care about all of your employees, and that you are committed to helping your team succeed.

When a new employee does not meet expectations, you may need to explain your expectations more clearly or provide more training. When an experienced employee has a lapse in performance, that's a sign that something has changed. Performance lapses can have a wide range of causes, including stress and burnout, personal or family issues, and conflict or tension with colleagues.

Delivering difficult performance feedback

Prepare for the conversation

- Be clear on the end goal for the conversation.
- Document specific, recent examples of the performance problem in neutral, objective terms that you would feel comfortable having the employee or anyone else read.
- Organize the points you plan to cover, focusing on work behavior.
- Find out what support options are available to the employee.
- Consult with your HR representative in planning the conversation.
- Review your plan for the conversation with your Manager Assist specialist.
- Plan to have the conversation in a private, comfortable space.
- Consider how the employee will respond.

In the conversation

- Deliver your feedback messages clearly and directly, citing specific examples, without emotion and without criticizing the employee as a person.
- Offer support options, including referral to the employee support program, if appropriate.
- Make next steps clear, including an action plan, your expectations for improved performance, and scheduled check-in meetings.

Follow up

- Monitor ongoing performance for adherence to the agreed action plan.
- Be consistent in providing ongoing feedback.
- Make yourself available for regularly scheduled check-in meetings.

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Managing performance

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Possible causes of employee performance problems

What you notice as a decline in work performance is often the visible indicator of deeper feelings that are driving an employee's performance down, much the way the visible part of an iceberg is just a small portion of the whole. A deeper and broader obstacle lies below the surface. There can be many causes of performance problems.

In a new employee or when a job changes, performance problems may be due to

- unclear job expectations
- insufficient training
- inefficient or inadequate tools
- inadequate skills, or a mismatch of skills and abilities to the job

In an employee who has previously met expectations, performance issues may be caused by

- health concerns
- transportation problems
- disruption in or unreliable child care arrangements

- responsibility for care of an ill or aging family member
- relationship problems outside of work
- financial issues, such as excess credit card debt
- legal issues, such as divorce or bankruptcy
- conflict with colleagues at work
- stress or burnout from overload at work
- mental health issues, including anxiety or depression
- substance use problems

Signs that work stress or issues outside of work are affecting an employee's performance may include declines in

- accuracy of work
- timeliness of work output
- ability to focus on work
- attitude toward work or colleagues
- contribution to team work
- physical stamina
- problem-solving skills
- attendance

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Managing performance

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Note that work performance includes the effect an employee has on the work and morale of colleagues and the performance of the team. An employee who is delivering satisfactory work results may still be causing performance problems if emotional outbursts, negative comments, or an unwillingness to cooperate with others are affecting the performance of the team.

Your job as a manager is to see that performance expectations are met and work results are achieved. It isn't to solve your employee's personal problems. But when personal issues are affecting work performance, you do have a role to play. You need to let the employee know that you have observed a lapse in work performance and that you want to help them get back on track. One way to help may be to suggest that the employee seek help from the employee support program, and to provide information on how to access the program.

Monitoring your energy to manage

As a manager, the demands on your time and energy can be taxing. You need to deal with work pressure, face change with an open mind, and model a positive approach to work for your team, even in the face of adversity. You can only do all of that if you attend to your own physical and emotional needs.

The following page presents some suggestions for monitoring your energy so that you have the stamina to lead and take care of your team.

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Monitoring your energy to manage

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- Attend to your health. Exercise regularly. Eat a healthy diet. Get the sleep you need.
- Pay attention to your emotions. Recognize the physical signs of stress before they reveal themselves in unhelpful behavior. Know the triggers that provoke you to anger or withdrawal.
- Take breaks to recharge. Take short breaks during the work day to pause and relax, and breaks before or after work to calm yourself. Listen to soothing music. Meditate or use breathing techniques. Take a walk or go to the gym to release energy and regain focus.
- Use your vacation time to get away from work and recharge.
- Make time for the people and activities you care about outside of work. Carve out both “me” and “we” time—time by yourself to recharge, and time with friends and family to connect and share.
- Reach out for support after a difficult decision, conversation, or situation. Talk with a trusted colleague or friend, your manager, an HR representative, or a Manager Assist specialist.
- Be a role model for your employees in showing how to manage stress and how important it is to attend to personal health and relationships, especially when work pressure is intense.
- Practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is a powerful tool to help restore energy and manage stress. Check with your employee support program to get more information about mindfulness.

Creating a positive work environment

In your leadership role, you play an important part in creating a positive work environment, one that inspires and motivates employees to contribute with energy and creativity. Research tells us that employees work best when they are supported and feel trusted to do their best work, that they are most engaged when they believe that their work is important and that their contributions are recognized.

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Creating a positive work environment

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Suggestions for cultivating employee engagement

Lead by example. Don't just describe the performance and behavior you expect from your team, demonstrate it. Make work fun by using humor and having fun yourself. Make courageous, principled decisions. Be a model for healthy work-life balance. Show the importance of meeting customer needs, what it means to produce high-quality work, and how a resilient person deals with obstacles and setbacks.

Find out what motivates the people who report to you. Ask what is important to them at work and in their personal lives. Learn what's hard about their jobs and what gives them the most satisfaction.

Show that you care about your employees. Get to know them. Listen to and act on their ideas and suggestions. Be present when you meet with them, and give them your full attention.

Recognize your team members' priorities outside of work. Make them aware of the many ways in which the employee support program can be helpful.

Get people working on what's important. Set employees' goals to align with your organization's priorities, and take the time to explain how each person's work contributes to the larger mission. Step back with your team, periodically, to look for any low-value work they may be doing out of habit, and either eliminate it or find a more efficient way to get it done. As work is completed, remind people of its value to the organization.

Be generous with praise and recognition. Notice good work with praise and recognition, from a simple "thank you" to more tangible rewards. Shine a light on progress and accomplishments at team meetings. Mark milestones, even minor ones, with small celebrations. Be generous in giving credit to others. Encourage upper management to recognize the accomplishments of people on your team.

Treat employees with respect. Make it clear that you listen to all ideas, and that you support the airing of different opinions. Create an environment where employees value different viewpoints, where it is safe to try new approaches and learn from mistakes. When something goes wrong, focus on solutions, not on

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Creating a positive work environment

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blame. Be fair, honest, and open with people, and expect the people on your team to be the same with each other and with you.

Practice open and responsive communication.

Give timely updates about work progress and organizational changes. Respond to questions and requests from your employees promptly. Be honest in your communication. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, and make an effort to find out. Give regular feedback to your employees and ask for feedback from them.

Encourage problem-solving and innovation.

Resist the temptation to solve all of the team's problems. Empower team members to look for new opportunities and suggest new ideas. Encourage team members to identify inefficient work practices that are causing frustration and to think of different ways that work might get done. Have them step back periodically and think about what your customers value, and how you might address their needs with new solutions. Experiment with new ways of working together to encourage greater flexibility and creativity.

Foster a sense of ownership and control. Encourage your employees to focus on what they can control, and get them to “own” those things.

Be an accessible and supportive coach. Make time to share your skills and experience with your employees. Help them learn new skills and new ways of dealing with challenges in their work. Share your knowledge of the organization's operations and direction so team members have a better sense of how their work fits in.

Help employees learn from each other. Encourage coaching and mentoring among team members. Pair experienced and less-experienced team members on projects as a way to promote learning. Make it clear that you expect employees to help each other and work together to tackle new problems.

Make the most of meetings. Meetings can be a great way to share information and tackle problems as a group. They can also be a huge waste of time. When planning a meeting, be clear about its purpose and who needs to attend. (If it is just to share information and no discussion is needed, would an email summary work as well?) Prepare an agenda and send it out well ahead of time. Manage the meeting to the allotted time, keeping discussion on track, and soliciting the thoughts of all attendees. Designate a note-taker so all points are captured. At the end of the meeting summarize decisions, next steps, and any follow-up actions.

Helping employees deal with stress and overload

Stress, whether from work or from worries and pressures outside of work, erodes morale and productivity. We've listed some of the ways in which stress can affect work performance, including increased tardiness or absenteeism, mistakes, lack of energy and focus, irritability, and withdrawal from teammates.



When you notice signs of stress in one of your team members, let them know that you've observed the change in work performance and ask, without prying, if there is anything the employee wants to share or anything you can do to help.

If an employee's stress is from issues outside of work

Remind them of the help available to them through the employee support program. Describe the ways the program can help, and its confidentiality. Explain that the employee does not need to tell you what is causing their problem, and that the information they share with the program specialist will not get back to you or to anyone at the company. (The only exception to this confidentiality is when an employee is at risk of harming themselves or others, in which case information may be shared with your manager and your HR department for safety reasons.)

Encourage them to use their personal time off. Train others on the team so that employees can back each other up. No employee should worry that customers will be let down or work will stop if they use allotted time off. Encourage employees to disconnect from work when they take time off, to use the break to rest and recharge. Be a role model by taking your allotted vacation time and by disconnecting from work when you are away.

Understand your organization's flexible work policies. Know when you can suggest these options to help employees meet personal and family needs while continuing to contribute at work. Be open-minded in considering ways your team can do its work with employees on

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Helping employees deal with stress and overload

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different schedules or in different locations, such as working from home. To the extent possible, offer the same kinds of flexibility to all of your employees.

Understand your organization's time-off policies.

Understand when time off for family or medical reasons may be the best option, and when it may be protected by law. (See the next section, *Managing employee leaves and absences*.)

If an employee's stress is from issues at work, such as work overload, job insecurity, unclear priorities, or interpersonal conflict

Make sure that people have the training, resources, and support needed to do their work. Encourage team members to share what they have learned about the best ways to handle tough tasks and situations. If certain tasks are a challenge for everyone, take the time to find out why. They may not have the tools needed to do the work efficiently, or the cooperation needed from other groups.

Make roles and expectations clear. Uncertainty about who is expected to do what, or about goals and deadlines, can be sources of stress and conflict.

Help team members prioritize their work. Review work assignments regularly in one-on-one meetings with each of your reports. When there is too much to do, help them identify lower-priority work that can wait or that might be eliminated.



Review deadlines to decide which are critical and which might be extended. Encourage employees to come to you whenever they have questions about priorities and deadlines.

Consider simple adjustments to rebalance workload. If a task is easy for one team member but difficult for another, consider shifting assignments for greater efficiency. If some employees are working longer hours than others, explore ways to reassign tasks for greater fairness.

Find out if interruptions are hurting productivity, and what options are available to minimize them. Employees may simply need your permission to focus on tasks without interruption for certain hours every day. Or they may need access to a quiet work space.

Address problems of interpersonal conflict. Conflict on your team that is causing stress is likely affecting work output and is a performance issue you need to manage. See the section in this guide on *Managing conflict, harassment, and bullying*.

Encourage employees to take short breaks during the work day. It's healthy for people who sit for work to take a five-minute break every hour to stand or walk around. A ten-minute break

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Helping employees deal with stress and overload

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to walk outside or to practice deep breathing or relaxation techniques helps clear the mind and recharge energy. Make lunch a break from work, and eat it away from the work space with a rule not to discuss work.

Let your team members know that it's OK to ask for help, especially during a work crunch or when faced with a challenging assignment. Model that behavior by asking for help when you need it, too.

If you believe that stress issues are widespread in your workplace, beyond your team, discuss your observations with your HR representative. Suggest that HR consider training sessions on stress management, such as mindfulness training, to help employees learn coping skills. HR might consider an employee survey to get a clearer picture of stress in the organization and its causes in order to develop an effective response.

Managing employee absences and leaves

As a manager, you not only need to manage your employees' work, you will sometimes be responsible for managing their absence.

This can happen when an employee is sick or unable to come to work for health reasons for an extended period, or when an employee needs to take time off from work for family reasons.

If an employee requests a leave or has an unplanned absence of more than three consecutive days, you should check with your HR representative right away to understand what steps are required of you and the employee. The actions required in your organization may depend on the reason for and anticipated length of the leave.

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Managing employee absences and leaves

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Your HR representative can explain to you who has the authority to approve or deny the request for leave. It might be you, your manager, or the HR department. Factors may include the amount of notice the employee has given for an anticipated leave and the length of their employment with the organization.

Be aware that rules around absences and leaves include requests for intermittent leave, such as when an employee needs to take a few hours off every week for medical treatments.

Work with the employee to understand their schedule needs, then with your HR representative to understand company policies and the different types of paid and unpaid leave options that may be available. You do not need to explain all of the options to the employee; you can refer them to HR for that. But it will help the employee if you have enough knowledge to answer basic questions.

Track incidences of employee absence on your team, and pay attention to any patterns you may notice. The reason given by the employee for the leave request should agree with the pattern of absences. Make sure you are dealing with a genuine need for time off and not an indication of a performance problem.



Your biggest responsibility is to work with the employee before a planned leave begins, or with others on the team if the leave begins unexpectedly, to consider how the work will get done in the employee's absence. When a leave is planned—as for the expected birth of a child, for example, or for scheduled medical treatment—it is reasonable to expect the employee to help you with transition planning. You'll probably need to detail all of the work the employee does and consider ways others on the team might handle it, whether some of the work can be put off until the employee's return, or whether you will need help from beyond your team.

You should also manage communication of the absence with other members on the team. Remember that the reasons for a leave might be sensitive, and the employee may not want you to share details. Other team members need only be alerted to the timing of the absence, and the plans for covering the absent employee's work.

While the employee is away from work, occasional communication from you can help maintain a personal connection. Ask your HR representative for guidance on contacting the employee during the absence. Occasional

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Managing employee absences and leaves

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messages to let the employee know that they are missed and that the team is looking forward to their return may be appreciated, for example. But you must be very careful about asking questions related to work in your communications, and you should never ask the employee to perform work tasks while on leave.

As the end of the leave approaches, contact the employee to confirm when they will return to work, whether they will be returning immediately to their former work schedule, and whether any special preparations will need to be made for their return. If the employee requests special scheduling or other accommodations, work with your HR representative to understand what you can (and may be required to) provide.

Prepare the team, too, for the employee's return. With the readjustment of work responsibilities, some team members will be relieved to have the absent colleague back, while others may resent giving up new tasks they had enjoyed. Do what you can to make the returning employee feel welcomed by everyone on the team.

Recognizing and dealing with a substance use problem



Familiarize yourself with your organization's policies around alcohol and substance use, and make sure that these are clearly communicated to employees.

Some organizations, and some jobs, have extremely strict standards when it comes to alcohol or substance use among employees, often for safety reasons. These standards and rules may be balanced with programs to help employees recover from a substance use problem and return to productive work. Note that substance use includes the misuse of prescription pain medications, some of which contain opioids and are addictive.

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Recognizing and dealing with a substance use problem

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As a manager, you are in a unique position to notice an alcohol or substance use problem and to take action to refer an employee to help. As you monitor employee performance, be alert to changes such as

- attendance problems
- errors and inconsistent work quality
- reduced ability to focus on work
- mood swings
- withdrawal from colleagues
- sleepiness or fatigue
- less care of personal appearance

These are signs of a personal problem, not necessarily of substance use, but they should prompt you to have a conversation with the employee about work performance after documenting specific examples of work lapses. It's appropriate to ask about any challenges or changes outside of work that may be causing the performance problems (recognizing that the employee does not need to share that information). If the issue is with substance use, be prepared to meet with defensive responses rather than an open admission of a problem.

As with performance problems caused by any personal issue, your role is to remind the employee of your expectations for the job, to clearly describe the gap between those expectations and the observed performance, and to suggest that the employee seek help from the employee support program. A Manager Assist specialist can help you plan for this performance conversation and how to word your suggestion that the employee seek help.

If your organization or work unit is required to follow drug testing protocols, a substance use problem may be detected as part of routine testing. When that happens, a qualified substance use professional (SAP) may need to do an assessment of the employee, and the employee may be barred from working until the SAP confirms that the problem is resolved. If you have any questions about these requirements or your role in the process, contact your HR representative.

Whether the employee seeks help voluntarily for an alcohol or substance use problem or is required to get help by your organization's rules, you should continue to be supportive, and encourage the employee to resolve the problem so that they can resume productive work. A Manager Assist specialist can offer guidance on appropriate ways to express that support.

When an employee has dealt with an alcohol or substance use problem and returned to productive work, you should be aware that the recovery process can be gradual and may involve relapses. You should continue to monitor and provide feedback on performance, as you would with any employee, and be prepared to repeat the process of referral for alcohol or substance use counseling.

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Recognizing and dealing with a substance use problem

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Responding to a workplace crisis involving alcohol or substance use

Alcohol and substance use can lead an employee to behave irrationally. When that happens at work, you may be called on to respond to the situation.

- Do a quick assessment to figure out if there is any physical danger in either taking action or not taking action, and decide whether you need to call security, law enforcement, or 911.
- Contact your HR department for guidance and, if appropriate, ask an HR representative to help you deal with the situation.
- Ask the employee to come with you and another supervisor, an HR representative, or security to a private area.
- Express your concern, and ask about the behavior in a non-judgmental tone. Listen to what the employee tells you, repeating back what you hear to make sure you have understood.
- If there is reason to believe that a violation of workplace policy has occurred, document your observations and notify HR or a labor relations representative. Follow the guidelines of your organization's drug-free workplace policy.

Managing conflict on your team

Conflict is a natural part of work, as it is in all human relations. Handled well, it can be an opportunity to hear new ideas and opinions, and to build a stronger team through deeper understanding of each other. But too often it is allowed to fester into division and animosity—mostly because managers ignore it out of fear of getting tangled up in the emotions of the situation.

Managing conflict is a critical part of your job as a manager, a skill you need to learn and a responsibility you need to face.

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Managing conflict on your team

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When you encounter conflict on your team

- Don't ignore it and hope it will go away. Address it quickly to prevent escalation and head off its productivity- and morale-damaging effects on your team.
- Remain neutral. Don't take sides. You need to earn the confidence of all parties in the conflict in order to help find a resolution.
- Ask questions to understand what the conflict is about. Don't jump to conclusions based on the first answers you hear. The conflict on the surface may be masking a deeper or longer-standing problem.
- Encourage employees to work it out themselves. An effective team is able to work out conflicts on its own, without a manager's intervention at every obstacle. Offer coaching on how to talk and listen to each other in positive ways, and when to step back if emotions get heated. You might offer to facilitate a discussion if that would be helpful.

If the conflicting parties are unable to find a solution on their own

- Get a sense of the emotional level of the conflict. In a "cold" conflict, people snub each other and don't talk. Your role will be to get them to open up and talk to each other. In a "hot" conflict, people express too much emotion. Your role will be to cool them down in order to have a productive conversation.

- Set clear expectations as to acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Remind employees that that you will not tolerate behaviors such as yelling, rudeness, or shunning, and that you expect people to treat each other with respect. Disrespectful behavior is a performance problem you need to manage.
- Listen to both sides. Let people tell their stories and express their emotions. If the conflict is highly emotional, you might choose to hear out each side separately before bringing them together.
- Work to get at the root of the conflict. Have the people involved define the problem for you. Ask questions to get at the real source of the conflict, the underlying need of each side. Work to understand how personalities and communication styles might be contributing to the difference.
- Encourage both sides to practice active listening. It's not enough for them to sit silently and wait their turn to talk. In active listening one person really listens to the other person, empathizing and paraphrasing what they have said to confirm that it has been heard and understood.
- Ask each side to suggest ideas for moving toward a resolution.
- Keep notes on all relevant information, including employees' behavior and steps taken by all parties to resolve the conflict. These notes may be important later if conflicts recur or you observe a pattern of problem behavior.
- Seek help from your HR representative, either for guidance on how to mediate the conflict or to ask for someone else to step in as a mediator. You should always alert HR and invite their involvement when you observe unacceptable behavior such as physical or verbal abuse or inappropriate language, or when a conflict persists and your attempts to resolve it have failed.
- Talk with a Manager Assist specialist. An experienced management expert can serve as a sounding board and help you plan discussions with employees. Note that the Manager Assist specialist will not act as mediator between employees. If employees in conflict are referred to the employee support program, they will talk separately with different specialists.

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Managing conflict on your team

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As you work to understand the conflict, make sure you're not dealing with an issue of harassment or bullying, which may be governed by law and will be covered by your organization's policies and guidelines.

- Harassment is deliberate and repeated behavior that annoys, disturbs, frightens, or irritates another person. Remember that harassment is not determined by the intent of the behavior but by how the behavior is perceived.
- Bullying is behavior that involves verbal abuse, including insults, malicious gossip, and personal attacks and criticism.

Both harassment and bullying hurt productivity, can cause division in a work group, and can lower team morale. Both can also lead an employee to leave an organization or to file a lawsuit.

Always seek help from your manager, HR, or the employee support program if you have concerns about harassment, bullying, or an angry employee, or if you are dealing with a chronic behavior problem that may require disciplinary measures.

Preventing workplace violence

Workplace violence is any act in which a person is abused, threatened, intimidated, or assaulted at work or while working. It includes threatening behavior, verbal or written threats, harassment, verbal abuse, and physical attacks.

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Preventing workplace violence

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Maintaining a safe workplace depends on recognizing early warning signs of violence and acting quickly to prevent escalation. Managers and employees can play a role in noticing these warning signs and taking appropriate action. Check to see if your organization has a workplace violence prevention plan and how you and your team can be trained on how to follow it.

Warning signs of violence

It can be very difficult to know when a person is going to be violent. The following behaviors are signs of personal stress and may be indications of risk for violent behavior:

- minor incidents involving negative remarks or inappropriate behavior that become more extreme over time
- crying, sulking, or temper tantrums
- increasing absenteeism or tardiness
- disregard for the health and safety of others
- disrespect for authority
- refusal to acknowledge job performance problems
- hostile or inappropriate reactions to criticism
- inability to focus
- complaints of unfair personal treatment
- social isolation or withdrawal from colleagues
- neglect of personal hygiene

More immediate warning signs include

- physical indications of anger or anxiety, such as a flushed or pale face, pacing, sweating, trembling, clenched jaw or fists, scowling, sneering, or exaggerated or violent gestures
- an extreme interest in weapons
- fascination with incidents of workplace violence
- past evidence of violent behavior
- statement of intention to hurt someone (spoken or written)

Domestic violence, or intimate partner violence, can also be a threat at work. When an employee experiences abuse at the hands of a partner, that partner may present a risk of violence in the workplace. Be aware of the signs of domestic or intimate partner violence among your employees, and talk to your HR representative about any concerns. The employee support program or a Manager Assist specialist can also help you recognize the signs of domestic violence in an employee and help you take appropriate steps to offer support and make your employees and your workplace more secure.

What to do if you are concerned about a risk of violence

Take action. Report your concerns to your manager or to the HR department. You can also get advice from the employee support program or a Manager Assist specialist. If you have a violence prevention plan in your workplace, refer to its guidelines and follow recommended steps. Refresh your knowledge of how to respond in a potentially violent situation by de-escalating and, if possible, safely disengaging.

Suicide awareness

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death, a tragedy with painful ripple effects on survivors: family, friends, and coworkers. It is also a frightening issue to think or talk about, one that many people would prefer to avoid. As a manager, you may be faced with an employee who is at risk of suicide. How will you recognize the risk, and what should you do?



Warning signs of suicidal risk

Many of the warning signs of suicidal risk are similar to those for stress and anxiety, though sometimes they are more extreme. People considering suicide often have been worn down by stress or by setbacks in their lives. Loss or anticipated loss—from a loved one’s death, a separation or divorce, declining health, or deteriorating finances—can lead a person to suicidal thoughts. The suicidal person is often lonely, without a strong social support network. Depression can make life seem hopeless.

Signs of suicidal risk may include changes in behavior, such as

- deteriorating job performance
- dramatic mood changes
- lack of attention to personal appearance
- withdrawal from colleagues
- giving away prized possessions
- interest in end-of-life matters, such as wills, insurance beneficiaries, or funeral plans

The employee might also express suicidal thoughts by

- talking about not being present in the future
- making statements that indicate hopelessness (“Life is meaningless.” “I’m trapped.” “You would be better off without me.” “No one would miss me if . . .”)
- posting messages on social media about death or hopelessness

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Suicide awareness

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If you hear this kind of talk, whether expressed directly to you or through another employee, question it, kindly but firmly. You won't make the situation worse by clarifying it, and an open conversation with you may be the person's first step toward getting well.

It's important that you get past your own fear of talking about suicide in order to have a helpful conversation. Manager Assist provides valuable consultation to help managers prepare for difficult and sensitive conversations such as this.

If an employee admits to thinking about suicide

You'll want to get your employee to professional help, and the way you do this is very important. Demonstrating respect and concern for the employee can make them more willing to seek help and can contribute to the healing process.

- Let the employee know that you care about them as a person.
- Listen to the employee's concerns, and try to understand the depth of their feelings. Give them your undivided attention. Remember that listening also includes body language, such as eye contact. When responding, reflect back what you are hearing to help them understand that you are taking their concerns seriously. Don't be afraid to ask direct questions like, "Are you thinking about taking your own life?" Let them talk openly. Show compassion, and speak in a non-judgmental tone.
- Don't leave the person alone, whether on the phone or in person.
- Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether the person's feelings are right or wrong. Don't minimize their problems or give advice. They need to hear that what they are experiencing is not their fault and that you are there to help.
- If any of the employee's problems are related to work, offer to address those problems, then follow through on your promises.

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Suicide awareness

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- Do not pry into the employee's personal problems, but listen in a caring way if the employee chooses to share them.
- Don't try to solve the employee's problems. Your role is to listen and show that you understand that those problems are real and painful, and to help guide the employee to someone who can provide meaningful help.
- Protect the employee's privacy within the workplace, while seeking professional help. Your HR department needs to know about the problem and can help both the employee and you. But think carefully about what other employees or higher management need to know.

Mobilize a response

Seek help from your HR department, and contact the employee support program to speak with a Manager Assist specialist. Alert your manager. With the employee's consent, call the employee support program on their behalf, or your community's crisis intervention or suicide prevention helpline. In an urgent situation, call 911.

Follow up

Once your employee has connected with a support program or has started to receive professional help, continue to show that you care.

- Find out if the employee needs to adjust work hours to participate in therapy.
- If the therapist is willing to offer you guidance directly—at the employee's request and with their consent—find out whether you should continue to challenge the employee as you normally do or temporarily reassign them to less challenging duties.

Check in with your support system

Working with a suicidal person can be very stressful. Don't underestimate its emotional toll on you. It is common for supporters in a situation of suicide risk to

- have feelings of guilt (“Did I do enough?”)
- become emotionally numb
- be angry or irritable
- sleep too much or not at all
- be emotional
- use alcohol or drugs to dull uncomfortable feelings

Pay attention to these reactions, and don't hesitate to get support for yourself, whether from the employee support program, your manager, or your own social support network. It is a totally natural reaction, and support can help you process your feelings in a way that helps you heal.

Managing after a disruptive event



Disruptive events are sudden traumatic occurrences that affect workers in emotionally charged ways. These events include natural disasters, robberies, workplace accidents, acts of violence, and employee deaths.

When a disruptive event occurs, employees are distracted from their work and emotionally shaken. They look to you, their manager, for leadership in regaining a sense of normalcy.

When a disruptive event occurs, how should you respond?

After alerting your manager, the HR department, and security, reach out to the employee support program. You will work with an incident manager (IM) to organize a response that is appropriate for the event. The IM will assess your situation and help you develop an intervention plan that includes communication to your employees, a visit by a trained trauma counselor for individual or group conversations, and specialized one-to-one help for affected employees. The IM can also provide you with helpful educational materials to distribute to employees or can deliver those as part of the visit.

Immediately after the event

Do your best to present a calm and controlled attitude. Pay attention to your own emotions, which may be disturbed by the event, and take steps to keep them in check. Take a few deep breaths when you feel your tension rising. Excuse yourself for a few minutes if you sense you are losing control.

Be a source of clear, reliable information about what has happened and what steps should be taken. Consult with your manager, your HR department, and the IM to make sure you

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Managing after a disruptive event

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and your team are following your organization's emergency response plan. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." Don't pass on information without confirming the source. Share helpful information with employees as it comes to you.

Interact with your team members in a compassionate and understanding way. Presenting a calm demeanor does not mean you have to hide your shock or pain. Sharing your own reactions can help employees see that their feelings are normal and can help reduce their stress.

Dealing with emotional reactions

It's normal for people to react to trauma with what might seem like abnormal behaviors and emotions.

- Physical reactions to trauma may include dizziness, shaking, increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure, rapid breathing, chills, or sweating.
- Emotional reactions to trauma may include anxiety, crying, anger, conflict with colleagues, or feelings of depression, hopelessness, or helplessness.

- Employees may react with withdrawal, prolonged silences, crying spells, or changes in appetite.
- Work output may suffer as employees experience distraction, confused thinking, loss of problem solving skills, or difficulty making decisions.

Part of your job as a manager is to accept these reactions as a temporary "new normal" for your team—and for yourself. Help your team members understand that they have absorbed an emotional blow and may not be able to continue with business as usual right away. Recognize, too, that engagement with the normal flow of work can be therapeutic for some employees. Allow for different responses, and do your best to help employees heal. Work with your manager and your HR department to figure out how to grant any needed time off from work while meeting the most critical needs of customers.

Let team members know about support available to them through the employee support program. Encourage them to take care of themselves and to talk with supportive people in their lives. Take care of yourself, too. Eat healthy food, exercise, and get the sleep you need. Talk with someone you trust, either a good friend, your manager, or a Manager Assist specialist, to work through your emotional reactions to the event.

Remind yourself, and reassure your employees, that this experience will end, the workplace will stabilize and return to normal, and you will be able to move forward.



How to refer an employee to the employee support program

When you notice a performance issue and either find out or suspect that a personal issue may be the cause (such as anxiety, dependent care, family conflict, or worry about financial or legal matters), you can help the employee by suggesting they contact the employee support program. This is called an “informal referral.” You are placing no obligation on the employee to follow up on your suggestion, though you should be clear about expectations for work performance.

If the employee chooses to call and work with an expert at the employee support program, that contact will be completely confidential, and you do not need to know anything about what is discussed. (The exception to this confidentiality rule is when the employee support program determines that an employee is at risk of harming themselves or others, in which case that risk must be reported so that steps can be taken to intervene.)

Keep information about the employee support program on hand, including the toll-free number, so that you can give it to employees when the need arises. Your HR department can supply you with printed overviews of the program or a link to an online program description.

When you find out about a personal issue affecting performance at work that must be addressed to comply with your organization’s rules and ensure safety in the workplace, or in order to meet performance expectations, you can go a step further and require the employee to contact and work with the employee support program. This is called a “formal referral.” Your HR department can help you understand the kinds of issues that warrant a formal referral to the employee support program, and can explain the steps you must follow. In most

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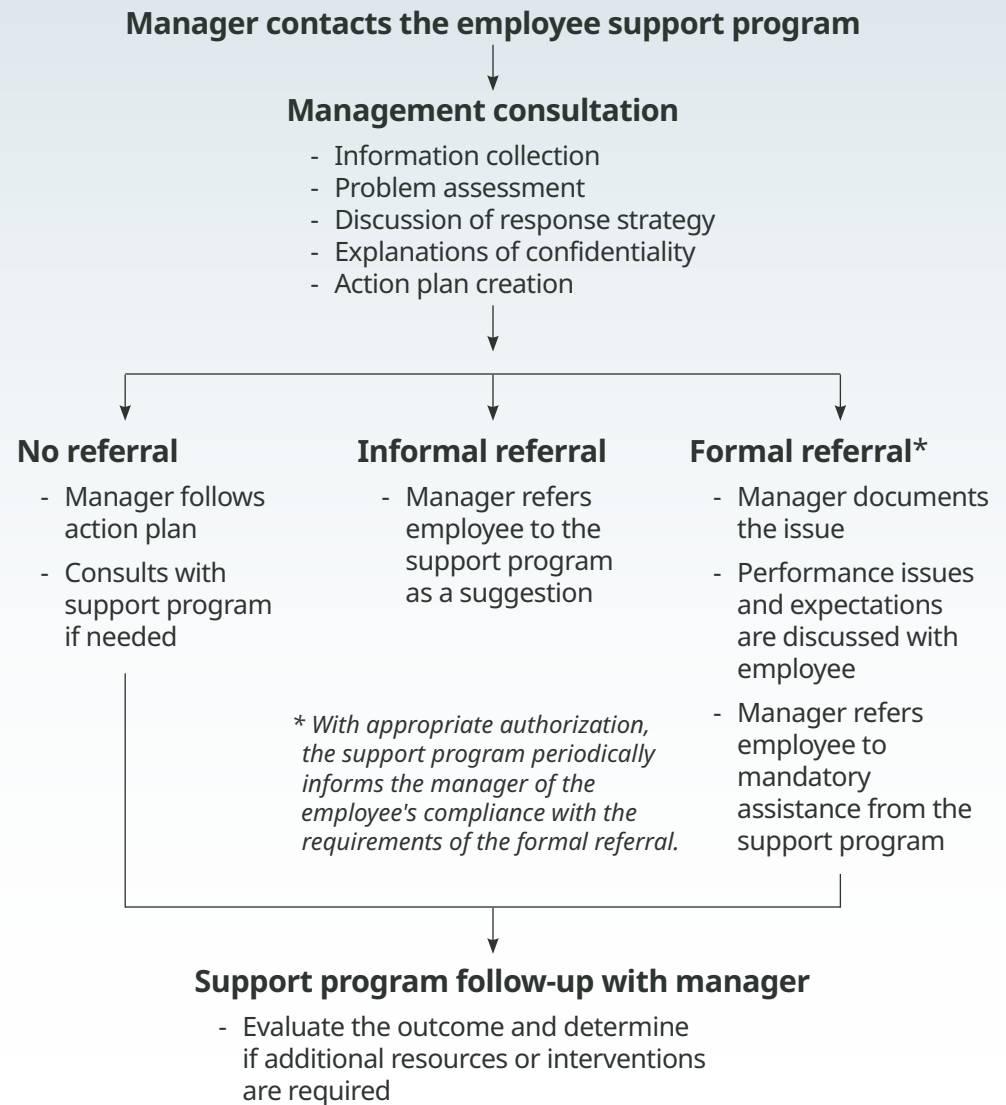
How to refer an employee to the employee support program

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organizations, these steps align with the performance management process, including requirements that you document the issue and review it with the employee, making your expectations clear as to work performance and adherence to the rules of your organization. As an additional step, you will contact the employee support program about the issue, typically by submitting a release of information form with the employee's name and the expectations for resolving the problem (an action plan).

In a formal referral, the employee is required to contact the employee support program. Assuming the employee consents, the program reports back to the manager periodically to confirm that the employee is complying with the action plan. The substance of the employee's consultations with the employee support program are otherwise confidential.

Process for manager consultation and informal and formal referrals



Examples of how the program helps managers



Situation:

Performance issues related to an employee's health problem

A manager called Manager Assist with concerns about a senior employee. The employee had been diagnosed with diabetes and was showing uncharacteristic behavior at work, including agitation, withdrawal, frequent absences, and clashes with colleagues. The employee complained of dizziness and difficulty concentrating, and expressed concern that he was being watched and his personal belongings were being touched by colleagues. The employee disclosed that he had suffered from depression before and had recovered with treatment.

Program response:

The Manager Assist specialist helped the manager understand that the behaviors and disclosures described might be related to a recurrence of depression. From the description, there did not appear to be an imminent risk of self-harm or harm to others.

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Examples of how the program helps managers

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The specialist suggested that the manager

- talk with the employee and recommend a doctor visit
- continue to observe the employee's behavior, including his interactions with others
- show patience when the employee is not able to perform to his previous level
- provide information about the employee support program as a source of help with stress management

The specialist suggested that an HR representative connect with the employee's family members, if possible and with the employee's permission, to encourage a supportive and caring recovery.

Situation:

Concern about managing the performance of a pregnant team member

A manager called Manager Assist to discuss concern about an upcoming performance review with an employee who was pregnant. The employee had joined the company a year earlier, on the recommendation of a senior executive, and her performance had not met expectations. The manager described her as "aggressive,

undisciplined, and resistant to following instructions." But because of the employee's recommendation from the senior executive, the manager had not discussed the performance problems with the employee. The manager realized that government labor law protects pregnant employees and worried about how to conduct an effective review meeting with the employee.

Program response:

The Manager Assist specialist helped the manager explain his concerns. The specialist suggested that the manager prepare for the upcoming performance conversations by taking several steps:

- Document the performance issues in a list of specific, observed examples, without opinion or commentary.
- Talk with an HR representative about the feedback he would be giving the employee in order to avoid any bias in his perception of the behaviors and to understand how labor laws might govern his actions.
- Rehearse the performance conversation. The specialist invited the manager to rehearse the conversation on another call if that would be helpful.

Situation:

A team member with suicidal thoughts

A manager called Manager Assist after an employee came to her with concern for a colleague who had expressed suicidal thoughts. The colleague had stated, "I have no reason to live

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Examples of how the program helps managers

(Continued)

anymore.” The manager explained that this employee had been having difficulty at work and had decreased his interactions with others in the office. The manager wanted to know if she should approach the employee since the information had come to her indirectly.

Program response:

The Manager Assist specialist talked through the situation with the manager to understand the nature of the risk. The specialist

- encouraged the manager to thank the employee for bringing the matter to her attention, and discussed ways to start a helpful conversation with the at-risk colleague
- suggested that the manager discuss the employee support program with the at-risk employee and offer to make a call to the program on his behalf so that he could have a conversation with a clinician before leaving work that day
- encouraged the manager to provide confidential space for the employee when making the call
- reviewed a safety plan in the event that the employee was at high risk and was not willing to speak with the employee support program

Situation:

Performance issues related to an employee’s divorce

A manager had observed that one of his employees had been angry and irritable, snapping at coworkers, raising his voice, and storming out of meetings. The manager had received complaints from other coworkers about this employee’s behavior. In a call to Manager Assist, the manager explained that when he discussed the issue with the employee, the employee disclosed that he is going through a divorce and a difficult custody battle. After two discussions with the employee, the behavior continued. The manager was looking for guidance on how to help the employee and get his performance at work back on track.

Program response:

The Manager Assist specialist reviewed the history of the situation with the manager to understand the patterns of the employee’s behavior and what had been discussed in terms of performance expectations. The specialist discussed the option of a formal referral to the employee support program, in which contact with the program and compliance with an action plan would be required as part of the employee’s performance expectations. The action plan would include the employee’s work with a program specialist to find ways to cope with his situation and learn to control his anger and restore good working relationships with work colleagues.

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Examples of how the program helps managers

(Continued)

Situation:

Conflict between two team members

A manager contacted Manager Assist because the situation between two team members was becoming a major distraction, upsetting the whole team and causing production to slip below targets. The conflict had been going on for a while. Even though the two parties had previously worked together without conflict for two years, there was not a clear explanation about what changed to cause the conflict.

Several members of the team indicated that they were being drawn into the conflict by pressure to take sides. Any of the manager's attempts to speak with either party regarding the conflict ended in complete frustration. The manager's intentions were to bring both parties together, however, she disclosed that she is not sure how to negotiate with the feuding team members when there is so much anger between them. She knew that the situation was no longer tolerable for the whole team, and needed guidance on what to do.

Program response:

The Manager Assist Specialist listened as the manager described the individuals, their roles, and the work they perform within the structure of the team. Together, they reviewed how the situation had escalated and the impact that it was having on other team members.

The specialist helped the manager put together a plan to address the conflict. The first step in the plan was to help the manager address her feelings about conflict. Next, they discussed effective techniques to confront the two parties and structure a meeting to diminish the conflict, opening lines for communication. They also discussed making a formal referral to the employee support program for each employee to address the performance issues that are raised by the ongoing conflict.

The manager was relieved to learn that she did not have to resolve the conflict; rather, by pointing out how their behavior is a performance issue, it is the responsibility of both parties to work with the employee support program individually to understand the source of their conflict and how to recover and move forward.

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Examples of how the program helps managers

(Continued)



Situation:

Helping a manager take appropriate action to protect the team in the face of potential intimate partner violence

Two associates came to the manager to share their concern about an employee who revealed that she is in a relationship with a partner who is volatile. She is fearing for her safety. The associates wanted to help, yet were sensitive to the confidential nature of the situation. The manager contacted Manager Assist to discuss the situation and get help to craft an action plan.

Program response:

The Manager Assist specialist helped the manager assess the risk to the employee and the team. They discussed how she might have a conversation with the employee about using the employee support program for herself and family.

Next, the specialist focused on ensuring the safety of the team. The specialist helped the manager identify key resources such as HR and Security that can be confidentially alerted in the event of a situation threatening the safety of anyone at work. The specialist further prepared the manager to have conversations with team members about understanding the warning signs of an escalating situation, and emphasized using the employee support program to help team members cope with any anxiety or stress related to the situation.

Manager training from the employee support program



Professional development training for managers is available through the Global Learning Solutions catalogue, which lists several topics on people management. These topics are available as both virtual classroom and on-site events. To schedule sessions for your peers or your team, check with your HR department.

Training topics include:

- Mental Health at Work: Recognize and Respond
- AIR – Awareness, Intervention and Resilience
- Resilience Series – Managing for resilience
- Effective communication
- Leadership
- The art of motivation
- Managing change
- Conflict management
- Managing a diverse workforce
- Managing change
- Managing challenging people
- Recognizing a troubled employee
- Managing employees on leave
- Preventing sexual harassment



A Manager's Guide

to the
Employee
Support Program

