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*Happy New Year from  
the staff of Family  
Service EAP!*

**Dealing with Employee  
Negativity**

Anyone can have a bad day at work. Employees have any number of stressors affecting their mood, and they may bring a negative attitude to work periodically. This kind of negativity is to be expected, and though it should be dealt with, it is not something to be very concerned about. However, an employee who is consistently negative or a culture of negativity in the workplace are both issues that need to be dealt with immediately. There are many ways to manage negativity in the workplace.

1) Listen to the employee or coworker's complaints until you are certain that they feel heard out and listened to. Ensure that you understand their complaints. Ask questions. Repeat back to them what they are saying to

ensure that you have heard correctly.

2) The employee may have legitimate reasons for his or her negativity. If you think he or she may have legitimate reasons, offer your assistance. Remember, however, that your role is not to provide therapy or counseling. Rather, you should provide short-term, simple advice and recommendations. If you feel that the employee's concerns are not legitimate, tell them what you think. Let them know that you disagree with their assessment of the situation.

3) Share inspirational stories. Sometimes, people who are negative truly believe that positive outcomes are not possible. Share stories about success, your own and others', with the person who is being negative in order to help refute these beliefs.

4) Use negativity to bring about strategies for change. Sit down with someone who is complaining and, together, come up with ways to change the situation. Negativity may continue, but if it does, remind the person that complaining does not change the situation, action does.

5) Press for solutions. If you hear a negative person continually bring up reasons why an idea will not work, ask that person and those who are present to come up with three potential

alternatives as solutions to the problems.

6) Create a visual. Draw a line down the middle of a board or a piece of paper. At the top of one column write, "Ways we could make this plan work," and on the other, write "Reasons this plan won't work." Have the group or negative person come up with ideas for each column. Once all thoughts are put out there, cross out the "Reasons this plan won't work" column. This puts the focus back on the solution and back on the positive.

Remember, you have the power to either ignore the negative person or make changes in the way you react to negativity. It can be very discouraging to work with or supervise someone who is negative, but if you can take action, even if that action does not work, you are moving forward in making a better workplace for yourself and you coworkers and employees.

*Adapted from  
[www.bottomlinecrets.com/article](http://www.bottomlinecrets.com/article) and  
[www.humanresources.about.com](http://www.humanresources.about.com)*

**Substance Abuse in the  
Workplace**

Alcohol and drug abuse in the workplace can create a number of problems, both financial and personal. With employees' active substance abuse comes increased absenteeism, injuries, and increased health insurance claims. In addition, substance abuse often creates a toll on



relationships and morale in the workplace.

It is often very difficult for those who are struggling with a substance abuse problem to get help and denial is often a major cause of this difficulty. Denial does not solely exist within the person who is actively using; it can also exist in those who work with that person and the company as a whole. There is often a temptation to protect the person who is using; however, this just serves to prolong the problem and feeds into denial.

How does a manager deal with substance abuse in the workplace? If you are aware of an employee who has a substance abuse problem, it is important to take action. Many companies have policies related to drug and alcohol use; in fact, companies that are contracted with or receive money from the federal government are required to have such policies, according to the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988. It is your responsibility to know your company's drug and alcohol policy, and if your company does not have one, consult with Human Resources or your supervisor. In addition, it is important to be aware of legal issues around dealing with drug and alcohol use in the workplace. Two websites to consult for information on this topic are:

[www.workplace.samhsa.gov/WPWorkit/legal](http://www.workplace.samhsa.gov/WPWorkit/legal)  
and  
[www.dol.gov/workingpartners](http://www.dol.gov/workingpartners)

If you do suspect that an employee has a substance abuse problem and is actively using, remember that you are not a counselor. Employee Assistance Programs began as a means of intervening to help employees with alcohol problems. Therefore, they are one of the best places to go for help. You can refer the employee for help from the EAP *and* you can call your EAP to get help in talking to the employee and dealing with the issue.

It is important that, at the same time as taking action to prevent and stop drug and alcohol use in the workplace, that the employee's rights are maintained. As much as possible, confidentiality should be kept and the employee should not be made to feel like a second class citizen. An effective supervisor and manager takes appropriate action in a way that protects the workplace and maintains the dignity of the employee.

### Effective Listening Skills

As a manager or supervisor, it is critical that you are able to listen effectively. Listening well is necessary to effectively communicate, and people who listen well are perceived as more effective leaders than those who do not listen as well.

The problem is that many people think that they are better listeners than they actually are. Have you ever had someone who suspects

you are not listening to them ask, "Did you hear what I just said?" You were probably able to repeat back what they said to you, but that is not effective listening. First, you are not effectively listening if you are not conveying to the person speaking that you are listening. Second, hearing and repeating something you have heard does not mean that you have understood what the person is trying to communicate.

There are a couple of skills you need to be an effective listener. The first skill is to be able to pay attention fully to the person who is speaking. This includes not only the words the person is saying, but also the body language and underlying meaning of what the person is trying to communicate. There are a few things that get in the way of this:

- 1) You are distracted by your own thoughts.
- 2) You are making judgments about the speaker and what they are saying.
- 3) You are waiting your turn to speak or you are rehearsing what you want to say.
- 4) You are doing other things.

Robert Bacal, in his article "Listen Up! Real Listening and How to Practice It" on [www.work911.com](http://www.work911.com) provides an activity that can be done at home to practice this skill:

- 1) Find a television program on which a speaker talks for a few minutes without interruption.
- 2) Attempt to give the speaker your entire attention for a set

period of time. You will notice that your attention wanders. Just practice bringing your attention back to the speaker until the set period of time has elapsed.

3) Once you feel like you have mastered this skill using the television, you can practice in actual conversation.

A second skill of effective listening is being able to understand and communicate your understanding of what the person is saying. You can do this by paraphrasing and repeating back what you think the person is trying to say. If you having a difficult time understanding what the speaker is trying to convey, an important practice is to ask questions and check to see if you are understanding correctly.

Building listening skills is an attainable goal that can go a long way in becoming a more effective manager, supervisor, and communicator with those around you. It just takes awareness and practice.

*Adapted from [www.work911.com](http://www.work911.com)*

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### Using the EAP

The Family Service, Inc. Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a confidential counseling and referral service to help you and your employees balance the demands of home and work.

- Call for help with: family/marital problems, substance abuse, parent/child problems, stress/anxiety, depression, coping with illness.
- Counseling and referral for employees and family members (locations in Merrimack Valley and So. NH)
- 24 hour a day, 7 days a week crisis support.
- Information and referrals for legal, financial and other support services.

1-800-683-9544

[www.FamilyServiceInc.com/EAP](http://www.FamilyServiceInc.com/EAP)