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# STATE OF MINNESOTA

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

### Supervisor's Manual

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STATE OF MINNESOTA  
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM  
SUPERVISOR'S MANUAL

WAYNE FREY

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Assistance Training Institute, Inc.

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## INTRODUCTION

As a supervisor, you know that the efficient functioning of any organization is directly related to the performance of each and every member or employee. On the other hand, the performance of each employee depends, to a great extent, upon the well-being of that employee. When an employee's performance begins to slip below acceptable standards, you, the supervisor, can often be caught between two "loyalties" in selecting your course of action: 1) your duty to (and the efficiency of) the organization, and 2) your concern for the well-being of the employee. This can be one of the most frustrating parts of a supervisor's job.

Recognizing the relationship between organizational efficiency and employee well-being, the State of Minnesota has implemented an Employee Assistance Program which is designed to help the State of Minnesota and the supervisor constructively manage the employee whose personal problems are interfering with job performance.

While one of the basic goals of this program is the recovery of valuable employees through the provision of needed assistance, these points should be emphasized. First, as far as the supervisor's role is concerned, the program should in no way be interpreted as an invasion of privacy. It is not a "witch-hunt". Supervisors are to evaluate what happens on the job, not what happens in the personal lives of employees. Second, the program is not to be regarded as permissive. It may seem that since the program is designed to help employees whose performance is below acceptable levels, supervisors should be lenient with such employees. On the contrary, as will be seen in the course, the success of the program depends upon fair and consistent application of standard procedures applicable to poor performance and related job problems.

The supervisory training course and this manual are provided to help you understand and implement the employee assistance program. The success of the program depends upon each and every one of you using it. As a supervisor, you are the person who can make the program work...and you can make the program work for you.

### Two Principles

The employee assistance program is based on two principles which, if applied correctly, produce significant results in terms of both assisting employees with serious personal problems and reducing costs through reduced absenteeism, increased efficiency, lowered insurance premiums, etc.

The first of these two principles is that early identification of increasingly serious personal problems can usually be achieved through resulting deficiencies in job performance. The accuracy of this principle has been proven time and time again - where the personal problem itself is not identifiable, its effect on job performance usually is. This is not to say that the supervisor can identify specific personal problems through job performance difficulties nor is

it to say that all employees who have performance difficulties necessarily have personal problems. It means that if supervisors observe job performance and work behavior, take the appropriate action when a performance problem appears, and refer the employee to the professional Diagnostic and Referral Counselor, the employee who does have a personal problem will have that problem identified in its early stages and will be referred for appropriate treatment with resultant benefits to both the employee and the State of Minnesota.

The second principle is that the just use of disciplinary action and its implied threat of job loss is a powerful motivator in terms of getting the employee to resolve the personal problems causing the performance difficulty. Of course, such action is a powerful motivator in getting the employee to improve performance no matter what the cause, but where a personal problem does exist, this action, combined with an offer of assistance, strongly motivates the employee to follow through, accept the assistance, and resolve the problem. This too has been demonstrated time and time again.

When these two principles are applied correctly, you and the State of Minnesota have a natural solution for many personnel problems, yet neither has to become overly involved in the personal problems or personal lives of employees.

#### Objectives of the Training Program

The overall goal of the training course is to teach the supervisor what the program is and how to utilize it in day-to-day operations. Here are some major objectives.

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <u>POLICY</u>                   | To understand the official stance of the State of Minnesota as expressed in the policy on the program.  |
| <u>PERSONAL PROBLEMS</u>        | To increase awareness of the seriousness of problems such as chemical dependency, marital and family stress, mental illness, etc., and their widespread effects ( <u>intended to increase awareness only - not intended as a counseling or diagnostic course</u> ). |
| <u>JOB PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS</u> | To increase supervisor's ability to identify job performance and work behavior problems in his/her work area, and constructively manage such situations through constructive use of available practices and procedures.   |
| <u>REFERRAL</u>                 | To train supervisors in the use of the referral systems to assist in resolving performance and other problems in the work area.   |
| <u>BENEFITS</u>                 | To make supervisors aware of benefits of program to employees, to themselves and to the State of Minnesota.   |

WHEREAS, the State of Minnesota recognizes that chemical dependency and other personal problems can interfere with the job performance of State employees, and;

WHEREAS, it is in the legitimate interest of the employee and the State of Minnesota to provide an employee assistance program that deals with such problems and offers professional diagnostic and referral services;

NOW THEREFORE, the State of Minnesota adopts the following policy, and will deal with affected employees within the following framework:

1. Chemical Dependency can be resolved more successfully if it is identified in its early stages and immediate steps are taken to refer the person to appropriate professional counseling. The employee assistance program can facilitate this early identification.
2. Unsatisfactory job performance which does not yield to correction by routine supervisory assistance may indicate that referral to a professional diagnostic and referral counselor is needed. Employees may be referred to diagnostic and referral counselors by their supervisors or union stewards, or they may voluntarily seek assistance through the program.
3. State of Minnesota employees are assured that when they are referred to a professional diagnostic and referral counselor, such referrals will be handled in a completely private manner. Employees' jobs, future job opportunities, and job rights and benefits will not be jeopardized by using this professional service, either upon individual decision or upon supervisory or union steward referral. All records relating to diagnosis and referral will be kept confidential as the term is defined under Title 42, Part 2, of the Code of Federal Regulations and under Minnesota Statutes 15.162 to .169, and other applicable Federal or State Laws.
4. Employees referred to professional diagnostic and referral counselors by their supervisors or union stewards may be asked to obtain further services if such are indicated as necessary to resolve their problem.
5. When a diagnosis and referral is made by the counselor, the employee may use sick leave if the prescribed treatment or rehabilitation program is made available under hospitalization or health benefits presently offered to the employees of the State of Minnesota.
6. Every employee deserves the opportunity and has the right to follow through on the recommendations offered by the professional diagnostic and referral counselor. However, continued unsatisfactory job performance may be cause for appropriate action as defined in existing rules and regulations of the Department of Personnel and existing union agreements.

12/22/77





## TYPICAL PERSONAL PROBLEMS CAUSING PERFORMANCE DIFFICULTY

Although many types of problems can cause difficulties on the job, the serious personal problems that are usually at fault for long-term performance difficulties are chemical dependency, marital and family, financial, medical, mental health, vocational and legal. Information on these is provided to increase your awareness of the widespread incidence and effects of these problems, not to teach you how to diagnose or counsel these problems. IT CANNOT BE EMPHASIZED TOO STRONGLY THAT DIAGNOSING AND COUNSELING PERSONAL PROBLEMS IS NOT A PART OF THE SUPERVISOR'S JOB UNDER THE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM. (See page 19 for further information). Attempts to diagnose a problem or counsel an employee with performance problems, on the part of the supervisor, will be detrimental to the program.

It should also be emphasized that these personal problems can result in all kinds of performance and work behavior problems; no one personal problem produces any one kind of performance difficulty.

Following are brief explanations on each of these personal problems indicating their seriousness.

Chemical Dependency Characteristically the most severe problem affecting performance, chemical dependency includes abuse of or addiction to alcohol and other drugs such as barbiturates, amphetamines and tranquilizers.

Alcoholism. Alcohol is a sedative drug and addiction to it is known as alcoholism. While most Americans who drink alcohol suffer no ill effects, almost 10% of adults who drink will develop an alcohol dependency. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 5-10% of any given employee population will have alcoholism affecting performance, and the employer loses about 25% of each alcoholic employee's yearly income because of such performance problems. Alcoholism, one of America's leading public health problems, is the greatest single cause of lost time and inefficient performance in the occupational setting. It is a "democratic" illness, occurring at all organizational levels, affecting both men and women of all ages. Myths, misconceptions and half-truths about alcoholism and alcoholics are rife, ranging from the stereotype of the "skid row" drunk to the belief that alcoholism is a sign of moral weakness. The fact is that alcoholism is an illness, recognized as such by the American Medical Association. It ranks among the major national health problems, along with cancer, mental illness, and heart disease. The illness can be treated, it can be arrested to the point that the alcoholic can live a normal, productive life. The spouse and children of an alcoholic are often severely affected by his/her illness and also require assistance.

Other Drug Dependencies. In the occupational setting, the drugs most often abused are those normally prescribed by a doctor as opposed to more street-type drugs such as narcotics or marijuana. Barbiturates are sedatives (depressants) and are highly addictive. Taken in small amounts under the direction of a doctor, they are not considered dangerous, but if taken in larger than prescribed doses over a period of months, addiction is almost inevitable. Like alcohol, large doses of barbiturates produce drowsiness, an inability to solve even simple problems, and impairment of speech

and muscle control. Amphetamines are stimulants and while they are not addictive, continued use can be habit-forming. In mild doses, these drugs create feelings of enthusiasm, well-being and competence, but in large doses or doses continued over a long period of time they produce bizarre behavior and increasing impairment of judgement and performance. Because one's tolerance for amphetamines increases so quickly, it is usually impossible to remain on mild doses for long periods of time. Tranquilizers are sedatives or depressants and can become addictive through prolonged use. Unlike barbiturates, moderate doses of tranquilizers normally do not affect intellectual functions.

Sedativism. Alcohol, barbiturates, and tranquilizers are sedatives (depressants) and addiction to them is known as sedativism. Their addictions are physiological; that is, the very cells of the body are addicted to the drug. In contrast, amphetamines are not sedatives and are not bodily addictive; one becomes mentally and emotionally dependent upon amphetamines.

The following drugs are less frequently a problem in the occupational setting.

Opiates (Opium and its derivatives, morphine, heroin, paregoric, and codeine) are narcotics, are illegal and are dangerous. Both mentally and physically addictive, tolerance for these drugs builds rapidly creating a costly addiction if used daily for a month or more. Cocaine, a drug derived from the leaves of the coca plant, is a stimulant. Although cocaine is not physically addictive, its user may become mentally dependent upon the drug. Prolonged use can produce bizarre delusions and behavior. Marijuana is similar to alcohol in some respects, notably in that it produces a state of mild euphoria and increases self-confidence while decreasing motor, intellectual and perceptual functions. The long term effects and addictive potential of marijuana have not been conclusively established.

Marital  
and  
Family

According to a 1975 poll, the divorce rate in our country today is 44%. Marital problems and the family problems (children, parents, in-laws) that often accompany them can usually be helped if the problem is identified early enough and if the couple seeks help. Too often the relationship has already deteriorated beyond reasonable hope by the time the couple seeks a marital counselor (many marital counselors refer to themselves as divorce counselors). This problem does show up in performance; early identification of the performance problem and referral can sometimes save a family or at least help the employee through the emotional stresses of divorce.

Financial

Few people go through life without experiencing financial difficulties at one time or another, so most of us can understand how this problem affects performance. When the problem becomes serious, performance can be seriously affected in a variety of ways. Fortunately, this difficulty is relatively easy to resolve through community resources.

Medical

Many medical problems interfere with performance (eye and ear trouble, nervous disorders, ulcers and others) and can be identified and treated through this program. Diabetes, for example, is a serious medical problem that affects balance, perception, etc., yet it is estimated that more than 1/2 million Americans have diabetes and don't know it.

Mental Health

While the effect of mental health problems is more often seen in employee relations than in performance, the impact is still detrimental to overall efficiency. With proper therapy, these problems can usually be resolved.

Vocational

Employees who are not suited for the jobs they hold or find after some years that they don't like the work they are doing are said to have vocational problems. It is easy to understand why employees who have prepared for months or years for the position they hold, only to find they don't like it, would have job performance problems. Normally, vocational counseling and testing will help resolve the problem.

Legal

Legal problems are often associated with other problems we've discussed so far - divorce, arrest for petty misdemeanors, bankruptcy. However, worry about other legal problems such as legal suits and tax problems can also detract from overall performance.

Combinations

In most cases, job performance difficulties are caused by a combination of these problems rather than any one problem. Drug dependency, for example, may produce medical and mental health complications. Alcoholism may involve any or all of the other problems noted above; the alcoholic person is usually experiencing marital, financial and medical problems in addition to alcoholism. The alcoholism of another member of the family may be the root of a family problem. Financial, marital and family problems are often intermingled.

Problems-  
Everyone

All people suffer one or more of these problems at some time in their lives. While some problems may be resolved relatively easily, others are more complex and require the aid of special resources. Often, to ignore or refuse this aid can mean that the problem will continue unresolved and develop into more serious situations. It is the employee's responsibility to avail himself/herself of these resources, should he/she need them, and bring his/her job performance back to acceptable levels.

## PATTERNS OF JOB PERFORMANCE DEFICIENCIES

The key words in relation to the job performance problems noted below are continuing and repeated. A pattern of job performance deficiency should begin to appear. This requires documentation.

NOTE: For the most part, the headings listed in this section are categories or types of performance problems as opposed to specific, documentable performance problems. For example, "on-the-job absenteeism" or "difficulty in concentration" are far too general to be documented. (See page 9.)

REMEMBER: Often, the employee having these job performance problems has been employed by the State of Minnesota for more than one year and has a history of good or excellent work.

1. Absenteeism. The patterns of absenteeism vary from person to person, whatever the cause. The following are some general patterns. Generally, any excess absenteeism and increases in absenteeism should be noted.
  - a. Unauthorized leave. (Absent without call-in, leaving work without supervisor's acknowledgement, coming in late without reporting to supervisor, etc.) The supervisor should always take action in the case of unauthorized leave, even if it is only talking the incident over with the employee. If this should happen more than once in one year, other action and/or a referral may be indicated.
  - b. Excessive sick leave or calling in sick. One good rule of thumb to use in deciding what is "excessive" is to look for "spotty" absenteeism (2 days here, 1 day there, etc.), especially if overall absenteeism exceeds policy on sick and personal leave.
  - c. Repeated Monday and/or Friday absences.
  - d. Repeated absences of 2-4 days or 1-2 weeks (with or without medical explanation).
  - e. Excessive tardiness, either at the beginning of the day or in returning from lunch.
  - f. Leaving work early.
  - g. Peculiar and increasingly improbable excuses for absences. These generally follow two patterns: 1) using the same excuse over and over again (five grandmothers died in 6 months, always having a tooth pulled, etc.); 2) inventing more involved stories each time - today's excuse has to be better than last week's (the aunt with one arm and two suitcases). (Also see b above and h below.)

The phrase "job performance" in this manual and the training program are intended to cover absenteeism, tardiness, inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and all other work behaviors generally considered detrimental to the efficiency of the organization.

- h. Higher absenteeism rate than other employees for colds, flu, etc. While these are usually legitimate excuses, they are also used as hard-to-document excuses by people that are not really sick. Even if they are legitimate excuses, this program can help such people identify the reasons their resistance to such illnesses is low. Incidentally, these create more claims on the health insurance, often resulting in a higher rate.

While absenteeism is a strong indicator of a severe personal problem, it pays to focus on job performance problems beyond absenteeism. Absenteeism is relatively easy to pick up (when the employee isn't there you notice it) and it is normally documented. If all the supervisor is keyed to is absenteeism, he/she may not be able to pick up the performance problems of employees who are only too well aware that absenteeism is sure to spotlight them and create problems for them. There are numerous examples of troubled employees who were smart enough to keep their attendance up but whose performance while on the job was far below acceptable levels.

2. On-the-job Absenteeism. (Absences from post, desk, station, or work more than the job requires.)
  - a. Frequent trips to water fountain or bathroom.
  - b. Frequent visits with other employees at other stations. While the supervisor, in certain areas, may allow a certain degree of visiting and conversation on the job for the sake of communication or morale, he/she must ensure that it is contributing to and not detracting from work.
  - c. Long coffee and/or lunch breaks.
  - d. Frequent physical discomfort or minor injuries on the job requiring repeated trips for medical help.
3. High Accident Rate.
  - a. Accidents on-the-job (often resulting in compensation claims and inflated compensation insurance costs). Inattention and poor judgement are usually the cause of accidents, and personal problems are frequently the cause of inattention and poor judgement. The program can be very effective in reducing accidents by providing assistance for employees' problems.
  - b. Frequent trips to receive medical help for minor injuries. (See 2d.)
  - c. Frequent accidents off-the-job (but affecting job performance). THIS DOES NOT APPLY UNLESS ACCIDENT RATE IS HIGHER THAN NORMAL AND PERFORMANCE IS CLEARLY AFFECTED. Employees that are aware that they are impaired in some way will take greater care in their work in order to avoid an accident (of course, their work will be slower as a result). However, when these employees are home, they are no longer so careful and are more likely to have accidents. Despite

the fact that these happen at home, they can still affect performance. For example, the secretary who continually hurts his/her fingers, the maintenance worker who continually hurts his/her arms or legs can't perform at usual levels, the field worker who constantly hurts arms or hands can't drive to field assignments, etc. In such cases, the supervisor should document the frequency of such incidents, the degree to which performance was affected, and how long it was affected.

4. Difficulty in Concentration. Usually caused by worrying about personal problems and/or daydreaming (often linked to solving one problem or another through fantasizing).
  - a. Work requires great effort.
  - b. Jobs take more time.
  - c. Staring into space or daydreaming on the job. This requires judgement by the supervisor. For example, an employee responsible for writing may sit and stare at a page for several minutes whereas such behavior among certain other employees may be undesirable. In such cases, the supervisor has to decide whether or not the job is being done properly and in a reasonable amount of time.
5. Confusion.
  - a. Difficulty in recalling instructions, details, etc.
  - b. Increasing difficulty in handling simple or complex assignments.
  - c. Difficulty in recalling own mistakes.
6. Erratic Work Patterns. Alternate periods of very high and very low productivity. Differential increases. An example of this is the employee who produces in excess of other workers on some days but produces far less or is absent on other days, always with "good" excuses. (See illustration, pg. 10)
7. Tenacity to Job - Doesn't Change Easily. This may present a threat because his/her control of present job allows him/her to hide low job performance. As explained in class, this normally applies only if other performance problems exist.
8. Generally Lowered Job Efficiency. Any performance deficiency, regardless of cause. Following are some examples.
  - a. Misses deadlines.
  - b. Makes mistakes due to inattention or poor judgement.
  - c. Poor planning.
  - d. Makes bad decisions.

## Covering Up Poor Performance

For many employees whose performance is being adversely affected by a personal problem, particularly those with good work records, keeping the job is a matter of survival. Such employees often use diversionary tactics, consciously or unconsciously, which will hide or camouflage their poor performance. It is important to understand that these cover-up activities are exactly like legitimate activities that take place in the employee's work area, so in order to penetrate the cover-up the supervisor must isolate and identify what's happening in terms of the employee's job performance.

Following are some examples of cover-up activities.

- a. Has trouble getting things done because another employee or office is late getting work to him/her (or for any other reason).
- b. Spends great amount of time with other employees.
- c. Discusses personal problems with supervisor (thus lowering expectations of performance). (see pg. 19)
- d. Spends much time at desk avoiding others (or with head down).
- e. Is constantly away from work station.
- f. Does special favors for supervisor.
- g. Is always very active.
- h. Is often involved in simple tasks (such as making coffee, etc.).

As you can see, these activities go on every day. Observing these more often than usual in any employee's work behavior may tip you off that performance is slipping, but in order to document it you must identify specific performance deficiencies (see illustration, pg. 9).

Since supervisors are generally reluctant to confront the employee whose performance is slipping, they often help the cover-up by ignoring the situation until it can be ignored no longer. The very fact that the employee is covering up the job problem allows the supervisor, almost unconsciously, to overlook it. This can be complicated by other employees protecting a member of the group, covering up his/her performance deficiency. Since early identification of job performance problems is essential for the success of the program, all supervisors should be especially careful in assessing performance.

- e. Utilizes time inefficiently.
- f. Improbable excuses for poor job performance.
- g. Fails to communicate necessary information.



9. Employee relations on-the-job. Friction in employee relationships, including supervisor-employee relationships, often result in decreased job performance and efficiency. The difficulty is identifying and documenting how and to what degree such behavior affects individual and/or group performance. Following are examples of this behavior.

- a. Over-reacts to real or imagined criticism.
- b. Wide swings in morale.
- c. Borrows money from co-workers.
- d. Complaints from co-workers.
- e. Unreasonable resentments.
- f. Belligerent attitude toward other employees.

Remember - no one is perfect. Interpersonal problems are bound to arise. You must decide whether a problem is just a "fact of life" or is significantly affecting work.

10. These patterns apply to all employees in general. In specific relation to supervisory personnel, however, there are other key indicators which are largely dependent on the level and type of supervisory position involved. A first level supervisor may begin to issue conflicting instructions to employees, use employee time and skills inefficiently, submit incomplete reports and data, become lax in supervisory duties, etc. On higher supervisory levels, patterns of declining job performance are more subtle. Budgets may begin to be mis-managed, activities fail to be coordinated, communications begin to break down, and so on. The decision-making aspect of higher supervisory positions is crucial in this regard. Supervisors who begin to make decisions on the basis of insufficient data, poor evaluative methods, or impaired judgement can significantly affect the efficiency of an organization.

REMEMBER: All employees, including yourselves, exhibit some of these job performance problems occasionally. It is a pattern of job performance problems over a period of time (several days, weeks, or months, that you should note and document).

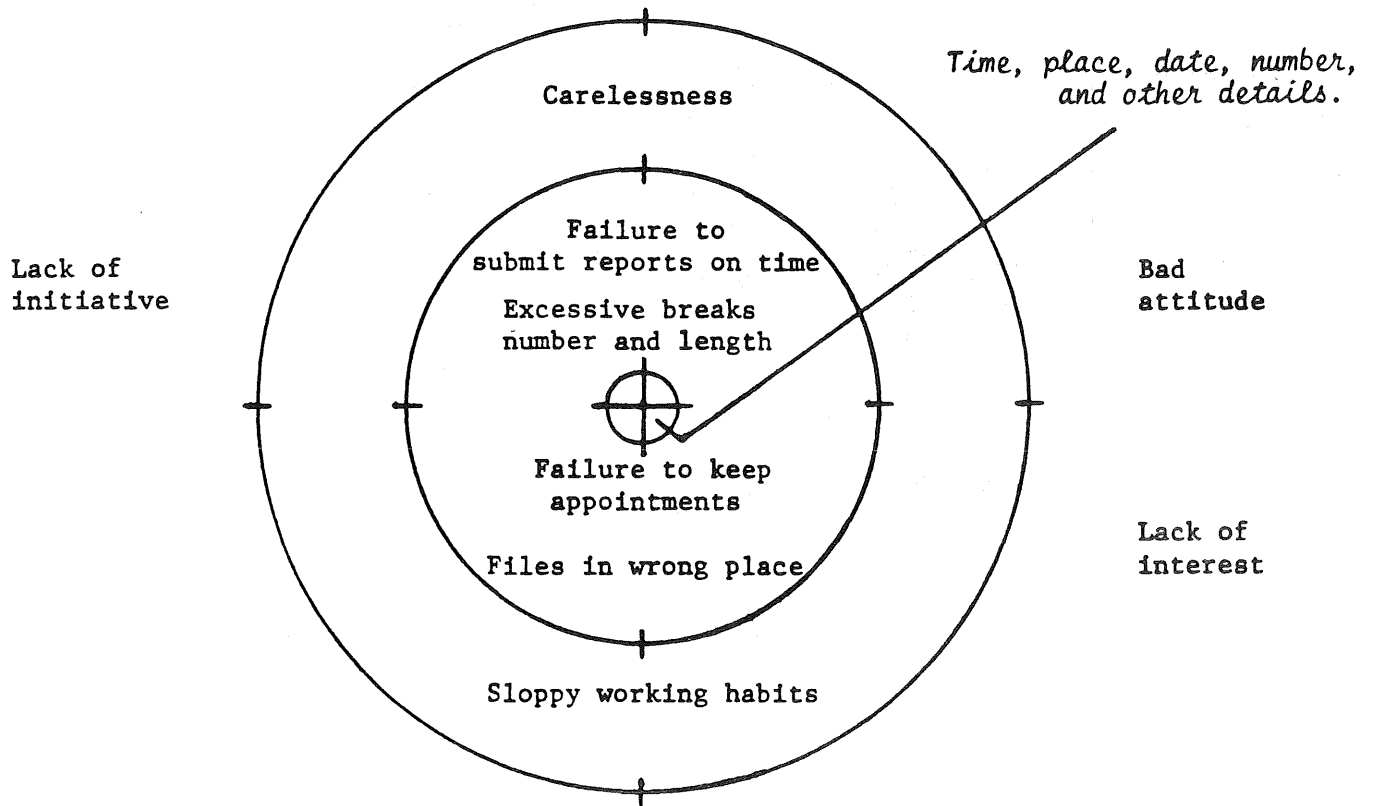
ALSO:

1. Supervisor is not expected to diagnose personal problems;
2. Identification and referral to the Diagnostic and Referral Counselor is to be based strictly on deficient job performance (unless an employee voluntarily comes to you with a personal problem).

TIME  
IS  
IMPORTANT:

1. As a factor in establishing job performance standards;
2. As a factor in observing deteriorating job performance;
3. As a factor in the evaluation of improving job performance.

NOTE: In addition to checking performance on a day-to-day basis, those supervisors who have a periodic performance review as an evaluation tool should use it. This is an excellent opportunity for the supervisor to confront the employee with a performance problem and refer him/her through the program. (Also, it is somewhat embarrassing to give an employee a good review and then have to give him/her a warning a month later.) (See Employee Performance Appraisal: A Handbook for Supervisors from the Department of Personnel, hereinafter noted as Handbook.)



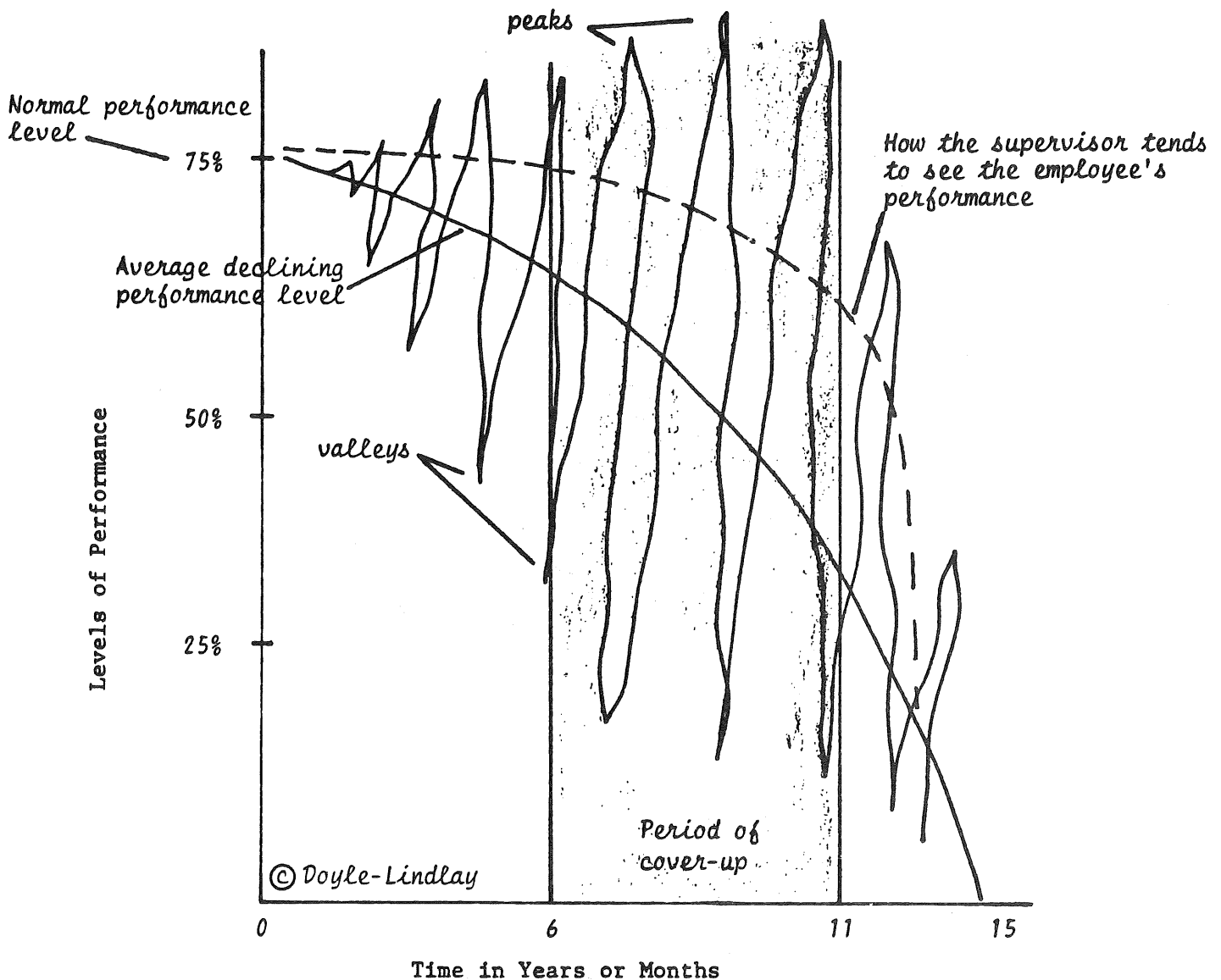
### Qualifying Job Performance Problems

Qualify means to reduce from a general to a particular. (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary)

In identifying job performance problems, supervisors sometimes fail to recognize the specific problems occurring on the job and instead focus on more general issues such as the employee's lack of initiative, lack of interest, or bad attitude. While these may in fact be problems, they are not specific enough to warrant any official job action. (This doesn't mean the supervisor shouldn't try to handle a problem such as lack of initiative through job counseling or some other means.)

A clearly defined job performance problem should be 1) specific, 2) documentable, and 3) a basis for a successful disciplinary action. The more specific it is, the greater the probability of success in handling the disciplinary action because the employee will be less likely to charge the supervisor with harassment, and more likely to correct the performance problem.

In the figure above, items such as "lack of initiative" and "attitude" are outside the scope of a clearly definable performance problem. "Sloppy working habits" and "Carelessness" are better but not specific enough. Those items in the middle circle are specific, documentable, and could be a basis for a successful job action if they are a part of a declining performance pattern and as long as the supervisor is not showing favoritism by disciplining one employee for offenses that are committed by other employees as well. By focussing through to the basic performance problem, including time, place, date, etc., and documenting it, the supervisor will find these situations far easier to manage.



### Erratic Work Patterns

Employees with personal problems affecting performance will typically have abnormal highs and lows in performance with average performance getting worse as time goes on. For alcoholic employees, the time line of the chart should be read in years; for other problems, in months. PLEASE NOTE: this chart is only an example. Specific cases may differ greatly.

The employee makes sure the supervisor is aware of his/her peak levels of performance but hides low performance levels through absenteeism or excuses (sometimes improbable) for poor performance. Sample excuses are, "This typewriter needs to be adjusted", and "The other division was late getting work to us". It's usually the same employees who are coming up with repeated excuses. The employee may use other means to cover-up poor performance.

The supervisor's perception of the employee's performance is higher than actual levels (because of excuses and other cover-ups) until the later stages of the problem when the work deficiency becomes all too obvious. The supervisor must be on his/her toes and willing to see and document these patterns in order to catch them early.

(continued on following page)

If a personal problem is affecting performance, there will usually be a period of cover-up when the employee begins to become aware that his/her problem is affecting performance. For example, between the years 6 and 11 (this is a ballpark figure), the alcoholic employee is in the middle stages of his/her illness when he/she becomes skillful at covering up drinking patterns as well as declining performance. Such a period of cover-up occurs in other serious personal problems also.

## CONSTRUCTIVELY MANAGING THE EMPLOYEE WITH A JOB PERFORMANCE PROBLEM

### The Role of the Supervisor

This section is very important in the employee assistance program. It is absolutely essential for the supervisor to be aware of what he/she should do with an employee whose job performance is declining.

#### The Key

At every level, the key to the success of the program is the supervisor. His/her effectiveness arises from two basic supervisory functions. First, in terms of monitoring job performance, the immediate supervisor is usually the first supervisor to become aware of an employee's decreasing job performance. This is often the first significant evidence of a developing problem. Second, in terms of disciplinary action, the supervisor can motivate the employee to seek appropriate professional help. The resources available to the troubled employee are of little value unless he/she is made aware of those resources and is motivated to use them. By utilizing disciplinary procedures, the supervisor is in a key position to effectively provide the motivation for the employee to seek help before his/her job performance has declined to the point where he/she must be discharged.

#### The Best Position

All supervisors are in the best position to know the extent of absenteeism, tardiness, and deterioration of work performance that may be associated with severe personal problems. Since recovery from such problems is most frequently related to early recognition and treatment, the immediate supervisor is the key to the success of this program. He/she must initiate appropriate action to make the program effective.

Many supervisors think they know their people well enough to know who is having what problems and who isn't. This simply isn't the case. The alcoholic, for example, is an expert at hiding his/her alcoholism. However, he/she is usually not so successful at hiding his/her deteriorating job performance from a supervisor who is properly observing his/her work performance.

Few supervisors possess the professional capabilities necessary for diagnosing employee problems or counseling employees and even when they do, such activities can create problems (see pg. 19). Consequently, in implementing this program the supervisor will be expected to do only that for which he or she is being paid: supervise.

#### Five Points

In this job performance centered program, the supervisor employs a five-point plan.

1. Observe job performance of subordinate employees.
2. Document instances and patterns of job impairment such as excessive absenteeism, decreased efficiency, or other job performance problems.

3. Utilize standard disciplinary procedures (or the threat of disciplinary procedures) in dealing with the job performance problem. (Handbook; also Personnel Regulations)
4. Constructively confront the employee with his/her inadequate work record.
5. Follow the referral procedures established under the program.

No  
Diagnosis

Two points must be emphasized. First, the supervisor's responsibility is to observe and document job performance deficiencies. He/she does not attempt to diagnose the problem nor does he/she mention his/her suspicions about the problem in discussions with the employee. On one hand, the problem may not be what it appears to be and attempting to diagnose the problem can only alienate the employee. On the other hand, if the problem is a severe one such as alcoholism, the supervisor will be unable to penetrate the denial syndrome characteristic of this particular illness. However, the employee cannot deny documented performance deficiencies. This is the only ground on which the supervisor has sure footing.

Referral

Second, in this situation the supervisor does not attempt to counsel the employee on his/her personal problem. He/she adheres strictly to the procedures established under this employee assistance program. Very few supervisors are qualified to act as counselors, and even for those who are qualified counselors, attempting to mix the roles of supervisor and counselor can prove to be difficult in terms of constructively managing the situation. (See page 19.)

Pitfalls

As indicated in the box on page 19, and in the film Dryden File, which is a part of the training program, there are pitfalls for the supervisor who tries to diagnose the employee's personal problem and then counsel him/her on the best way to handle it. The story is told of the supervisor who had an employee whose performance was slipping. This is a true story. The supervisor and the employee were long-time neighbors and the supervisor was aware to some extent of the amount of alcohol the employee was consuming. Diagnosing the problem behind the slipping performance as alcoholism, the supervisor decided to confront the employee on his poor performance, point out that the problem was alcoholism, and counsel him on the best way to handle the problem. During the discussion the employee maintained that alcohol wasn't the problem. His problems were his wife, who didn't understand the worth of a dollar and was always nagging him for more money; his son, who had totaled the family car with no insurance to cover it and was in the hospital running up medical bills; and his general financial position which had been made all the worse by the fact he hadn't received a raise in two years. With those problems, couldn't the supervisor understand why he was drinking a little more than usual to get away from these problems?

By the time the discussion was over, the supervisor had loaned the employee one-hundred dollars.

Whether the employee's problem was alcoholism or not is not all that important. What is important is that the supervisor tried to solve the personal problem and never got around to dealing with the performance problem. In discussing performance problems with an employee, particularly in a disciplinary situation, the supervisor should keep the discussion centered around job performance because he/she knows truth from fiction in that area. That's the supervisor's ballpark. On the other hand, if the discussion moves into the area of personal problems, the supervisor is in the employee's ballpark and can't tell truth from deception.

Beyond this, the supervisor can jeopardize his or her own position by trying to work with personal problems while allowing performance problems to persist. Correcting performance deficiencies is a part of the supervisor's job.

### Documentation

After identifying a pattern of job performance deficiency, the first step in constructively managing the problem is documentation. Although many supervisors feel that documentation is just another thankless "paper" chore that takes up valuable time, its importance in terms of both handling disciplinary measures and making the program work cannot be overemphasized. (Handbook)

#### Need

Proper and careful documentation is an essential part of management on all levels and is necessary at all times for efficient organizational operations. Proper documentation gives the organization an authentic record of what has gone on in the past and helps to avoid the lack of clarity that usually occurs when the supervisor attempts to evaluate an employee's job performance on the basis of memory alone. The effective use of documentation is crucial to the success of the program.

#### "On-the-Job" Only

It is most important that the supervisor understand that his/her documentation should cover problems that occur on-the-job only. Mention of incidents that take place outside the work setting (such as marital fights or public intoxication) could be construed as an invasion of privacy. The State of Minnesota can only legitimately become involved when an off-the-job problem interferes with job performance or when the employee voluntarily requests assistance. The employee's actions while he/she is off-the-job are of concern only to the employee: they are his/her private business. When such off-the-job problems create job performance difficulties, however, these performance difficulties should be carefully and thoroughly documented.

#### Inconsistencies

The supervisor should ensure that he/she is being fair in documenting performance problems. To document and take action against one employee's poor performance and fail to do so in the case of another employee with the same deficiencies can cause very serious problems.

A particular problem in this area is the "be nice to the nice guy" syndrome. When a supervisor documents and issues a warning to a not-so-nice employee for work behavior that is also typical of the "nice employee", these things will probably happen:

1. The not-so-nice employee will successfully and justly grieve the warning;
2. Morale in that unit will drop; and
3. The next time that supervisor attempts to issue a warning, it will be a little harder to convince everyone it was justified. Treat each employee alike as much as possible. Don't play favorites. Remember that employees are not paid just to be nice. BE OBJECTIVE.

Review Documentation of both excellent and poor performance can be a great help in preparing accurate performance reviews. (Handbook)

Use It It is interesting to note that some researchers have discovered that personnel files of discharged chronic alcoholic employees reflected the problem months and even years before it became obvious. Patterns of absenteeism, chronic tardiness, accident and health claims, and decreasing job performance ratings pointed to some kind of off-the-job problem. Had the supervisor assessed the situation using the documented material to periodically evaluate the employee, he/she would have become aware of a developing job performance problem. Had the employee been confronted with these facts earlier, he/she might have received the professional treatment in time to arrest his/her personal problem and maintain his/her job.

When to Document Deciding when to start documenting what might be a job performance problem is a matter of judgement for the supervisor; for some guidelines, see Summary on page 22.

### Disciplinary Procedures

The proper use of disciplinary (or corrective action) procedures is essential in managing the employee with performance problems.

"Step" Discipline First, such measures let the employee know where he/she stands, how he/she got there, and what he/she has to do to get his/her performance back in order. "Step" discipline provides the employee with several increasingly serious warnings before he/she is subject to discharge. Thus the employee has several chances to improve his/her performance and maintain his/her job.

Motivation Second, in terms of the employee assistance program, these measures motivate the employee to get help to solve whatever personal problems that may be contributing to the performance difficulty. With "step" discipline, the employee gets several chances to realize and/or seek help for his/her problem. It has been demonstrated and thoroughly documented that this is the most effective means to moti-



vate the employee to seek assistance for any personal problems that may be causing performance difficulties.

### Procedures

It should be noted that in many cases, formal procedures are preceded by one or more informal discussions to advise the employee of the performance problem and give him/her a chance to correct it before formal warnings are initiated.

These are the formal procedures available to the State of Minnesota supervisor.

- a. oral reprimand
- b. written reprimand
- c. suspension
- d. demotion
- e. reduction in pay
- f. discharge

### Referral Procedure

Referral is the only part of the employee assistance program that is different from the supervisor's normal duties.

### Procedure

In the disciplinary situation, the supervisor can refer the employee in any of three ways, all of which are carried out at the end of an informal or formal disciplinary discussion. In the first method, the supervisor tells the employee about the services of the Diagnostic and Referral Counselor (D&R Counselor), gives him/her the D&R Counselor's telephone number and suggests he/she give the Counselor a call and make an appointment. This is a friendly suggestion, usually associated with informal warnings or an oral reprimand. In the second, the supervisor tells the employee about the services of the D&R Counselor and invites the employee to call for an appointment on the supervisor's own phone. This approach, being a stronger suggestion, is normally associated with the written reprimand. In the third, the supervisor reminds the employee of the D&R Counselor and strongly recommends that the employee let him/her (the supervisor) call then and there to make an appointment for the employee. In this method, the supervisor is strongly urging the employee to take the referral.

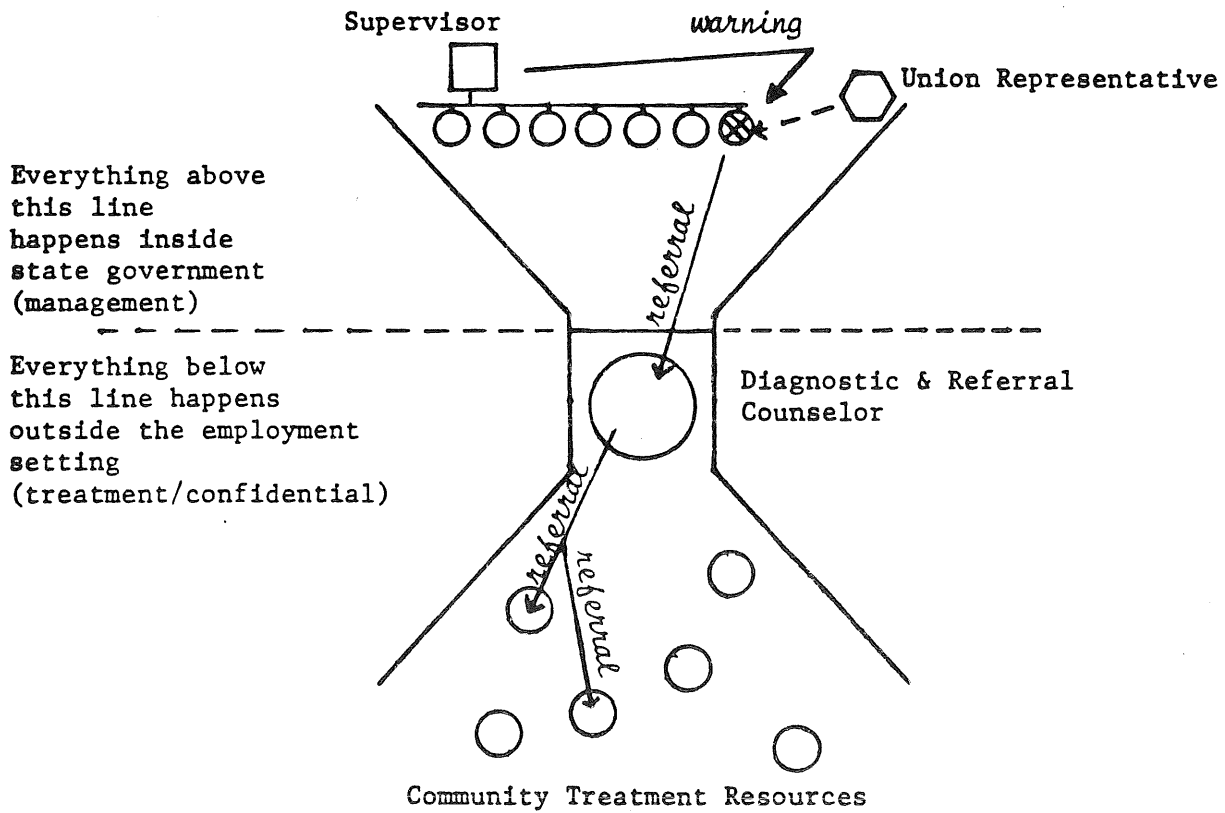
In other situations, such as those in which employees bring serious personal problems to the supervisor or voluntarily ask the supervisor to set up an appointment for them, the method of referral could be any of the above that seem appropriate for the situation.

### Important Points

These two important points concern the employee's personal rights and right to privacy. First, the supervisor cannot force the employee to see the Diagnostic and Referral Counselor. Nothing in his/her employment agreement requires him/her to do so. Beyond the rights

issue, the employee must make a choice for treatment or it will probably not be effective. The supervisor can suggest, recommend, or strongly urge the employee to make the choice, but he/she cannot force the employee to do so. Second, the supervisor will not be able to find out whether or not the employee followed through with the appointment. This is a matter of privacy (see pg.21). The supervisor should, however, continue to monitor performance.

The drawing below illustrates the entire referral procedure.



Union Referrals

Often other employees and union representatives are aware of a performance problem before the supervisor is. In such cases the union representative may suggest the employee see the Diagnostic and Referral Counselor.

## Constructive Confrontation

Constructive confrontation is a term used to describe a method for conducting a disciplinary discussion in such a constructive manner that the employee is motivated to improve performance and take advantage of the referral procedures under the program, if necessary.

### Critical Aspect

One of the most critical aspects of the supervisory function, particularly in terms of this program, is the manner in which a supervisor confronts an employee whose work is below standard. Not surprisingly, this is one of the functions which most supervisors like least. It is one in which they have had little or no training and involves a situation in which they feel uncomfortable. Supervisors' feelings regarding this situation arouse a variety of responses from "chewing the guy out" to avoidance of the situation altogether. It is essential to the program and to good supervision that supervisors 1) follow through on their responsibility to speak to, or confront an employee whose work is below standard, and 2) confront the employee in a constructive manner. If the supervisor follows the established procedures for documenting performance deficiencies, the initial discussion with the employee will be based on objective performance data rather than vague references to the employee's unsatisfactory work. The goal of this discussion is motivation, not punishment; the supervisor is attempting to motivate the employee to bring performance to acceptable standards. The supervisor must not avoid this confrontation when the employee's job performance indicates that such a confrontation is in order; dealing with performance problems is a part of the supervisor's job.

The following are some guidelines for constructively confronting an employee whose performance is slipping. (See Handbook)

#### A. Preparation

1. Document all absenteeism, poor job performance, etc. (specific criteria are necessary). Have this documentation in hand during your discussion with the employee.
2. Be consistent. Don't tolerate more with one employee than you would with another.
3. Don't try to "figure out" the employee's personal problem - this can influence your attitude toward the employee. Your concern is with correcting deficient performance.
4. Select a place and time for the discussion which affords privacy. No one enjoys criticism, however appropriate, but criticism in the presence of co-workers can cause more difficulties than it resolves. (See Handbook)

## A Word On Counseling

The issue of counseling can be confusing. Most supervisors understand that diagnosing a problem is well beyond their training and abilities. However, many supervisors feel that counseling an employee is an integral part of their job. There are several matters to be considered at this point. FIRST, counseling in this context does not refer to job counseling or coaching. It is entirely within the role of the supervisor to advise, coach, or counsel the employee in regard to how he/she may learn to do his/her job better or advance his/her career within the organization. (See Handbook) SECOND, counseling in this context does not necessarily refer to conversations the supervisor may have with his/her employee in other than disciplinary situations. Many supervisors pride themselves upon the fact that they are open to and willing to listen to the personal problems of their employees. While this attitude is commendable, the supervisor should be cautioned against (A) advice-giving (counselors do not advise people but help them arrive at their own solutions), (B) becoming involved in severe personal and emotional problems (these should be referred to the professional diagnostic and referral counselor), and (C) losing sight of the fact that an employee, by involving the supervisor in his/her personal problems, may be covering up a job performance problem. THIRD, the supervisor should not attempt to counsel an employee within a disciplinary situation. One reason for this is that it represents a basic conflict; to the employee, particularly in this situation, the supervisor represents authority, power, and a threat to his/her well-being (his/her job), yet in offering counseling, the supervisor is asking the employee for trust and confidence. (Handbook) A counselor, on the other hand, is not officially connected with anyone who has authority over the employee and is one in whom the employee can, without fear, place confidence and trust. So the roles of counselor and supervisor, within a disciplinary situation, are incompatible. Another reason counseling should not be attempted in this situation is that the employee can turn it to his/her advantage by sidetracking discussion of the job performance problem and sometimes even convince the supervisor to delay or drop the warning. In all fairness, it should be noted that the employee almost unconsciously tries to manipulate the supervisor; after all, his/her job security is endangered.

### B. The Discussion

1. It is usually wise to preface your discussion of performance deficiencies by pointing out to the employee that the State of Minnesota recognizes his/her value (years in State government, technical skills, past performance, previous level of competence and dependability, etc.). Be truthful. If the employee has been of no value, then skip this item and go on to #2 (the supervisor should have handled this situation during the probationary period).
2. Having begun the discussion on a positive note, you should now bring attention to the reason for the discussion. Be firm and honest. Don't hedge. Using your documentation, tell the employee exactly what it is that dissatisfies you with his/her performance.

3. A good rule of thumb in this situation is to base your discussion on the employee's job performance rather than upon the employee. (An example of this distinction is the difference between saying "You're a very poor worker" and "your performance has been below standard".) Remember, your goal is to restore the employee as a productive member of your department.
4. Don't let the employee play you against higher management and/or the union. If the employee is exhibiting a pattern of declining or unacceptable performance, it is your right and responsibility to take the appropriate action.
5. If the employee blames his poor performance on some off-the-job problem, avoid any personal involvement with this problem. Even if he/she appeals to you for advice, your only legitimate course of action is to refer him/her to professional help through the employee assistance program. (In fact, most professionals avoid giving "advice"; they are skilled in helping the person arrive at his own solutions.) This does not mean you should be unsympathetic. (See previous page "A Word on Counseling".)
6. Explain to the employee exactly what the standard disciplinary procedures are and where he/she stands in respect to them. This will communicate the seriousness with which you take the matter.
7. Issue the warning.
8. Refer the employee to the professional Diagnostic and Referral Counselor.

C. Follow Through

1. Set up a plan for improvement. Get a commitment from the employee and document it. Set down specific work criteria which he/she agrees to work toward during a certain time period. Evaluate his/her performance periodically together.
2. Continue to monitor performance.

Right to Intervene

Take the responsibility to intervene. Don't avoid intervention in a situation that demands your attention as a supervisor. You have a legitimate right to intervene when an employee's overall job performance is below standard. It is highly probable that a troubled employee's performance will improve if he/she is confronted constructively and consistently. On the other hand, if he/she is ignored or warned in an inconsistent and arbitrary manner, it is highly unlikely that his/her performance will improve.

## Privacy

Privacy is the assurance that the employee's problems and treatment will be a matter of trust between the employee and the treatment agent. The only person that can communicate or authorize the communication of this information to others is the employee.

### Necessity

The State of Minnesota has always regarded the medical and personnel records of its employees as private, available only to the employee and certain officials (Reference: Code of Federal Regulation Title 42, Part 2; Minnesota States 15.162 to .169; other applicable Federal or State law). Preserving the private nature of these records is essential to the overall success of the program; if employees do not have confidence in the privacy of the program, they will not utilize it. No one wants to risk making their private life public. Also, since one of the goals of the program is to encourage employees who suspect they may be developing personal problems, such as chemical dependency, to refer themselves for treatment, it is necessary to create an atmosphere in which they feel free to initiate such referral. It would be impossible to create such an atmosphere if it were not commonly understood that all records pertaining to this self-referral would be strictly private.

### Focus On Job Performance

Supervisory attention should be focused specifically upon job performance. Should the supervisor have any suspicion concerning the nature of the employee's problem, he/she should keep that suspicion entirely to himself/herself. While the supervisor may suspect that chemical dependency, marital problems or financial problems may be the cause of the employee's deficient job performance, the actual cause may, in fact, be something quite different. Undue speculation concerning an employee's problem can only result in damage to the employee and to the overall success of our program. Privacy is essential for the integrity of the program, as well as the well-being of the employee.

The supervisor should understand that in most cases he/she will never know what the employee's problem is. After the referral, the supervisor's responsibility is to continue to monitor job performance as before. If the supervisor should ever learn anything of the employee's problem, in most instances it will be the employee himself/herself who tells him/her.

### Summary

In the following paragraphs, the supervisor's role in the program is applied to a fictional situation for purposes of outlining a typical course of events. Important actions are underlined.

John Smith works in a state office. He has been in state government for seven years and is generally considered a competent, reliable employee. You, John's supervisor, are in your office going over reports filed by several employees before passing them on to your boss. You notice that one of John's reports is disorganized, ungrammatical in places, and hazy in its conclusions. This reminds you that three weeks ago John was late submitting material to you which was to have been included in a manual being prepared for your division. Since this performance is quite different from John's usual reliability, you decide to document the mistakes on the report you hold in your hand and also the fact that the report was late three weeks ago, and you decide to have a talk with John on the problems in this report.

During your discussion with John, he apologizes for the recent problems and says that he has had a lot of work in the past three months but that nothing of the sort will happen again in the future. Satisfied with his explanation, you go back to your desk and document the fact that you spoke with John and that the problem did not seem overly serious. However, you do intend to pay a little more attention to John's performance than you normally would.

Two months later, you begin to notice that John is not at his work station as often as he usually is. On several occasions you've tried to find him but have been unable to. Remembering the previous problem with the reports, you begin to get concerned and document the fact that you are unable to find John today. Over the next few days you keep an eye on his activities and see that he is, in fact, away from his desk a great deal more than his job would require, so it seems. You document the amount of time that he is away from his desk and any other problems that you might observe and arrange to see him as soon as possible. You are now concerned about this course of events and decide to have another talk with John about this recent problem. In your discussion with him, John claims that he has been spending a great deal of time in another office with a person who is contributing material and information to a project that he is working on. You ask John to advise you and sign out when he is going to be away from his desk for a long period of time since it is essential that you get in touch with him on certain occasions. You document the fact that you talked with John about this problem and he agreed to let you know when he would be away from his desk.

John's performance over the next few weeks seems as good as it ever was, but then, within one week, two reports are late, letters sent to you from John for your signature are sloppily written and you have to rewrite them, and John again is spending a great deal of time away from his desk. On one occasion when you tried to get in touch with him you called the office to which he had signed out but you found he was not there and had not been there that day. You document all these incidents, noting all specifics, and prepare to give John an official

oral reprimand. That afternoon you call him into your office and issue the warning. John protests that he has been over-worked and that he cannot be expected to let you know where he has been every minute of the time, but using your documentation you show him exactly how his performance is significantly below the levels of his performance prior to three months ago. Regarding his claims of being over-worked, you tell him that you have checked out his work load and that it is not significantly different than it has been in the past. You suggest to John that he might consider seeing the Diagnostic and Referral Counselor. You document the discussion and the fact that you suggested he see the Diagnostic and Referral Counselor, and file the documentation in the appropriate place.

John's work improves for a while, but a month later you begin to detect work problems again. You document these specifics, coming in late, poorly written material, and you notice that although John does not seem to be visiting other people in the office so frequently, he does spend a great deal of time at his desk doing very little. You prepare a written warning and call him into your office. Using your documentation, you explain to him once again exactly what is unsatisfactory about his performance and give him the written warning. You tell him that you will be evaluating his performance with him on a weekly basis until it reaches acceptable levels. This time you suggest more strongly, or more formally that John see the Diagnostic and Referral Counselor. You document the fact that you had the discussion with John and issued the warning and also that you suggested he see the Diagnostic and Referral Counselor. You document the discussion and referral.

After John receives the written warning he seems to work hard toward getting his performance up to its previous high levels. As agreed after the written warning, you and John get together every week to evaluate his progress in getting performance up to acceptable levels. At the end of the month you feel it is no longer necessary to have these evaluation sessions since his performance is as good as it ever was. His performance continues on a high level for another month and a half beyond the evaluation period when you begin to notice problems again. While John's attendance had always been near-perfect, he has begun to miss work; in three weeks he has been out a total of six days, all one and two-day absences. His accuracy in report and letter writing has begun to slip again and he has begun to visit with other employees extensively again. You document these problems and prepare a second written warning with a suspension attached. You ask John into your office, issue the warning, (using your documentation) and strongly urge that he follow through with a referral to the Diagnostic and Referral Counselor. You tell him that his job is in danger and that he has nothing to lose in following through with such a referral. You document the discussion and referral.



Important:

In all further warnings beyond the disciplinary suspension, the supervisor would follow the same format. That format is as follows:

1. Observe job performance.
2. Document all instances of performance problems when you begin to notice that overall performance is slipping, or dropping below its normal levels.
3. Utilize disciplinary measures in the appropriate manner.
4. Constructively confront the employee on the basis of the performance problem.
5. Refer the employee to the Diagnostic and Referral Counselor in the appropriate manner ("appropriate" in a verbal warning would be simply a suggestion whereas in a disciplinary suspension it would be to strongly urge).
6. Document the discussion and the warning issued.

## BENEFITS

### Benefits for the Employee

State of Minnesota employees, be they supervisory or non-supervisory personnel, benefit through the program in two ways. First, they can find and take advantage of treatment resources for their problem(s), whatever they may be. Most employees referred through the employee assistance program learn to handle or solve their problem and return to happy, normal, productive lives. Chemical dependency is the toughest problem; in the first two years of the program, recovery for chemically dependent employees will be about 80%. In future years, the recovery rate will rise because the dependency will be caught in earlier stages and some of these employees will begin to refer themselves. The recovery rate for other problems is nearly 100%. Second, since they are now not so burdened with the problem, their performance returns to acceptable levels, they keep their jobs, and they are able to return to satisfying, productive work.

### Benefits for the Supervisor

The supervisor can benefit from the program as do other employees, of course, but the major benefit of the program to the supervisor in terms of his duties is that it provides him with a tool to use in handling employee problems. This tool enables the supervisor to manage the problem employee as effectively as he/she manages other aspects of his/her job with resultant benefits to both employee and supervisor. Additionally, the program effectively removes the guilt which many supervisors feel when issuing warnings, particularly when they feel a personal problem is involved - under the program the employee has every opportunity to seek help for his/her personal problems. Another way the program helps the supervisor is through the increased morale of employees who receive help through referrals; it spreads throughout the entire office.

### Benefits for the State of Minnesota

The State of Minnesota benefits from the program in several ways. One of the most obvious is cost reductions. Through reductions in absenteeism and health and compensation claims, and increases in overall efficiency, the State of Minnesota does benefit in a material way. But it does benefit in other ways as well. For example, through the program long-term experienced employees can be retained that might have been lost; the value of these workers cannot be over-estimated. Another benefit is heightened employee morale and resultant improved employee relations because implementation of the program demonstrates a concern for the well-being of employees.

In fact, the program, if properly applied, can benefit just about everybody in the State of Minnesota.

# NOTES