STATE OF NEW JERSEY
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION
EMPLOYEE ADVISORY SERVICE NEWSLETTER

Support • Empowerment • Growth

Q4

SUPERVISOR / MANAGER

The New Jersey Civil Service Commission's **Employee Advisory Service (EAS)** Newsletter contains useful articles and information for managing various well-being and work-life issues in order to create a healthier, happier, and more productive workplace. EAS is committed to improving the quality of life for all New Jersey Civil Service employees by encouraging a good work-life balance.



UPCOMING WEBINARS

Stepping Into Supervision: Navigating Relationships, Boundaries & Expectation

About the Webinar

Becoming a supervisor often means navigating new expectations while managing relationships with people who were once your peers. This includes increased responsibilities, difficult conversations and uncertainty about how to lead effectively. This important session will provide new supervisors with strategies for managing the challenges of a new supervisory role and maintaining positive relationships.

Date: Oct 22, 2026
TIME: 11:00 AM - 12PM

REGISTER NOW

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When the Load goes Both Ways: What Cognitive Overload does to a High-Performing Leader's Brain

By Jill Hinrichs, PPC, Leadership and Team Development Coach, AllOne Health



It was a Friday afternoon when the call came in. The voice on the other end belonged to one of the sharpest leaders I know. MENSA-level smart. The kind of person who walks into a room and immediately sees what everyone else missed. He had recently been promoted into a role of significantly greater complexity, leading leaders for the first time, navigating a difficult organizational dynamic above him, and simultaneously managing a personal life that had become, by any measure, a lot. He was not calling to talk about any of that.

He was calling because he was scared. Something felt off. He was forgetting things. Simple things. Things that a person like him did not forget. And in the silence underneath his words was a question he was almost afraid to ask out loud:

The answer was no. But the explanation required some science.

The Brain Does Not Separate Work From Life

Researchers call it cognitive bandwidth: the brain's usable processing capacity at any given moment. It is not unlimited. For a leader carrying a significant personal load alongside a high-complexity role, that capacity is being drawn from before the workday even begins. The decisions being weighed, the logistics being tracked, the emotional labor of holding someone else's fear or uncertainty while still showing up and leading well. That is real cognitive work, and it competes directly with the work happening at the office.

Research on stress and memory confirms that sustained pressure shifts the brain's encoding priorities toward what feels most urgent. Lower-stakes information, even professionally important information, encodes differently. A leader who is normally sharp and thorough starts dropping small things. Not because their capability has changed. Because their cognitive floor is already full.

This is not a character issue. It is neuroscience.

What We Can Do About It

For leaders carrying this kind of load: write things down, build routines, reduce small decisions wherever possible. Cognitive bandwidth does not respond to willpower. It responds to load reduction. And naming what is happening to a trusted colleague or manager is not weakness. It is how the leaders who navigate these seasons most effectively actually get through them.

For organizations: the most valuable thing you can offer is permission. Permission to say what is happening without it being read as a red flag. Check-ins that are human rather than evaluative. A manager who understands that a full life does not make someone a less capable leader. It makes them a human one.

My client on that Friday phone call was not losing it. He was carrying more than any one system should have to hold, and his brain was telling him so. Once he understood that, something shifted. Not the load. But his relationship to it.

Organizations that recognize cognitive saturation as a real and temporary condition rather than a performance flaw are the ones that keep their best people through the hardest chapters of their lives. That is not a soft benefit. That is a retention strategy.

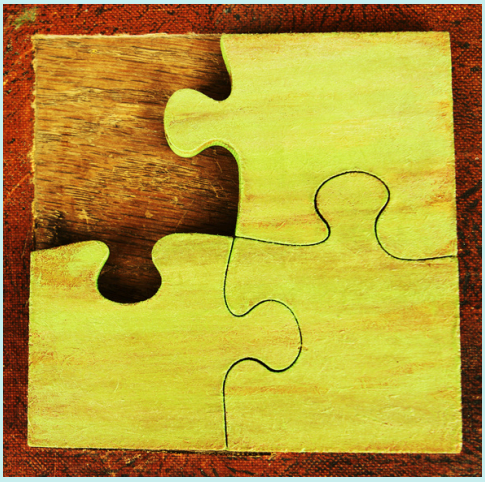
Source: https://allonehealth.com/insights/what-caregiving-really-does-to-a-high-performing-leaders-brain/

TRY THIS: A 30-SECOND REFLECTION

How Many Invisible Tabs Are Open?

Think about someone on your team who seems a little different lately.

Maybe they're forgetting small things.
Maybe they're less patient.
Maybe they're taking longer to make decisions.
Maybe they're still performing—but everything seems to require more effort.



Now, consider how many of these might be running in the background:

- ☐ A difficult conversation at home
- ☐ Caring for a child, parent, partner, or other loved one
- ☐ A financial or family member's health concern
- ☐ A major decision they're trying to make
- ☐ Carrying someone else's emotions or needs
- ☐ A problem they're solving outside of work
- ☐ Their own exhaustion
- ☐ Something they're carrying that you simply don't know about

How many invisible tabs might someone on your team be carrying right now?
You don't need to know the answer.
But you can create enough psychological safety that people don't feel they have to hide the load.

The leadership question isn't always—"Why aren't they operating at their usual level?"
Sometimes it's —"What might be consuming their bandwidth—and what can I do to reduce the load?"
And sometimes, reducing the load means reconsidering what we expect from people when they're already carrying a lot. That raises a bigger question— What does "good enough" have to do with great performance?

The Performance Review Paradox: Why Accepting "Good Enough" Creates Excellence

By Jill Hinrichs, PPC, Leadership and Team Development Coach, AllOne Health



Here's what we know about feedback: It doesn't work the way we think it does.

Carl Rogers said something that should be the foundational mindset for every manager preparing for performance reviews: "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, only then I can begin to change." What Rogers understood is that you cannot simultaneously tell someone they're inadequate and expect them to grow. The two are incompatible.

In 1996, researchers Kluger and DeNisi published a meta-analysis of 607 studies on feedback interventions. The finding? Thirty-eight percent of the time, feedback made performance worse. More than one-third of the time, the very tool we rely on to improve performance actively undermines it.

Why? Because feedback that threatens how we see ourselves doesn't land as development, it lands as threat. When a manager opens with "you're underperforming in X, Y, and Z," the amygdala fires. The prefrontal cortex, the part we need for learning, goes offline. The employee isn't thinking about how to improve. They're moving into self-protection.

This is where the paradox lives. We want growth, so we point out gaps. But pointing out gaps activates defense, and defense makes growth impossible.

The Foundation of Growth

What happens instead when we start with acceptance?

Researchers Edward Deci and Richard Ryan identified three core psychological needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Competence isn't about being exceptional; it's about feeling fundamentally capable. When leaders communicate "your baseline work is solid," they're not lowering the bar. They're satisfying a basic human need that allows people to reach higher.

The Corporate Leadership Council studied 19,000 employees and found something important: managers who focused on strengths produced 36.4% performance improvement. Those who focused on weaknesses? Performance dropped 26.8%.

Here's what this tells us: acceptance isn't the opposite of high standards. Acceptance is what makes high standards achievable.

Psychologist William Swann's Self-Verification Theory helps us understand why. People need others to see them as they see themselves. When an employee believes they're doing solid work and you open by cataloging their deficits, they resist. Not because they're unwilling to grow, but because you've created misalignment with how they understand themselves.

Starting with acceptance creates coherence. It signals: *I see you. I see what you're doing well. Now let's talk about what's possible from here.*

Amy Edmondson's research on psychological safety shows us how this works. Teams perform best when members feel safe enough to take risks, safe enough to admit what they don't know. Leaders who communicate "you're fundamentally capable" create the conditions where people can look honestly at their development areas without feeling their entire competence is in question.

The paradox is this: acceptance reduces the very resistance that blocks improvement.

The Practice

So what does this look like?

First, acknowledge baseline competence. "You're doing good work. You're meeting job requirements." Second, validate self-perception. "You mentioned you see yourself as strong in X; I agree." Third, introduce development as an opportunity. "Given your strength in X, you're positioned to stretch into Y." Finally, frame growth as a choice. "Here's what exceptional performance looks like. What interests you?"

This isn't permission for mediocrity. This is recognition that growth doesn't happen when people feel threatened.

Rogers understood something in the therapy room that decades of organizational research now confirms: acceptance precedes change. Not because acceptance makes us complacent, but because it creates the safety we need to grow.

The performance review paradox is that we must accept where people are before we can guide them toward where they could be. Not because we're satisfied with "good enough," but because acceptance is the foundation upon which excellence is built.



Source: https://allonehealth.com/insights/the-performance-review-paradox-why-accepting-good-enough-creates-excellence/

The Benefits of Creating a Psychologically Safe Work Environment



Managers play an important role in developing and maintaining a “psychologically safe” work environment. This is a workplace culture where everyone feels a sense of belonging, regardless of whether they work onsite, remotely, or in a hybrid environment.

A psychologically safe environment creates spaces for personal and professional growth. Employees feel empowered to learn, innovate, and express themselves freely—without fear of judgment, failure, or retaliation. They’re also more likely to invest in themselves, each other, and in their shared goals and projects.
Here’s a closer at the benefits of creating a psychologically safe work environment:

- Enhanced communication fosters a culture of trust by creating spaces for open dialogue and honest conversations.
- Increased innovation comes naturally when diverse perspectives come together to unlock creativity.
- Higher engagement is achieved when employees are more involved and committed.
- Greater productivity leads to greater organizational success.
- Improved personal well-being stems from greater personal and professional growth.

The following 4-Stages of Psychological Safety is a model developed by LeaderFactor. Use this approach to ensure your organization’s journey to psychological safety is impactful:

- **Stage 1: Inclusion Safety:** Here the goal is to combat all forms of prejudice so employees can experience a sense of belonging. They feel comfortable expressing their identity, background, and perspectives without fear of rejection or exclusion.
- **Stage 2: Learner Safety:** This stage encourages employees to become active learners by asking questions, trying new things, brainstorming, and giving and receiving constructive feedback. Having already developed a sense of belonging, employees also feel encouraged and supported.
- **Stage 3: Contributor Safety:** Here employees develop an enthusiasm for achieving common goals by sharing their expertise and showcasing their skills without becoming competitive. They feel their contributions are valued and respected, which fosters collaboration and innovation.
- **Stage 4: Challenger Safety:** This is the highest form of psychological safety, where employees feel comfortable challenging the status quo, questioning assumptions, and advocating for change. They can trust that any dissenting viewpoints will be heard and considered.

Source: https://allonehealth.com/insights/the-benefits-of-creating-a-psychologically-safe-work-environment/

ASK EAS!



Q. I often hold back dealing with personnel problems and confronting troubled employees because I feel burned out. These days it seems I can't make a difference, that procrastination is a coping strategy, and coming to work and going through the motions is all I can handle. What can EAS Help?

A. What you're describing is more common than you might think. Many supervisors feel worn down and fall into avoidance as a coping strategy, which only builds a crisis. When you're emotionally exhausted, it can feel impossible to stay proactive and engaged. EAS can help in several ways. A confidential assessment can clarify whether burnout or even major depression is present. Just talking in a private setting often brings relief, helps you feel understood, and restores perspective. EAS can also help you sort through employee issues, decide which to handle yourself, and figure out when to involve HR. Together, you'll work step by step to address your employees' issues. The goal is for you to feel supported and confident intervening. Finally, EAS will help you develop strategies to prevent sliding back into this rut. The goal is to help you feel empowered and reengaged. Call EAS today to schedule an appointment. Experience shows that you will feel some of the burden lift immediately when you take this first step, because you will know you're acting to resolve these issues.

Q. I have an employee who shows amazing effort and progress on tasks, and then suddenly without warning there is a huge slump, with minimal productivity. This irregularity is frustrating. He has accomplished so much that I tend to ignore it, but should I put more focus on the problem?

A. It appears your employee has what is known as a spasmodic work pace. Many factors can cause this pattern, but a proper assessment through EAS is the best way to identify its true nature. You are generally satisfied with the employee's performance, but the complaint about inconsistency is legitimate and should be addressed. Both the employee's well-being and the company's bottom line may be at stake. Inconsistency also affects coworkers and carries hidden costs. Address the problem by observing and documenting specific patterns — missed deadlines, fluctuating quality, or unpredictable output — and then have a private, fact-based conversation with the employee. Clarify expectations for steady, reliable work. Thorough documentation is important, because EAS will use it to conduct an adequate assessment. Performance patterns can vary greatly, whether they stem from depression, drinking episodes, or simply poor time management. Set clear goals, hold regular check-ins, and offer constructive feedback. If problems persist, make a formal referral to EAS.

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UPCOMING WEBINARS

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www.nj.gov/csc/employees/advisory

EAS Supervisor/Manager Webinar

Navigating Conflict: Four Steps to Better Conversations and Stronger Relationships

Date / Time
- October 22, 2026
- 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

About this webinar:
This important presentation provides a practical approach to identifying the needs of people during disagreement and conflict, respectfully gaining understanding of their opinion and goals, assessing the potential for compromise, and how to agree to disagree. In addition, the session will review communication approaches and skills crucial to maintaining and restoring relationships as you work through difficult conversations.

Building Resilience at Work: The Role of Emotional Intelligence

Date / Time
- November 19, 2026
- 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

About this webinar:
Emotional intelligence provides valuable tools for understanding ourselves and others, managing our responses, and navigating these challenges more effectively. Our emotions can bring us joy and happiness but also pain and frustration if we don't manage them well. Learn practical tools to build emotional resilience, manage everyday workplace stress, and maintain healthier relationships.

Transitioning to a New Year: Finding Balance, Managing Stress & Looking Ahead

Date / Time
- December 17, 2026
- 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

About this webinar:
For many, the holidays and year-end projects can be a busy and emotional time. Work responsibilities coupled with financial concerns, and personal expectations may all be competing for our attention. As we transition into a new year, learn practical strategies for managing stress, finding balance, and making space for what matters most.

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MASTERING CREDIT MANAGEMENT

Lunch & Learn

Q4 Financial Wellness Webinar

A financial wellness webinar that covers "Credit Card Makeover" and "Understanding Credit" to help participants improve their credit knowledge and management skills.

Tue Oct 20th

- **Session A: 11am – 12noon**
- **Session B: 2pm – 3pm**

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EAS IN ACTION: RESOURCE PAGE

CONTACT US

OUTREACH PROGRAM

We offer in-person or virtual sessions to educate employees and/or supervisors/managers about the support services available to them year-round. Our Outreach Program promotes workplace wellness by ensuring staff know that help is always accessible. If you have any concerns or need support, consider taking advantage of the resources provided by EAS. Our Outreach Team will visit your agency to inform employees about the free benefits that we provide, and how they can request our services. Ask your Human Resources Department to schedule an information session for your team today.

WELLNESS WORKSHOPS

Is your agency looking to strengthen team cohesiveness, support employee well-being, or enhance workplace productivity? Our EAS Counselors can help.

Wellness Workshops support supervisors, managers and HR with practical tools and strategies to help employees and teams thrive. Sessions can be uniquely designed to meet your agency's needs, with topics including ways to strengthen workplace relationships, communication, reduce stress and anxiety, and develop a healthy workplace culture where employees feel supported, motivated, and connected. Contact us to learn more.

WEBINARS

EAS offers monthly live webinars designed to support supervisors and managers with relevant information and practical strategies they can apply at work or in their personal lives.
Topics are informed by supervisor survey feedback, helping to ensure that each session addresses issues, challenges, or areas of interest that matter most to them and their teams. Join us every month to learn, engage and grow.
If you are unable to attend a live session, recorded webinars are also available upon request or through the Civil Service Commission's Learning Management System (LMS).

SUPERVISOR/MANAGER CONSULTATIONS

Facing a challenging workplace situation? EAS can help.

EAS offers confidential consultations to discuss concerns affecting supervisors, managers, or their teams. Challenges may include navigating employee conflicts, the loss of an employee, workplace wellness, team dynamics, performance evaluations, and other workplace issues. Counselors can also help with difficult or uncomfortable conversations by exploring how to approach the situation and/or communicate concerns. You don't have to navigate challenging situations alone. Email us to schedule a confidential consultation today.

Contact us to schedule a confidential appointment or to speak to a Mental Health Specialist.

NUMBER: 866-327-9133

EMAIL: EAS_HELP@CSC.NJ.GOV

WEB:
www.nj.gov/csc/employees/advisory/

