BALANCE

Employee Assistance Program Newsletter
Summer 2024

The EAP is a professional and confidential counseling service available to you and your family to help resolve personal problems before they affect your health, family or job. There is no cost to you or members of your family for services provided by the EAP.

In those cases where referrals are necessary, they can often be made to prescreened professionals or community organizations whose charges may be covered within the allowances of your health insurance. Call **845-638-8880** to arrange an appointment with an EAP specialist.

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From the Director

Susan Mazzarella, LCSW, CEAP

This issue of 'BALANCE' focuses on work life. Clearly our time spent at work occupies a great part of our day; subsequently our relationships there have a significant impact in our daily lives. The healthier our workplace relationships are the more productive and satisfied we are at our jobs. Conversely, the more problematic our relationships are at work the less effective and unsuccessful we are at work. Simply stated, those who play well with others at work will do well for it. Ultimately, one's success or failure at work is determined by their relationships in the workplace.

We will review key components of effective work relationships and managing emotions in the workplace. Additionally, team dynamics and work identity will be explored and lastly, conflict resolution and the loss of a co-worker.

We hope you enjoy this issue and welcome any comments or feedback you can give us on this topic. The EAP is available to confidentially assist employees experiencing workplace difficulties; please don't hesitate to contact us!

Opportunities are usually disguised as hard work, so most people don't recognize them.

Ann Landers
American Writer

Montefiore | Nyack

Workplace Relationships

Whether we like it or not workplace relationships matter! Effective work relationships are the key to success and satisfaction with one's job and career. The actions we take and the behaviors we exhibit with others at work can sabotage our current and future employment. No matter what one's education, experience or even title, if you can't work well with others, you won't accomplish your work goals. Successful work relationships form the basis for promotion, salary increases and overall job satisfaction.

Listed below are seven key aspects of effective work relationships. These actions create a positive, empowering, motivational work environment.

- **Bring suggested solutions with the problems to the table.** Identifying problems is the easy part. Coming forward with thoughtful solutions is a challenge that will earn respect and praise from coworkers and bosses.

- **Don't ever play the blame game.** You may need to identify who was involved in the problem, but the "it's not my fault" attitude is counterproductive. Publicly identifying and blaming others for problems will earn enemies and what you need at work are allies, not enemies.

- **Verbal and nonverbal communication matters.** When you talk down to others, use sarcasm, or just sound nasty, other employees hear you. People constantly scope out their environment and gravitate to the safest, non-threatening place or person.

- **Never blind side a coworker, boss or reporting staff person.** Always discuss problems first with the people directly involved. You can never build effective work alliances unless others trust you.

- **Keep your commitments.** If you fail to meet commitments, you affect the workflow and other coworkers. If you can't keep commitments make sure all affected employees know what happened. Provide an alternative due date and honor the new deadline.

- **Share credit for accomplishments, ideas, and contributions.** Take the time to thank, reward, recognize and specify the contributions of people who helped you succeed. This approach never fails.

- Help other employees find their greatness. Every employee has their own unique talent, skills and experience. The growth of each individual employee benefits the entire work organization. Compliment, recognize, praise and notice other's contributions. Doing so will offer great rewards.

In addition to forming alliances with coworkers building effective work relationships includes overcoming one's fears of confrontation and conflict. Not all of us act or think in the same way, subsequently conflicts arise. Human conflict is unavoidable; it's how we address conflict through direct communication and constructive confrontation that counts. Although not every action needs to be confronted, constructive confrontation is the only way to truly resolve differences.

Successfully confronting issues begins by preparing oneself to confront the real issue. One must be able to state the issue in one (or two), non-emotional, factual sentences.

After you make your initial statement stop talking. Allow the person you are confronting to respond. Don't further justify your statement by defending why you feel the way you do. This generally just creates an argument. It's necessary to avoid arguing during the confrontation. Confrontation does not mean fight or argument. It means stating what you have to say, listening to what the other person has to say and figuring out a conflict resolution. It's usually helpful to determine the conflict resolution you want before the confrontation. Meaningful confrontation and conflict resolution is paramount to effective work relationships and allows for alliances to form.

Ultimately, building strong alliances and effective work relationships are crucial in allowing us to accomplish our work goals. If you or a co-worker could benefit from job coaching or workplace support services, contact the EAP at **845-638-8880** or email us at MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org.

Managing Emotions in the Workplace

Research has shown that suppressing emotion is extremely detrimental to you and others whom you interact with. This doesn't mean you should run around screaming and yelling, but it does mean that you should develop necessary skills to express your emotions appropriately and productively. Keeping emotions 'bottled up' especially when you're at work takes energy, and that energy will be detracted from everything else you're trying to do, including your work. Self regulation, for the most part, is about managing your emotions and responses to situations and other people.

Some of the *"abilities" or "competencies"* that are necessary for self regulation are:

- Emotional self-control – the ability to control impulsive responses by thinking about the emotions you're experiencing, then choosing a response rather than reacting impulsively.

- Trustworthiness – being honest and taking action that is in line with your values.

- Flexibility – being able to adapt and work with different people in different situations.

- Optimism – the ability to see opportunities in various situations and the good in other people.

- Achievement – developing your performance to meet your own standards of excellence.

- Controlling negative reactions – recognizing what you're feeling, especially anger, fear or frustration, then consciously choosing the best way to react in a situation. This doesn't mean covering up negative reactions, denying them or blocking them out, which would be equally counterproductive.

Self-regulation is a key component of life satisfaction and success. Proper self regulation enables us to manage change, and any curve ball life throws at us. It's the recognition and skill set that allows us to choose the best response for the situation rather than being a slave to impulsive emotions. If you, your co-worker or a family member is struggling with self-regulation, contact the EAP at **845-638-8880** or MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org.
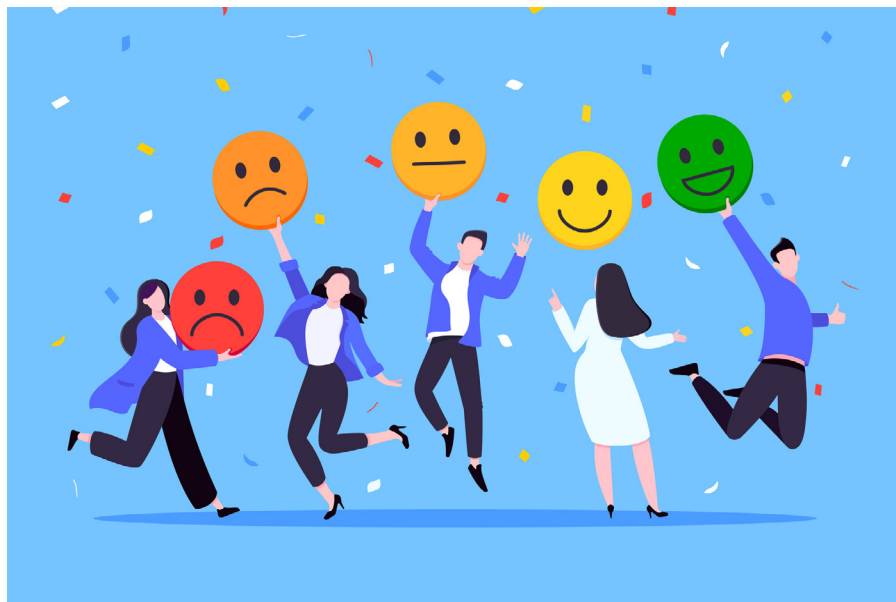
<u>Work Identity and Team Dynamics</u>

We are all unique individuals; therefore, our values may be quite different from those held by others on the work team. Everyone has something from their own personal identity to contribute to the work environment. A sense of purpose, significance, and worth will affect our attitudes about work (e.g., meaningfulness of work). Without question one's work identity contributes to positive (or negative) team dynamics.

Whatever the task, work can provide a sense of belonging, of contributing to an organization with a "bigger purpose". This sense of contribution helps us to feel valued in society. Work also provides structure for the day, week and year, and a commitment to oneself and others. It can also provide friends, camaraderie, and support during difficult times.

Work identity plays a major role in fostering self-esteem, an essential ingredient of good mental health. It helps us to feel valued as a person and provides a sense of accomplishment, feelings of pride and goal attainment. In the U.S., work plays a major role in our self-esteem and personal identity. It is important to note that work identity should be part of one's personal identity, but not the only element of one's overall identity. A healthy sense of self includes balancing one's work life with one's personal life.

When we develop healthy attachments to our place of work, we are enriching the connection between our individual identities and the meaningfulness of work relationships and team dynamics. In the long run, enriching the overall work environment and promoting organizational success.

Team dynamics and positive work relationships are influenced by four types of individual differences. The challenge of the work team is to find the unique combination of values that the team supports while recognizing individual styles. Therefore, each member benefits the entire team and the team is successful in meeting its goals. Common individual differences that affect team dynamics are:

1. One's interpersonal style – whether a person talks fast, loudly, or softly, uses hand gestures, or withdraws quietly when doing their work or one who needs support, etc.

2. One's personal work style – whether a person is organized or disorganized, also how they set priorities. We all like to do certain tasks rather than others; however, we need to understand how our actions affect the people around us and impact the overall team goals.

3. Experience and background – New workers may come into the work group and want to change everything; veterans need to be willing to consider new ideas.

4. Communication styles – how people send and receive information. Do individuals communicate directly, respectfully, and clearly?

Overall team success is dependent on one's ability to work well with different people and respecting and understanding individual differences. Individual attributes such as, honesty, friendliness and thoroughness all enhance team success. Also important to team success is determining what company values are reflected on the team and establishing team norms. Reflecting on one's individual values, work goals, and personal attributes helps to highlight one's contributions to overall team dynamics. The EAP is available to confidentially assist individuals with these issues as they relate to one's success and satisfaction at work. We can be reached at **845-638-8880** or email us at MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org.

Resolving Workplace Conflict

Conflict in the workplace is not necessarily a bad thing and ultimately is a part of "doing business". In fact, healthy conflict at work can lead to questions and discussions and opens up new ways of thinking and problem resolution. Ultimately, conflict is a normal and natural part of any workplace. With that being said however conflict can and often does impact team dynamics. Since teams are required to work closely with each other, it's important to address issues as they arise within a team. Consequently, this reinforces the fact that the team functions as a unit and that working together as one is a priority. Teams should be reminded that conflict is healthy and encouraged as long as it's productive. Conflicts also may occur between small groups or pairs of individuals and can be dealt with in similar ways as team conflicts. For smaller groups, healthy debate and dialogue should be encouraged.

Typically there are two responses to conflict: avoid or battle it out. In either case we often feel uncomfortable or dissatisfied with the results because no resolution was achieved. Learning to constructively resolve conflict can turn potentially destructive workplace situations into opportunities for creativity, enhanced performance and improved workplace morale.

Some of the main causes for workplace conflict are the following:

- **Poor Communication:** different communication styles can lead to misunderstandings between employees or between employee and manager. Lack of communication and/or poor communication often lead to relational conflicts in the work group.
- **Different Values:** any workplace is made up of individuals who see the world differently. Conflict can occur when there is a lack of acceptance and understanding of other's differences.
- **Differing Interests:** conflict can occur when individual workers disagree while attempting to achieve their own personal goals, ignoring organizational goals and overall team and organizational well-being.
- **Scarce Resources:** employees feel they have to compete for available resources in order to do their job, therefore leading to inevitable conflict.
- **Personality Clashes:** the workplace is made up of differing personalities. Colleagues need to understand and accept each other's approach to work and problem-solving, otherwise conflicts will occur.
- **Poor Performance:** when one or more individuals within a work group are not performing and the issue is not addressed, conflict is inevitable.

Despite one's best intentions however, work relationships and team dynamics can sometimes become strained. Many of us are uncomfortable with conflict as we often lack conflict resolution skills and are afraid of getting hurt or losing out. Building effective work relationships includes overcoming one's fears and avoidance of conflict. Avoiding conflict is often the easiest way to deal with it, however pushing the conflict underground, only to have it resurface in a new form is counterproductive. Actively resolving conflict when it occurs allows for staff to satisfactorily work through their differences therefore allowing work relationships to deepen, become stronger and more resilient. Ultimately, conflict can be productive, beneficial and empowering.

Key steps to resolving workplace conflict constructively include:

1. Honestly and carefully determine what the real issue is and then prepare oneself to address the issue with those involved.
2. Define the actual cause of the conflict. If there is any uncertainty about how or what the conflict is about enlist your adversary in finding out what the real issue is; simply state your uncertainty as to the cause for the disagreement.
3. State your perception of the issue in one (or two), non-emotional, factual sentences.
4. After making the initial statement stop talking; listen actively. This means listening with the intent to understand not respond. Healthy communication is the key to resolving problems and feeling heard is the first step toward reconciliation.
5. Allow the person you're confronting to respond. Validating and accepting your adversary's perception does not obligate you to share it. By doing so, you're inviting them to join in the resolution process.

Resolving Workplace Conflict (continued)

6. Don't attempt to further justify your statement by defending why you feel the way you do. (This generally just creates more conflict and an ensuing argument).
7. Mutually determine a resolution to the conflict. Establish and design an agreement for a process you both will work through. Usually after emotions are lifted we're available to generate and evaluate solutions. When possible, note the agreed upon resolution and the plan of action.

To clarify, constructive confrontation does not mean to fight or argue; it means stating what you have to say, listening to what the other person has to say and jointly figuring out a resolution to the conflict. If necessary, in an effort to preserve communication, agree to disagree.

Healthy work relationships, team dynamics and conflict resolution are key components in making one's work day a successful experience. Diffusing workplace conflict is a commitment to one's own emotional wellbeing as well as to a better functioning workplace. Other tips to making your work day successful include stepping away from the mind-set to "be right" which tends to increase feelings of resentment, and balancing work and personal responsibilities along with fun and relaxation.

If you or a loved one is having difficulty within your work area involving these issues, please contact the EAP for confidential guidance at **845-638-8880** or email us at MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org.

References:
www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communications/conflict-resolution-skills
https://hr.ou.edu/Employees/Career-Development/Resolving-Conflicts-at-Work
www.forbes.com/sites

Loss of a Co-Worker

As co-workers learn together, overcome challenges together, and sometimes spend more hours together in a week than with their own families, a bond is inevitably formed. Overtime, colleagues can become as close to us as our extended family. As a result, the loss of a co-worker can mimic the emotional pain that occurs from the death of a loved one.

As surviving co-workers we are vulnerable to the same feelings of sadness, shock, and anger that can set in when a loved one dies. Even when a co-workers death is the result of a prolonged illness, employees may still feel disbelief when they hear the news or experience anticipatory grief, while they prepare for the impending loss.

Unlike families who are afforded as much time as they need to mourn, work environments are usually not afforded that opportunity. Organizations are challenged to strike a delicate balance between providing support and guiding the transition to 'business as usual'. This can be especially difficult since grief is a process that requires time and each employee's grief will vary in length, intensity, and nature. Managing the death of a co-worker is unsettling for everyone. Here are some suggestions for all team members that may be helpful:

- **Share how you feel.** Your co-workers may be able to relate to the emotions your feeling and it is important to remember that you are not alone. Relying on mutual support is a great strategy to help everyone through the grieving process.

- **Show Empathy.** Although grief may be considered a private matter, remember that people cannot control where or how they grieve. If you notice a co-worker struggling at work, show concern and offer to help or listen.

- **Contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).** Experienced counselors can help you cope with the loss and learn to manage your grief more effectively.

- **Grief is personal, and everyone reacts differently.** There may be times when we are surprised by our own grief response. Similarly, don't judge a coworker's reaction that is different than yours.

If you are experiencing grief due to the death of a coworker and would like additional information, resources and/or support, call the EAP at **845-638-8880** or e-mail us at MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org.