



STATE OF NEW JERSEY CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

March
2024

EMPLOYEE ADVISORY SERVICE NEWSLETTER

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 WEBINAR

4 STEPS TO MAXIMIZING YOUR POTENTIAL



REGISTER NOW

Date: March 28, 2024
Time: 2:00-3:00 PM

About the Webinar:

This presentation will provide a roadmap to help individuals focus on further developing their unique strengths and abilities, including: assessing their talents; embracing the full value of them; identifying opportunities to use them in greater ways; and planning for their use in meeting the needs of others.

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Women & Money Webinar
Date: March 13, 2024
Time: 1:00-2:00 PM



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BE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE AT WORK

Positive attitudes are contagious at work, but so are negative ones. Moods, feelings of engagement or disengagement, and even health-related habits like healthy eating and exercise, can spread within a network of work colleagues in ways you're often not aware of. Be a person who lifts the moods of the people around you, encourages good work and effective collaboration, and inspires by example. By being a positive influence at work, you can make your work environment healthier, more productive, and more enjoyable while improving your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of the people around you.

How to Be a Positive Influencer at Work

- **Manage your emotions.** Emotions are particularly contagious at work. If a colleague is anxious or unhappy, it's easy to be pulled into that anxiety or sadness. If a colleague is smiling and laughing, it's hard not to smile and laugh, too. You can't always control your emotions, but you can learn to manage them so they don't erupt in uncomfortable and unproductive ways. Learn to notice signs of tension in your body. Figure out what's making you tense, and consider what you can do about those causes. Learn stress management techniques to keep yourself calm. If you feel yourself growing upset or angry, step back from a situation and go for a walk or take some deep breaths. Take some time every day to think about what you're grateful for. That's a way to lift and steady your mood. Look for reasons to be happy at work and show that happiness with a smile.
- **Help others feel heard and understood.** Getting your way in the face of opposition isn't influence. It can be perceived as overbearing and make others feel ignored and unappreciated. Build a reputation as someone who listens and works to understand different viewpoints. Listen to build connection with colleagues and to get to know them as people so that you can work more effectively together.
- **Draw positive attention to colleagues.** Get behind other people's ideas, and be sure they get credit for them. Be generous with compliments. Publicly recognize colleagues' good work and progress.
- **Set a high standard with your work.** Be the best that you can be in your work. Show that you can be depended on to do your share and more, deliver quality work, and meet your commitments.
- **Be clear and honest in your communication.** Explain your ideas and suggestions in ways that people will understand, even when the issues are complex or technical. Don't overstate or exaggerate the points you're making. Be honest when things go wrong or you need more time to complete a task.
- **Build your expertise.** Expertise in a valued skill or area of knowledge will lead others to look to you for guidance and include you in planning discussions. You'll be able to contribute to your organization's work in more significant ways. Take classes, attend webinars or online training sessions, read books and articles, and work with people who can help build your expertise. If you can, find a mentor who can guide your learning.



- **Be a problem-solver.** Identify obstacles that are getting in the way of efficient, high-quality work, and suggest solutions for getting past them. When problems occur, don't just complain; look for ways to solve them, and participate in those efforts. Pay attention to changes outside your organization, and suggest ways the organization might adapt to or take advantage of them.
- **Be inclusive and welcoming.** Show that you recognize and value differences among your colleagues—differences in backgrounds and life experiences, training, expertise, and communication or work style. Seek out different viewpoints to help make better decisions. Accept and value people for who they are, so they feel welcome when working with you.
- **Help build connections.** Make an effort to meet people from other parts of the organization. Look for opportunities to work on projects that involve people from different locations or departments. Use those connections to link people in solving problems and coming up with innovations. Build connections outside your organization, too, with trade groups, academic researchers, and others who might help your organization improve and grow.
- **Be a positive voice.** While it's important to be realistic, to be aware of challenges your team and the organization may be facing, be the person who is looking for positive solutions and opportunities, not the one who complains and makes others scared and unhappy. Keep yourself above gossip and negative talk, especially negative talk about particular people behind their backs. When you hear this kind of talk or see these kinds of messages, ignore them. Don't contribute to their spread. If the negativity advances to the point of harassment or bullying, don't be a passive bystander. Stand up to it or report it in safe and appropriate ways.



- **Deal promptly with negativity.** One negative influence can pull a team down, in both its mood and its performance. Pay attention to people who complain, engage in destructive gossip, or undermine colleagues to make themselves look better. These are performance issues, as important as—and perhaps more important than—an individual's own output. Include positive or negative influence on others as a key measure when setting goals and evaluating performance.

For More Information

Brower, T. (2023, January 29). Managers have major impact on mental health: How to lead for wellbeing. *Forbes*. Retrieved October 20, 2023, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2023/01/29/managers-have-major-impact-on-mental-health-how-to-lead-for-wellbeing>

Christakis, N.A., & Fowler, J.H. (2009). *Connected: The surprising power of our social networks and how they shape our lives*. Little Brown Sparks, New York.

Mirgain, S. (2019, May 24). How others influence your happiness. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health. Retrieved October 20, 2023, from <https://www.uwhealth.org/news/the-happiness-ripple-effect>

Reference

1. UKG. (2023). Mental health at work: Managers and money. Retrieved October 20, 2023, from <https://www.ukg.com/resources/article/mental-health-work-managers-and-money>

The Special Role of Managers

- **Recognize your outsized influence.** One recent survey showed that managers have more impact on people's mental health than their therapist or doctor—an impact equal to that of a spouse.¹ Recognize the power of your influence to inspire or demoralize, to energize people or drain them of energy. Understand what an important model you are for demonstrating healthy stress management and work-life balance. Managers need to manage themselves—their moods, their behavior, and their words—to build high-performing teams in a work environment that enhances physical and mental health.

BALANCING CAREGIVING, WORK, AND FAMILY

Just as having a child can shift the balance between work and home life, the responsibility of caring for an older or infirm family member can force adjustments to schedules and priorities. How do you handle work responsibilities and maintain your career while also doing what's right for your older relative, attending to your relationship with your spouse or partner, giving your children the love and attention they need, and taking care of yourself? It's not easy. In fact, it might be one of the biggest challenges you will ever face. But it can usually be done, and you may have more options than you realize. Here are some ideas that may help you find a balance that works for you.

Balancing Work and Caregiving

- **Step up your organizing skills.** Manage your calendar so you can easily see both work and family obligations. Create a calendar with key care-related events, such as your older relative's doctor's appointments, in a form that can be shared with siblings, friends, and others who might be able to help. Look for efficiencies in how you spend your time, such as shopping for groceries once a week or using a home-delivery service.
- **Plan ahead—and make backup plans.** Perhaps more than ever before, you'll need to plan ahead, both at work and with your family and caregiving responsibilities. You'll also need to be prepared for the unexpected by having backup plans. Who will check in on your older relative if the person who usually does that gets sick? Who might step in for you at work if you're called away for an urgent family need?
- **Take a hard look at your priorities.** As a caregiver, new priorities are being added to your life. What are you spending time on that you might do in a different way, put off, or stop doing altogether?
- **Get help.** Think about who might be able to help with specific caregiving tasks. Talk to family members, friends, and neighbors about ways they might be able to play a helpful role, even a small one, to free you to focus on other important priorities. Explore options for paid help and free or low-cost community services.



- **Talk with your employer.** Read your employee handbook to find out about support available to you, such as information and counseling through your employee assistance program (EAP) or provisions for temporary leave, flexible work hours, or working from home. Think about what sorts of support or flexibility would enable you to continue to do your job well and be there for your family. Have an honest conversation with your manager or human resources (HR) representative (whichever feels safest to you) about what's going on in your life and what adjustments would help you contribute to the best of your ability at work. Show that you've thought your proposal through from your employer's perspective.
- **Cross-train and delegate.** If you're in a position to do this at work, cross-train with team members so you can handle each other's work when you or someone else has an unplanned absence. If you're a manager, use the opportunity to train and delegate, so your constant presence isn't as critical. This can give team members a chance to learn new skills and stretch their capabilities.



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*As part of Comprehensive Services of Aging (COPSA), Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care offers the Care2Caregivers program. **The mission of Care2Caregivers is to provide free help and support for anyone concerned about or caring for someone with memory issues or other complex needs.** Our compassionate and knowledgeable staff are here to give you the support and guidance that only someone who has been there can provide. We'll help you navigate the often-overwhelming challenges of caregiving.*



- **Set limits.** Establish boundaries around what you can or are willing to do and what you can't or aren't willing to do. Be realistic about what you can handle. Say no to requests that might push you beyond your limits.
- **Take care of yourself.** With all the expectations put on you, it can be easy to lose sight of your own needs. Don't let that happen. Make time to exercise, get outdoors for a walk, talk with a friend, meditate, read a book, or do other activities that help you stay calm and healthy. Keep your own needs on your list of important priorities.

Caregiving and Your Marriage or Partner Relationship

Caring for an older or infirm family member can cut into the quality time you spend with your spouse or partner. It can also create new tensions—about money, for example, or from the social dynamic in the household if your older relative has moved in with you. It may just be your new reality that you have less time for your relationship, but it's important to make time for communication and connection:

- **Involve your spouse or partner in important decisions** about your relative's care and in planning for what might come next.
- **Discuss and clarify responsibilities.** Are you responsible for the care of your parents and is your partner responsible for their parents? If you're sharing those responsibilities, who is responsible for which tasks, or for care at different times of the day and week?
- **Be clear when you ask your partner for help.** Don't assume they know when you're at your limit or that they can tell what you want or need. Be open and honest about your needs. Explain, with specifics, how your partner can be most helpful to you.

- **Make time to enjoy each other.** Go out to dinner together, or even just take a break to go for a walk or sit together on a park bench. If your children or older relative need constant supervision, use your network of helpers to free your time.
- **Show your appreciation.** Say thank you. Tell your partner you appreciate them, and why.

Caregiving and Your Children

In the squeeze on your time and the competition for your attention, don't let the needs of your children sink to the bottom of the priority list:

- **Make time for your children.** Plan times for just you and your child to do things together that your child would like to do. If you have more than one child, spend time with them together and with each of them separately in one-on-one outings. Take turns with your spouse or partner or draw on your network of helpers to make this happen.
- **Listen.** Ask questions to find out what's going on in their lives and how they are doing. Then listen to what they tell you. Find out what they think and how they feel about what's happening with your older relative. Don't dismiss your child's worries or emotions as unreasonable. Acknowledge them, take them seriously, and help your child find ways to deal with them.
- **Let your child help,** in appropriate ways, with your older relative's care. It can help your child feel valued and important and could help create opportunities for cross-generation connections. Let your child say no to helping, too. Don't force it if your child is uncomfortable or unwilling.



Within the NJ Division of Aging Service, the Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) is a trusted source of information on long term services and supports for persons of all incomes. **ADRC professional staff assists seniors, adults, and their caregivers in finding benefits and services they need.**

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IGNITING THE SPARK OF INDIVIDUALITY IN OTHERS

Encouraging Coworkers to Express Themselves

When encouraging coworkers to open up and express themselves, it is important to be mindful of your biases within the workplace. That is, are you prepared to listen to what some coworkers have to say, but not others? Perhaps you are more ready to listen to coworkers who identify more strongly with your own values, attitudes, and beliefs. Actively seek out those coworkers who differ from you with respect to age, gender, faith, educational background, and culture, and create space to allow expression.

Your active listening skills will help you here. Active listening involves speaking less and listening more. It's not simply waiting your turn, but being present within the conversation, attending to the core themes discussed, and then reflecting these thoughts and feelings. Also, use positive reinforcement to increase the likelihood that your coworkers will continue to express themselves. In other words, reward your coworkers for speaking up. To do this, highlight the value that your coworker's contribution brings to those around them. In creating space, you are modeling for those around you that it is safe to express yourself irrespective of your background.



Encouraging Your Children to Be Themselves

In order to encourage your children to be their authentic selves, attend to their interests rather than areas of disinterest. Show a genuine interest in their passions, demonstrating that their passions are worthwhile to pursue. It's not unusual for children to feel a need to go along with the crowd and jump onto whatever fad might be popular at the time. Children might do this in order to be included within their social circles and not appear as unusual and different. Help children to recognize the benefits and costs associated with following the crowd, allowing them to make informed decisions.

It's also valuable to highlight how individuality has helped you in life, and how fads come and go. It can also be useful to draw the child's attention to those around them, thereby allowing them to identify what they like about their friends, family, and idols, as well as what they dislike. Finally, encourage children to be involved in problem-solving and decision-making. For example, how should family time be used on school vacations? Including children in this decision-making demonstrates that you value their opinions. This will help develop your child's self-esteem, encouraging them to speak up and be more independent.



How to Encourage Yourself to Express Yourself

There could be multiple reasons you choose not to express yourself. Have you expressed yourself in the past, only to have your thoughts and opinions fall on deaf ears? Perhaps you prioritize others' needs before your own, and therefore struggle to speak up about what you want. It could be that you find conflict uncomfortable and opt to stay quiet, thereby managing the uncomfortable thoughts and feelings that accompany conflict.

When encouraging yourself to voice your opinion, know that simply because you have had negative experiences in the past does not mean that all future instances of expression will lead to negative outcomes. In order to express yourself, it is crucial that you recognize that there is value in you expressing yourself. Ask yourself what you have to gain by speaking up. Attending to the potential gains can help motivate you. It is also helpful to build your assertive communication skills. Assertive communication involves being clear and direct about your needs, linking your needs with your thoughts and feelings, acknowledging the perspectives of others, and encouraging problem-solving. Finally, make a conscious effort to speak up about your needs rather than waiting for opportune moments. The more you express yourself and have positive outcomes, the more your confidence will grow. As your confidence grows, the easier it will be to speak up in the future.

Source: Veretis. (2022, June 11). Igniting the spark of individuality in others (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).





Employee Advisory Service

Support - Empowerment - Growth

EAS IN ACTION!

Women & Money

WEBINAR



Wednesday
March 13, 2024 | 1pm - 2pm

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**Credit Union
of New Jersey**
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Please join us for a FREE, comprehensive webinar to familiarize and empower you (or a woman in your life) with the financial fundamentals that can assist with personal aspects of various life stages.

DID YOU KNOW?

If you are interested in EAS visiting your agency to inform your team on what EAS offers, please email us at the email address below. We will be more than happy to speak to your team in-person. The Outreach Program is designed to build a healthier workplace by informing employees that help is at their fingertips 365 days a year.

Employee Advisory Service (EAS)
Support - Empowerment - Growth

Your privacy is important to us. Your confidentiality is protected by state and federal law and regulations. All of the services offered are guided by professional and ethical standards. Contact us to learn more.



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How Can We
Help You?