EAP SUPERVISOR ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

Deer Oaks EAP Services

June 2024

DEER OAKS PRESENTS

Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series

Advanced Coaching Skills for Leaders

Date: Monday, July 29, 2024
Time: 1:00 PM–2:00 PM CST

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YOUR PROBLEM-SOLVING TOOLBOX

Some problems are easy to deal with. You've encountered them before, and you know just what to do. Others can be more difficult, such as problems with relationships, finances, work or school, or problems that come up during a significant life change. When you face new or complex problems, or problems that leave you feeling stuck, it's time to draw on your toolbox of problem-solving resources. It can also help to follow a step-by-step problem-solving approach.

Your Problem-Solving Resources
You may not realize it when you're confronting a difficult problem, but you have a well-stocked toolbox of resources to draw on. These may include:

- Your qualities and strengths, such as your curiosity, resilience, self-awareness, determination, courage, creativity and flexibility.

- Your skills and abilities, which might include your communication and listening skills, your ability to analyze situations and think critically, your ability to plan and prioritize, and your ability to calm yourself and regulate your emotions.

- Your supportive social connections – the people in your life whom you can talk to; share your concerns with; bounce ideas off of; get honest feedback from; and turn to for help, guidance and support

Steps in Problem-Solving
Building on your existing toolbox of resources, here's one more: a step-by-step approach to problem-solving that can be applied, with variations, to almost any problem you face.

Step 1: Identify the problem.
The first step in solving any problem is to notice, acknowledge and identify it. Ignoring the problem won't solve it and may lead to the problem getting even worse over time. When identifying a problem, it's important to distinguish between the symptoms of the problem and the problem itself. Write down a description of the problem you're trying to solve, being as specific and concrete as possible. Imagine, too, what would be different for you and others if the problem were solved. That vision can serve as your goal as you take steps to address the problem.

Step: 2: Break the problem down, or look for its causes.
Ask yourself questions about the problem to break it down and get at its causes. Why is this a problem? When did it begin? In what situations does it come up? Who does the problem affect? How has it affected you and others? Have you solved a similar problem before? What's different about this problem that's making it harder for you to solve?

Digging deeper into the problem can help you distinguish between symptoms of the problem and the problem itself, or help you identify the part of the problem that's most important to solve. Sometimes, asking a series of 'why' questions can help you get to the problem's causes.

It can also be helpful to get another viewpoint as you break a problem down. That might be a friend or work colleague who has a different perspective or relevant experience.

Step 3: Make a list of possible solutions.

Once you've identified the problem that needs to be solved or the causes of the problem that needs to be addressed, make a list of all the possible solutions you can think of, even ones that seem impractical or even silly. Don't judge or rank the ideas as you're generating them. Be as open-minded and creative as possible as you generate ideas, and make as long a list as possible.

Involve other people who might help you come up with ideas you might not think of yourself. That might be friends, work colleagues (for a work problem) or a professional counsellor or coach (for an emotional problem or one involving hard-to-change habits). You may need to do some research to learn about solutions that have worked for others in similar situations. A book, online research or a conversation with an expert might help you identify potential solutions you're unlikely to think of on your own.

Don't rush this process. Fresh ideas might come to you after you sleep on the problem, or when you're doing something else and not working at coming up with ideas.

Step 4: Weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each possible solution.

Once you have a good list of possible solutions, consider the advantages and disadvantages of each. You might do this by making a chart with columns to note pros and cons. For each possible approach, consider whether it would really solve the problem, how hard it would be to act upon and whether making it work is within your control or would depend on other people changing their behavior.

Try to be rational and realistic, avoiding overly negative or overly optimistic thinking, but also pay attention to your feelings. How would you feel if you were to act on a particular solution? As you narrow your list of options, think about the worst possible outcome if you were to try a solution, the best possible outcome and the most likely outcome.

Step 5: Choose a solution to try.

From your options, choose a solution or combination of solutions to try. You're not looking for the perfect solution. That probably doesn't exist. You're choosing the one that seems to have the best chance of working for you.

Step 6: Map out a plan of how to act on the solution.

Once you've settled on an approach to try, make a step-by-step plan for making it happen. What will you need to do differently than you do now for this to work? What resources or support will you need? How will you need to communicate your plan, and to whom? What step or steps will you need to take first?
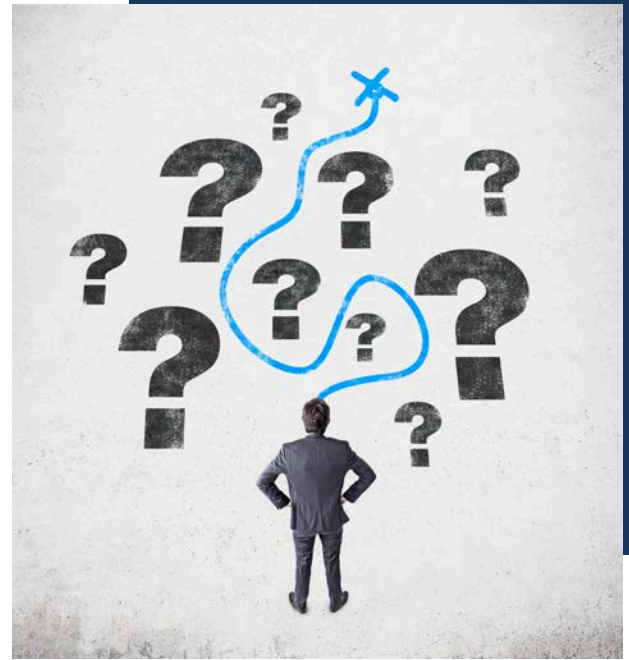
Step 7: Put your plan into action.

Starting with one small step, put your plan into action. Allow yourself to experience the feeling of success as you make progress, even small progress, and keep building on those successes.

Step 8: Review and adjust.

As you make progress on implementing your solution, pay attention to how it's going. Is it working? Are you getting closer to solving the problem you set out to solve? If not, what might you do differently or what other solutions might you try?

Don't worry if you don't solve your problem on the first try. Look at it as a chance to learn and grow. You'll know more, and have new skills and experience, when you try again in a different way.

Source: *Morgan, H. (2024, March 6). Your problem-solving toolbox (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).*

INTERVENTIONS TO REDUCE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH RISKS FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

Some researchers have recommended preparedness and assessing the suitability of new staff for the first responder role before they begin work, in order to ensure that their personality and mental health status are such that they can handle the stress of work as a first responder.1 They have also emphasized the importance of being prepared for the potential psychological impact of the job, as well as of mental health trainings and briefings.1 A number of disaster preparedness and response actions have been suggested by Mitchell (2011), Brooks and colleagues (2015, 2016), and Quevillon and colleagues (2016), as described in the sections that follow.1,2,3,4

Preparedness

Leaders and managers can take these steps to support the behavioral health of their teams:

- Plan in advance of disaster mobilization, and develop clear written protocols and strategic plans.2 This is important for the behavioral health of first responders because the feeling of being well-prepared and the sense of doing a job well serve as protective factors against behavioral health issues and conditions.4

- Include all team members in the development of the protocol, and ensure they are all adequately trained.2 Teamwork and sense of community serve as major protective factors for disaster workers.4 High sense of team accomplishment and assurance of personal and team capabilities were associated with reduced stress levels.1

- Gather as much information as possible about the disaster to reduce the dangers from disaster exposure.2 Perceived dangers to wellbeing and safety were linked to anxiety, depression, and general psychiatric syndromes.1

- Develop a clearly defined leadership cadre, establish sub-teams, and determine factors that could prevent some team members from participating.2 Organizations should put the welfare of their team at the forefront and move toward a more supportive attitude.4

- Model the structure of the team on the Incident Command System (ICS)2: https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/olc/moodle/ds_online_orientation/viewf265.html.

- Ask potential responders before the disaster to be aware of the stress they are dealing with, and to assess whether they have the capacity to deal with the additional stress the disaster situation will involve. Recognize good work during the disaster, empower staff, and assign responsibility to staff members to have a protective effect.4

First responders can take these steps to protect their own behavioral health before deployment:

- Be aware of personal vulnerability, signs of burnout and compassion fatigue, or profound psychological pain; these were symptoms observed by therapists working for long periods with people who have been directly traumatized.4,5

- Make plans prior to the disaster for self-care during the disaster response and plan on taking breaks, sleeping adequately, eating nutritious meals, and exercising during relief work.4

Response

During and after the response, leaders and managers can act as follows to support their teams:

- Develop clear lines of communication.2
- Assess the welfare of the team, resolve any conflicts between team members, and rotate assignments.2 The role of leadership is crucial in maintaining the mental health of their team.4
- Encourage workers to pair up in a "buddy system" to support each other and monitor each other's stress reactions; provide support to them if needed in doing so.4
- Provide mental health and resilience training, and promote counseling and debriefing following stressful situations.1,4
- Provide team group sessions upon the return to home base, as well as staff support services.2 No further assignments should be given before the workers have had sufficient time to recover; relief workers need some time to adjust, ease back into personal life, and take some time before returning to work.4

Public Health Intervention Models

Behavioral health interventions to increase resilience and reduce the risk of behavioral health problems in first responders have been tested in a number of studies. In an intervention study for public health personnel without mental health training, a training program in psychological first aid (PFA) increased self-efficacy and confidence in personal resiliency.5

Special forces police were eager to participate in the resilience-promotion training program in another study, and they believed their stress reaction was reduced by the program, and that the reduction could improve their performance in the line of duty. They also reported that they felt that resilience training should be provided to special force police officers and that they would recommend the program for their peers.6 In an Australian study, firefighters received four hours of resilience training; while the intervention was unable to show evidence of reducing PTSD, the follow-up period was limited, which might have influenced the results.7

In a literature review study that investigated 25 burnout-intervention studies, about 80 percent of all studies led to positive effects on burnout; and about 82 percent of all person-directed interventions led to a significant reduction in burnout or positive changes in its risk factors, lasting up to six months after the intervention; while a combination of both person- and organization-directed interventions had longer-lasting positive effects of 12 months and over. However, the study found that

the positive effects fade with time, and they suggested a refresher course to enhance the effect of the intervention.8

In a study to evaluate a peer-support training program in six public health agencies, the participants demonstrated increased knowledge concerning their ability to identify stress injuries, initiate and maintain conversations, motivate peers to follow through with help-seeking behavior, and provide acute stress management.9 Peer-support programs have emerged as the standard practice for supporting staff in many organizations in which employees are at a high risk of experiencing potentially traumatic events. The rationale behind them often includes the goals of meeting the legal and moral duty to care for employees as well as addressing the multiple barriers to standard care, including stigma, lack of time, poor access to providers, lack of trust, and fear of job repercussions.10 These programs amount to a cultural shift in these professions, in which people typically have not talked much about their feelings regarding their work, particularly their distress.

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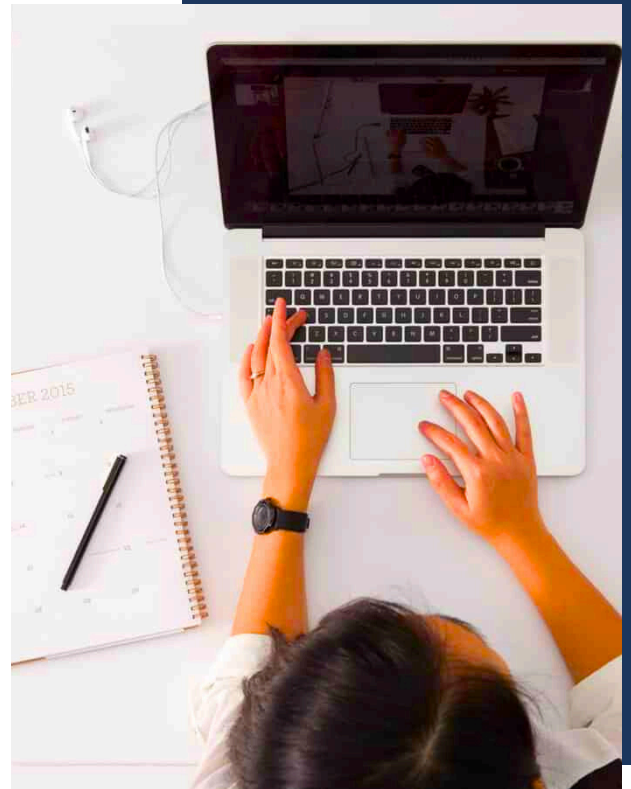
ASK YOUR EAP!

Q. Our recently hired employee had superior performance for six or seven weeks, but since then, everything has gone downhill with this person not producing good work. Some colleagues say to let the new employee go during the probation period, but I am not sure. Any advice?

A. Consult with your human resources advisor in matters of employment, discipline, and separation. Many factors may play a part in your organization's decision about what it ultimately wants to do. An EAP would decline offering an opinion in such a matter. If your management advisors support a decision to make an EAP referral, share documentation with the EAP, particularly a detailed account of the decline in work performance. Often, employee assistance professionals can identify through performance patterns what sort of personal problems exist, especially if the performance record is available during the EAP assessment. The satisfactory work initially is a strong indicator of the worker's potential, but it may take a confidential EAP assessment to identify the true cause of the decline in performance. Avoiding turnover and resurrecting a good work record appears reasonable in this instance.

Q. My employee is telling new coworkers that I am unfair and that they should be careful in the office because I play favorites. Of course, I heard this secondhand, but I think the source is credible. How should I respond?

A. Addressing this situation is important because it can adversely affect morale. Have a private meeting with this employee to discuss their concerns. Show yourself to be completely open-minded with a desire to resolve the issues. Begin the conversation by expressing your concerns about what you heard. Seek clarity because the secondhand information you received may not be entirely accurate. Listen completely, don't become defensive, and don't interrupt. It is to your advantage to support open communication, and in this regard explain or clarify the matters perceived as favoritism to the employee concerned. Share how you make decisions and any factors that influence your thinking. Emphasize the importance of employees coming to you directly rather than venting in such a way that rumors or gossip result. Ask the employee for input as to how they would like decisions made, actions taken, or changes made. Monitor employee communication for a while, and promptly address any similar instances that arise. Document the discussion.