

Q. There is usually a lot of tension when I conduct annual reviews. If employees are surprised by the results or if their scores are less than they imagined they would be, I often face hostility and anger. How can I reduce this tension?



A. Follow the performance review process of your organization, but make the effort to increase communication. Meet with your employees at the beginning of the year and discuss with them what they would like to achieve in the coming year, along with other measures of performance consistent with the goals of your work unit and the organization as a whole. These goals should be achievable and measurable and include defined criteria for outstanding performance and lesser achievement. Meet several times during the year and coach employees toward success. Ask employees each time, during these meetings, how they would grade themselves against the performance criteria they set. At year's end, you should see far less angst at performance review time, more satisfied workers, and higher levels of achievement that benefit the organization.

Q. My employee went into treatment after he was informally referred to the EAP for attendance problems. He has a severe opioid addiction. He left treatment against medical advice after about a week, but he still seems to be doing well. I worry that this won't last. What should I do?

A. Meet with the EAP to discuss your role in monitoring your employee's performance and also learn about the symptoms of a relapse related to opioid addiction that may exhibit themselves at work. Although the EAP will not share confidential information, you can discuss signs and symptoms of relapse that you can document later, if needed. Absenteeism is the original problem you spotted, but others may include poor coordination, drowsiness, nausea, and slurred speech. In this situation, the chances of relapse are high since he displays a lack of motivation for treatment. If your employee left against medical advice, then it is unlikely that he is being followed by a medical doctor or taking prescribed medication. Talk with your HR advisor about your organization's fitness-for-duty policy. He or she can advise you on if and when it is appropriate to take advantage of it.

Q. I want to be a firm supervisor when necessary as well as a nice guy my employees admire. I think most supervisors feel the same way, but I find myself correcting employees more often than I praise them. How can I increase my positive interactions?

A. Establish communication habits to use daily with employees that help you improve your interactions and grow your reputation with them. When approaching an employee for any reason, lead with something positive so they do not learn to associate your presence with correcting performance, a negative interaction, or other painful exchange. Ask employees for their solutions to problems, and treat them like pros, regardless of the position they hold. Intentionally interact with your employees when things are going well—get out of your office so you aren't seen as a one-person fire department only interacting when problems arise or things go badly. Participate in small talk; use these moments to learn about your employees' needs. Praise and be in awe of their past achievements, not just the ones you witness on the job. Finally, look for roadblocks to their success. Pay attention to what is impeding performance, and find small ways to make their lives more comfortable.

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