



STATE OF NEW JERSEY CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

WINTER
2024

EMPLOYEE ADVISORY SERVICE SUPERVISOR/MANAGER NEWSLETTER

The New Jersey Civil Service Commission's Employee Advisory Service (EAS) Supervisor/Manager Newsletter contains useful articles and information for leaders around various well-being and work-life topics. All articles are intended for supervisors, managers, and any other title that has responsibility for the unit. EAS is committed to improving the quality of life for all New Jersey Civil Service employees by encouraging a good work-life balance, and a healthier, happier, and more productive workplace.



UPCOMING WEBINARS

WHAT'S INSIDE

The Keys to Creating a Thriving Team Culture
January 25th, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

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NJ EAS Supervisor-Manager Orientation Webinar
February 13th, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

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Helping Your Employees Adjust to Change
February 22nd, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

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Strengthening the Team
March 28th, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

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MANAGING EMPLOYEE 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. These should happen throughout the year, not just when it's time for the annual performance review. If an employee is surprised by your annual evaluation, that's a sign you haven't been communicating clearly and often enough.

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 colleague's performance. This may result in a collective decline in job satisfaction. An EAS counselor can help you get past your reluctance and plan for the conversation.

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 coworkers.

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 Human Resources (HR) representative in planning the conversation. If needed contact EAS to schedule a Supervisor Consultation related to providing performance feedback.
- Review your plan for the conversation with a specialist at the employee support program.
- 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.

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 towards work or coworkers
- Contribution to teamwork
- Physical stamina
- Problem-solving skills
- Attendance

Note that work performance includes the effect an employee has on the work and morale of coworkers 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 NJ Employee Advisory Service (EAS), and to provide information on how to access the program.



FOR MANAGERS: RECOGNIZING & DEALING WITH AN ALCOHOL-OR SUBSTANCE-USE PROBLEM AT WORK

As a manager, you are in a unique position to notice an employee's alcohol- or substance-use problem and to take action to refer the employee to help, following your organization's policies. You are responsible for maintaining a safe, healthy, and productive workplace, and for being fair and consistent in managing employee performance.

Know your organization's policies.

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.)

Know the warning signs of alcohol and substance use.

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

Have a conversation with the employee about any performance issues.

The signs above are indications of a personal problem, not necessarily of alcohol or substance use. That might be depression, exhaustion from family caregiving responsibilities, a medical condition, or stress from another cause. When you notice any of these problems, 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.

Whether the performance problems are caused by alcohol or substance use or another personal problem, your role is to remind the employee of your expectations for the job, clearly describe the gap between those expectations and the observed performance and suggest that the employee seek help from EAS. Your human resources (HR) representative or a counselor at EAS can help you plan for this performance conversation and coach you on how to word your suggestion that the employee seek help.

If you have noticed more specific indications of alcohol or substance use, such as slurred speech, unsteady walk, dilated pupils, bloodshot eyes, or hyperactivity, it's appropriate to mention your observations as part of the performance-management conversation, but not in an accusatory way. These signs, too, could have other explanations, such as allergies or the effects of medication for a health condition. Keep the focus of your conversation on observed work performance, with specific examples.



Follow your employer's policies around testing and referrals for support and treatment.

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. Note that being supportive is not the same as being an enabler. An enabler ignores, helps to hide, or minimizes the significance of an alcohol- or substance-use problem in misguided efforts to be kind or avoid conflict. Be encouraging while holding the employee accountable. Continue to monitor the employee's performance, giving positive feedback when deserved and pointing out performance lapses as needed. A specialist at your Employee Advisory Service (EAS) may be able to offer guidance on appropriate ways to express your support and share performance feedback in ways that help the employee move forward.

If an employee denies having a problem and refuses to seek help, but continues to show poor performance, you will need to deal with it as you would any performance problem. Follow your agency's performance-management protocols.

Continue to encourage the employee and manage performance.

When an employee has dealt with an alcohol- or substance-use problem and returned to productive work, be aware that the recovery process can be gradual and may involve relapses. 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.

This was adapted from A Manager's Guide to the Employee Support Program.



MANAGING A NEURODIVERSE TEAM

What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the wide range of ways people experience and interact with the world and the differences in the way people think, learn, and process information:

- Neurodivergent people include autistic people and those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia (which affects word and symbol recognition), dyspraxia (which affects coordination and movement), and other differences in brain and nervous-system functions.
- Neurotypical people, by contrast, are those with what are considered "typical" brain and nervous system functions.
- Neurodiversity in the workplace is the inclusion and engagement of neurodivergent employees.

It is important to note that many neurodivergent people choose not to disclose their condition to their manager or colleagues. Also, many neurodivergent people do not have a medical diagnosis, which can be costly to obtain.

The Benefits of Neurodiversity at Work

As with other aspects of diversity, increasing neurodiversity at work brings new perspectives, insights, ideas, and skills to the work environment. Many neurodivergent people have unique strengths and abilities in areas such as pattern recognition, memory, mathematics, creativity, problem-solving, and focus. Yet traditional hiring and management practices have tended to overlook these assets and undervalue or exclude those who don't fit a neurotypical profile.

Neurodiversity at work harnesses the benefits of different ways of observing and thinking. Well-managed, teams with neurodivergent members can be more productive and better able to identify product and process improvement opportunities than teams made up solely of neurotypical employees.

The focus on the individual strengths and abilities required to manage a neurodiverse workforce can have benefits for neurotypical employees as well. Everyone gains when managers pay closer attention to what's unique about their employees and better align coaching, task assignments, and growth opportunities with individual differences.

Your Role as a Manager

Neurodivergent workers need support from their managers and colleagues to thrive. As a manager, and with your organization's backing, you are in a position to:

- Adapt the hiring process and your selection criteria to open the door to more neurodivergent employees.
- Place neurodivergent employees in roles that align with their strengths and abilities.
- Provide appropriate coaching and support to neurodivergent employees.
- Foster supportive and collaborative relationships among neurodivergent and neurotypical team members.

Ways to Build Engagement

Here are some ways to build engagement and foster high performance when managing a neurodiverse team:

- **Seek help in learning about neurodiversity.** Don't assume that you understand the needs and abilities of your neurodivergent staff or potential hires. Find out if your Employee Advisory Service can put you in touch with experts who can give you a better understanding of how your neurodivergent employees might perceive the world and think differently from you. Find out what other managers have learned in working with neurodiverse teams. Read about relevant neurodivergent conditions.



- **Adapt your hiring process to be more inclusive.** While neurodivergent people may have remarkable skills that could be valuable to your team, they may not have the typical range of assets you're used to looking for in the hiring process. They may not be team players or have strong communication skills, for example. They may not interview well. With the help of your HR, think of ways you might adapt the hiring process to identify people with valuable skills, abilities, and perspectives who don't fit the standard profile of a desirable hire.
- **Ask neurodivergent people what they need to thrive at work.** Every individual is unique, and people with the same neurodivergent label can have vastly different talents and needs:
 - Ask in the hiring process what a candidate will need in order to contribute to their full ability. Ask what work they would be good at.
 - Ask neurodivergent employees on your team what they need from you, the organization, and their colleagues to do their best work. Ask how the team and the organization might use their skills more fully.
 - Ask whether the ways you and others communicate fit with the ways they process information.
 - Ask what you can do to help them feel included, respected, and valued.

- **Place people in roles that align with their strengths and abilities.** The adage about not trying to fit a square peg in a round hole applies to managing both neurodivergent and neurotypical employees. Work to understand each employee's skills and abilities as well as their potential for learning and growth. Help them find their most valuable strengths. Match people to job assignments in ways that will further the team's objectives and bring out the best in people while distributing work fairly and helping everyone feel that their contributions are important.
- **Be flexible.** Neurodivergent people may not fit comfortably into established work processes or environments designed for the neurotypical. Work with your organization to provide appropriate accommodations. Those might include providing access to a work buddy or mentor, allowing the use of noise-canceling headphones to reduce distraction, accepting that some employees choose not to participate in team activities, and enabling employees to work from home.
- **Pay attention to communication.** People have different preferences for how they get information, and neurodivergent people may have needs related to communication that are new to you. Ask employees where communications from you or among team members might be clearer, simpler, or provided in different ways. In general, be direct in your communication. Don't assume you have been understood. Avoid hints, sarcasm, idioms, and other habits of neurotypical communication that may be missed or misunderstood by neurodivergent employees.
- **Encourage neurotypical team members to welcome and appreciate their neurodivergent colleagues.** Help them see the value their neurodivergent colleagues bring to the organization. Help them understand their neurodivergent colleagues' strengths and needs. Talk about ways in which their neurodivergent colleagues' behavior and conversation might seem unusual but is normal and expected, given their condition. Explain why certain accommodations are being made that might be perceived as unfair. Encourage them to ask their neurodivergent colleagues how they might be supportive and what they might do to make the work environment more comfortable and welcoming.
- **Don't over-protect.** It may be tempting to shelter neurodivergent employees from challenges and difficulties. Some of this protection may be appropriate if you are enabling them to do their work without unnecessary distraction. But over-protecting employees can be limiting. If you consistently protect or rescue employees from difficulties, you deny them the chance to learn how to handle these situations themselves. You risk overloading yourself while leaving the employee vulnerable if you move to another job and a new and less-protective manager takes your place.
- **Reconsider performance and career management.** It's always important to manage performance so employees know where they stand and to provide timely feedback and coaching, but not every employee should be pushed to perform to the same broad set of standards. Goals like engaging with colleagues in team activities may be beyond the capabilities of some neurodivergent employees, for example. In the same way, not every employee wants to advance in a traditional way through the organization's hierarchy. Opportunities for growth for neurodivergent people might lie in other directions, such as more challenging assignments or the chance to coach other employees. Growth may not even be desirable for some employees. They may simply want to continue doing work that they are good at and that has value to the organization.

Manage everyone well.

Look for opportunities in managing neurodivergent employees to make work more satisfying and productive for everyone. Seek to understand the unique strengths and potentials of all employees—neurodivergent and neurotypical—and offer coaching and opportunities to help each of them be the best they can be. Appreciate every employee for who they are. With this approach, managing neurodivergent employees can help you become a better manager and make the work environment better for all employees.

For More Information

Austin, R., & Pisano, G. (2017, May). Neurodiversity as a competitive advantage. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved November 14, 2023, from <https://hbr.org/2017/05/neurodiversity-as-a-competitive-advantage>

Mahto, M., Hatfield, S., Sniderman, B., & Hogan, S. (2022, January 18). A rising tide lifts all boats: Creating a better work environment for all by embracing neurodiversity. London: Deloitte Insights. Retrieved November 14, 2023, from <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/talent/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace.html>

Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN). (n.d.). Neurodiversity in the workplace. Retrieved November 14, 2023, from <https://asklearn.org/page/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace>

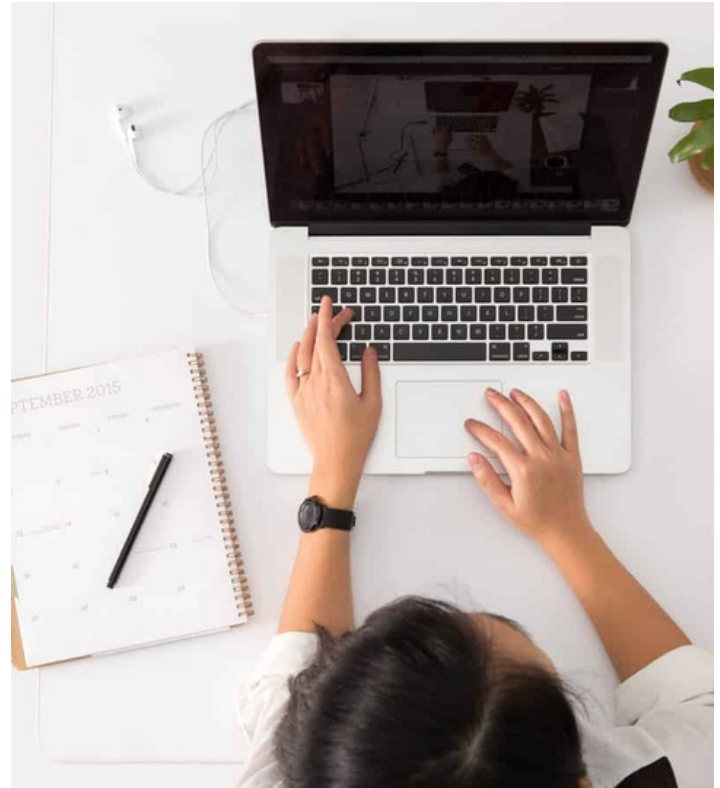
ASK EAS!

Q. What problems can supervisors anticipate if they ignore or don't confront disrespectful behavior in the workplace?

A. When employees witness a supervisor ignoring serious conduct issues with a coworker, it can have several significant consequences that affect the workplace. Employees may lose trust in the supervisor's ability to enforce workplace standards and maintain a safe and productive environment, which can lead to decreased confidence in leadership overall. Growing discontent can then lead to less engagement, decreased motivation, and diminished commitment to the employer's mission. If employees become preoccupied with the problematic behavior, it can hinder their focus on performance. Also, negative conduct can be contagious, creating more frequent conflicts and even the possibility of workplace violence. Generally, when problems remain unresolved, ripple effects and unpredictable consequences follow. The costliest problem typically is turnover, as employees tire of conflict and tension and leave to find a happier workplace.

Q. What does it mean for a manager or management team to lead with empathy?

A. Leading with empathy means that the supervisor puts a priority on recognizing, understanding, and addressing the emotions, needs, and perspectives of their employees. They create a positive and supportive workplace where employees feel valued and understood. This leads to higher morale and a more engaged workforce. And that translates into lots of other great things, like lower turnover, higher productivity, fewer disciplinary matters, and a happier place to work. To be an empathetic supervisor, take the time to understand how employees feel, whether it's related to work challenges, personal issues, or successes. Empathetic supervisors are also good listeners and feedback givers. And importantly, empathetic leaders involve employees in decision-making processes, valuing their input and diverse perspectives. Learn more from "Leading the Empathic Agile Enterprise" (2021) by Dr. Gail Ferreira.



ANY QUESTIONS

**EAS is interested in hearing from you.
Submit any questions you may have to us at
EAS_Help@csc.nj.gov.**

Information contained in this newsletter is for general information purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. Some of it might not apply to your particular company policies and available programs. This information is proprietary and intended only for eligible EAS members. For specific guidance on handling individual employee problems, consult with EAS by calling the Helpline.

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DID YOU KNOW?



EAS OUTREACH PROGRAM

Employee Advisory Service provides free and confidential services to statewide employees, local agencies and household members of their families. Services help to restore the health and productivity of the employees and their workplace as a whole.

Our goal is to visit local agencies and statewide departments to inform employees about the supportive resources offered by EAS. During this information session, participants will learn about the free benefits and how they can request services.

We encourage you to take advantage of our information session, as we highlight the resources of our program.

ARE YOU INTERESTED?

Contact your HR department and ask them to schedule an information session. We will come to you.

How Can
We Help
You?

Employee Advisory Service

Support - Empowerment - Growth

NUMBER:
1-866-327-9133

EMAIL:
EAS_HELP@CSC.NJ.GOV

24 HOURS A DAY 7 DAYS A WEEK
(EMERGENCY MENTAL HEALTH
SERVICES)



Contact us: 1-866-327-9133 | Email: EAS_Help@csc.nj.gov



Employee Advisory Service

UPCOMING WEBINARS SUPERVISORS/MANAGERS

Supervisors / Managers

The Keys to Creating a Thriving Team Culture

Date / Time

- January 25, 2024
- 11 AM - Noon

About this webinar:

This important session is designed to help leaders to better understand the characteristics of a great team culture and provide several strategies for creating and maintaining a workplace environment in which their employees can thrive.

Register Today!



Supervisors / Managers

Helping Your Employees Adjust to Change

Date / Time

- February 22, 2024
- 11 AM - Noon

About this webinar:

In today's constantly evolving world, change management is a crucial skill for supervisors. Employees going through difficult changes can experience frustration and a loss of productivity. This session discusses the stages of change and provides strategies that managers can utilize to help their employees effectively cope with and adjust to change.

Register Today!



Supervisors / Managers

Strengthening the Team

Date / Time

- March 28, 2024
- 11 AM - Noon

About this webinar:


This important presentation is designed to provide managers and supervisors with practical strategies for building a strong team environment for their staff. The session will discuss the barriers to creating a positive team environment, the basics of working effectively with different personalities, generations, etc., and several communication approaches that are important for strengthening relationships among team members.

Register Today!



Employee Advisory Service (EAS)
Support - Empowerment - Growth

 EAS_Help@csc.gov

 1-866- 327-9133 (Toll FREE)

 www.nj.gov/csc/employees/programs/advisory/eas.html

How Can We Help You?

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.