

# Workplace Supervisor

May 2016

## Testimonials

**Here are some quotes from HR Managers who recently called on CONCERN for a Management Consultation:**

*“Our experiences with the clinical manager and onsite counselor were excellent. The counselor was on-time, attentive and very cordial. She was available and willing to stay to speak with individual employees if the need existed. It was all around a positive experience.”*

*“The service was outstanding! Thank you for being there when we needed you.”*

*“Thank you for the assistance I was given with the concern I had for the associate. The information I received was very helpful.”*

*“It’s always an exceedingly professional interaction and experience to work with your clinical managers. We can always count on a quick response, professional onsite services and great follow-up. Thank you!”*



## FAQs for Managing Employees

**Q.** What does it mean for a supervisor to play the role of a “safety mentor”?

**A.** When supervisors act as safety mentors, they help employees acquire the education, training, and instruction needed to stay safe on the job. They also help employees develop habits of thinking before they act in order to prevent accidents. A safety mentor teaches employees to remain cautious and look for risks – in their own and others’ best interest. Training and education alone can’t teach this safety attitude, so the supervisor must model it within an effective relationship. This is what helps establish a safety culture. The supervisor must repeatedly impress upon the employee the need to ask safety-related questions, bring concerns to him or her, and not hesitate to do so. In short, the safety mentor passes along a prevention attitude, and this in turn is passed to other employees down the line. With this model of nurturing employees, organizations reap the rewards of higher productivity and reduced costs. An additional reward? Better cooperation in general between supervisors and employees.

**Q.** I have two employees with a personality clash. Periodically I succeed in getting them to cooperate, but it doesn’t “stick.” Soon they are back at each other’s throats. What is the preferred method for referring them to CONCERN?

**A.** There is no one preferred method for referring employees in conflict to the EAP, but most EA professionals can recommend an approach based on their past success at conflict resolution in a similar circumstance. Consult with a CONCERN clinical manager to offer background information and plan the referral. Be careful not to see conflict as “the problem.” This view of conflict can unwittingly allow you to tolerate it for years because the root causes of conflict are ignored. Conflicts between employees are usually symptoms of other issues requiring intervention or personal change. Employees are responsible for professional behavior at work. If you refer employees individually with clear expectations for what you expect from them, you may discover that venting and sharing each one’s individual stories in private with a CONCERN counselor produce an almost immediate cessation of tension. Be assured that it is temporary. However, when each employee is feeling supported and aligned with the EAP, the next step of engagement can proceed. You will quickly gain more clarity about the general path toward resolution with the above approach.

**Q.** How can supervisors intervene with attitude problems, bickering, and morale problems among a large group of employees? Should I have a large group meeting to air out the issues?

**A.** Remember this rule: If employees are bringing their concerns and complaints to you, they are less likely to bring the same complaints and concerns to their peers. Appreciating this dynamic can help you stay proactive in developing effective relationships with employees. Start by reaching out to employees individually to interview and engage with them to gain clarity about the problems your work unit is experiencing. Do not have a large group meeting, because you may never uncover the nature of squabbles that commonly develop among subgroups. Depending on how quickly you meet individually with employees, you may notice more calm and less negativity. This is temporary and requires the next step of acting on and responding to the issues brought to you in these meetings. Establish a feedback process to gauge the impact of implementation. Consult CONCERN to have a clinical manager validate your analysis and the conclusions you've arrived at concerning solutions.

**Q.** Should a supervisor always seek to motivate an employee to self-refer to CONCERN before making a formal referral, other than referrals for serious work rule infractions like a positive drug test, violent incident, etc.?

**A.** Formal supervisor referrals are intended for performance, conduct, attendance, attitude, or related behavior issues. In the course of supervision, a performance problem might be identified, and typically the supervisor offers guidance to correct it. If change isn't forthcoming, the supervisor's suggestion to use the EAP may come next. This in turn may lead to a formal referral if performance issues remain or become chronically unsatisfactory. The one pitfall of this progression is the protracted period of time over which a personal problem may grow worse if they don't take the steps needed to address it. How you

refer should be more a function of how soon you want to see improvement and the rate of observable progress towards change you can accept. Supervisors should focus on helping employees make changes early and in an expedient manner to prevent an increasing likelihood the employee will become unsalvageable

**Q.** Supervisors must be skilled at dealing with difficult people and personalities, but no one gets formally trained to do it. It is learned as you go. Can you provide "generic tips" on managing performance with these individuals?

**A.** Many resources attempt to name and categorize personality styles and offer specific interventions, but the following serve as general advice for supervisors. (1) Interrupt the difficult coworker's pattern early. Counsel the employee to make necessary changes in behavior or performance so they don't come to perceive them as acceptable. (2) Document the problem well: include what happened, and describe in measureable terms the impact of the difficult behavior on others, productivity, work processes, and/or work climate. (3) Discuss the adequacy of your documentation with your Human Resources or its equivalent department. (Don't skip this step.) A difficult employee often has well-practiced defense mechanisms to employ against poor or mediocre documentation. The EAP can also offer suggestions for more "airtight" documentation. (4) Meet with your employee, and use the documentation in your meeting. Stay objective, neutral, and stick with the facts (5) Record the outcome, and produce a letter of agreement between you and your employee about changes to be made. (6) Reinforce changes and positive attributes with praise, but do not make global statements of how outstanding a performer you believe your employee to be. These could undermine your attempts to take needed administrative or disciplinary steps in the future.

CONCERN: EAP teams with Human Resources to provide another resource for managers and supervisors to consult about how to manage issues with individuals, within and between work groups, and across departments. When you call CONCERN: EAP, ask for a Management Consultation or request to speak to a Clinical Manager.

**Call: 800.344.4222**  
**www.concern-eap.com**