



A Healthy Outlook!

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How to Create a Positive Work Environment

We have all worked in places where we grew to dread getting up in the morning, and a few of us have had the pleasure of working for a boss who makes us feel like we can do anything. Let's take a look at the differences between a positive and a negative work environment.

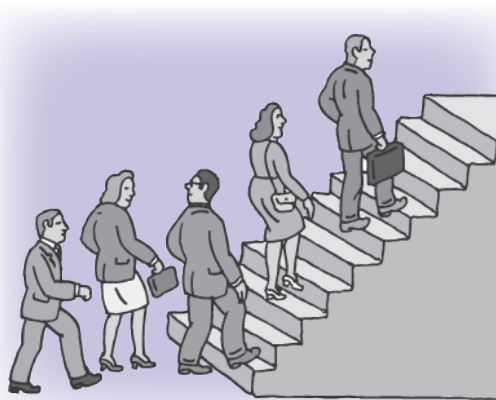
Signs of a Negative Work Environment

- The boss is unfriendly.
- The boss is critical.
- There is high employee turnover.
- There is low employee morale.
- People watch the clock.
- People don't get much performance feedback.

Signs of a Positive Work Environment

- The boss demonstrates interest in the employees.
- The boss has an encouraging attitude.
- Employees like working there.
- There is evidence of company pride and loyalty.
- People know where they stand with their supervisors.

Thousands of books have been written on the subject of managing and motivating people, and as many training seminars are conducted on this subject around the world every day. And yet, it's interesting that even with all of this available



information, few companies succeed at creating a positive work environment. Let's see what's involved.

Four Key Skills

Creating a positive work environment is based on the following four key skills:

1. Tell people what you expect of them.
2. Show interest in your team members.
3. Create an encouraging environment.
4. Recognize and reward good performance.

Skill #1: State Your Expectations

Telling people what you expect of them means doing the following:

- Communicating expectations clearly
- Having a specific job description
- Identifying specific performance standards
- Specifying deadlines
- Setting goals

Skill #2: Show Interest in Your Team

What behaviors convey that someone is interested in you?

- Making eye contact
- Calling you by name
- Asking your opinion
- Smiling
- Complimenting your work
- Following your suggestions

These behaviors convey a lack of interest:

- Ignoring you
- Not knowing your name or not using it
- Not asking your opinion
- Ignoring your suggestions
- Not commenting on your work
- Following your suggestions, but only when heard from someone else

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Such signs discourage productivity because they make people feel discouraged, angry, less confident, and stripped of self-esteem.

Skill #3: Create an Encouraging Environment

Most people would agree that the following are characteristics of an encouraging work environment:

- Your ideas are valued
- Creativity is encouraged
- Risks are encouraged
- Fun and laughter are valued
- New ideas are rewarded
- You feel appreciated
- People thank you for your contributions
- Flexibility is valued
- You feel like part of the team

Skill #4: Recognize and Reward Good Performance

A reinforcer is anything that happens, based on a behavior, that tends to increase the chances that the behavior will be repeated. For example:

- Compliments
- Smiles
- Giving thumbs-up gesture
- Saying “Thank you”
- Giving a public announcement of your achievement
- Placing a positive letter in your personnel file
- Awarding a special parking space
- Promotion to first choice on schedule
- Placing picture on the bulletin board
- Recognizing with applause at a meeting

Recognition Guidelines

1. Describe the results you are recognizing. Be specific. It’s important to make certain the employee knows the specific relevant behavior or accomplishment.
2. State your personal appreciation. Say, “I appreciate it.” Adding your personal appreciation makes the compliment feel more genuine.
3. Encourage the person to continue producing such good work. This increases the chances that the person will repeat the desirable behavior.

Suggested Reading

Bob Nelson, *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*. New York, NY: Workman Publishing Company, 1994. ■

Adapted from an article by Rachel Barone, Ph.D., in the *Therapists Newsletter*. Used with permission.

EAP open during the summer

Something bothering you, but you haven’t had the time to schedule an appointment to talk to a counselor? The Employee Assistance Program is open all year. Feel free to schedule an appointment with an EAP specialist over the summer. Just call 240-314-1040.

Humor in the Workplace

Imagine that you are at work and about to get a cup of coffee from the machine down the hall. You notice that your coworker, Bob, approaches you with a smirk on his face and starts a conversation with the words, “Did you hear the one about the...” You may react in one of two ways. You may be friends with Bob and grin in anticipation of his joke, or you may dread it like hearing about your neighbor’s colonoscopy. Lucky for you, Bob had just read up on what is and is not appropriate humor in the workplace. For example, David Granirer, a Vancouver-based psychotherapist and part-time standup comic, outlines four rules that people in the workplace should follow:

Rule #1: Don’t make jokes about coworkers’ sexuality. People are very uncomfortable with sexual innuendo in a workplace. Your friends may find it hilarious, but unless all the people you work with are close friends you’ve known for years, leave

it at home, because someone is bound to be offended.

Rule #2: Don’t make jokes about people’s appearance. This is another emotionally charged area, and whether you agree or not, just don’t go there.

Rule #3: Avoid jokes about religion, ethnic background, nationality, and sexual orientation.

Rule #4: Avoid jokes about bodily functions. People may be offended.

You may be thinking, where does that leave me? What can I joke about? Mr. Granirer gives a few suggestions:

1. Yourself—your flaws, neuroses and inadequacies. When you make these jokes, people are brought closer to you because they can relate. So far, no one’s ever been sued for joking about him or herself.

2. The situation you all face (i.e., the upcoming meeting, the new reorganization, etc).

3. Personal characteristics in areas of low ego-involvement. Though most people are extremely sensitive about appearance, they’re much less invested in other aspects of themselves. For example, poking fun at Peter because he’d rather ski than do paperwork, or Mary because she has a distinctive laugh is relatively safe to do and communicates affection rather than disdain.

And what did Bob have to say?

“There is supposedly someone out there doing exactly the same thing as you at the same time as you. I found out who it was for me and gave them a phone call...but the line was busy.” ■

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is the most common form of depression. It follows the seasons. The most frequently seen form of SAD begins in late fall or early winter and normal mood returns in summer. A less common type of SAD, known as summer depression, begins in early summer. Summer SAD may be related to changes in the amount of daylight.

As many as 4 to 6 of every 100 people may have winter SAD. A much smaller number may have summer SAD. Although some children and teenagers get SAD, it usually doesn't affect people younger than 20.

Common symptoms of winter SAD include feelings of hopelessness and sadness, thoughts of suicide, weight gain, a heavy feeling in the arms or legs, a drop in energy levels, and irritability. Symptoms of the summer SAD include poor appetite, weight loss, insomnia, and anxiety.

Treatment

It's possible to successfully manage SAD. Treatments may include the following:

- **Light therapy.** This is the main treatment for many people with winter SAD. Light therapy involves sitting a few feet from a special lamp that's 10 to 20 times brighter than ordinary indoor lights for 30 minutes or more each day, usually in the morning. You can do activities, such as reading or eating breakfast, while sitting in front of the light.

Light therapy is easy to administer and has relatively few side effects. Nearly 70 percent of people experience a reduction of their symptoms from daily light therapy, and about 50 percent experience remission while undergoing light therapy. Light therapy needs to be done daily until springtime, when the sun shines for a longer period during the day. Lights from tanning beds cannot be used for light therapy, because tanning beds use potentially damaging ultraviolet light.

- **Medication.** Your doctor may prescribe an antidepressant medication in combination with light therapy, or as an alternative, if light therapy does not work. About 70 percent of people taking antidepressants have decreased symptoms, and about half experience

remission while taking medication.

Summer SAD may also be treated with antidepressants.

Examples of antidepressants include paroxetine (Paxil), sertraline (Zoloft), fluoxetine (Prozac, Sarafem), and venlafaxine (Effexor). In June 2006 the Food and Drug Administration approved bupropion HCL extended release tablets (Wellbutrin XL) for prevention of depressive episodes in people with a history of SAD.

The duration of treatment with medications varies. If you have a history of SAD, your doctor may suggest you start medication before the time your signs and symptoms usually develop and continue the medication beyond the time the signs and symptoms usually abate. This may be from the middle of fall to the middle of spring. If you have a double depression, in which an underlying depression is complicated during the winter by SAD, your doctor may prescribe treatment with medication for a longer period.

- **Psychotherapy.** Psychotherapy helps you identify and modify negative thoughts and behaviors that may influence signs and symptoms of SAD. You and your psychiatrist or therapist may also discuss ways to reduce stress in your life.

Coping skills

You can do things on your own to help you cope with seasonal depression. The following suggestions may help you better manage SAD:

- Increase the amount of light in your home. Open blinds, add skylights and trim tree branches that block sunlight.

- Get outside. Walk outdoors on sunny days, even during winter.

- Exercise regularly. Physical exercise helps relieve stress and anxiety, which can accentuate SAD. Being more fit can make you feel better about yourself.

- Find ways to relax. Learn how to better manage stress.

- Take a trip. If possible, take winter vacations in sunny, warm locations for winter SAD, or cooler locations for summer SAD.

If you think you might have SAD, either the summer or winter version, you might consider talking to your doctor about it, or, call EAP and schedule an appointment with a counselor. We can help you assess your symptoms and suggest next steps. ■

Quote:

A well-developed sense of humor is the pole that adds balance to your steps as you walk the tightrope of life. —William A. Ward

Ask EAP

Q. Do I have to pay for EAP services?

A. There is no cost to you as an employee or to any of your immediate family members who use the program. EAP is provided to you as a free resource paid for by MCPS. Your insurance will not be billed and you do not have any co-pay to worry about. Payment only comes into play if you are referred to an outside resource, and in that case every effort will be made to make sure the resource is compatible with your financial situation. ■

Do you have a question for EAP? Send us your questions via Outlook or the phone to Jeff Becker



Upcoming Dates and Events

June

National Aphasia Awareness Month
www.aphasia.org

June 11–17
National Men's Health Week
Men's Health Network
888-MEN-2-MEN (636-2636) Men's Healthline

www.menshealthweek.org
Materials available – Contact: Erin Hoffman

A Healthy Outlook!

To help employees with troubling issues before they become overwhelming.



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE

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You may contact us or send your questions and comments to
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Please note that e-mail is not necessarily confidential.

*Published by the Department of Communications
for the Employee Assistance Program*

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