

Optima EAP: Quarterly Leadership Bulletin

3rd Quarter 2009

Your employer has invested in the wellbeing of its employees by providing an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Everyone has personal issues at one time or another that may impact job performance. EAP is also a very important resource for supervisors and managers – consider the following:

- Optima EAP is a resource for employees dealing with many different kinds of issues.
- EAP is a tool for supervisors and managers – not just employees with personal problems.
- EAP is **confidential** – our clinicians are legally and ethically bound to protect the confidentiality of clients according to state and federal laws.
- Our educational Web site has information on a variety of topics related to problems of everyday living as well as behavioral health topics. Log on at www.optimaeap.com.

Creative Ways to Support Employee Development

As supervisors and managers, we know that personal and professional development is mutually beneficial to both the employee and the organization. We know that reduced budgets and rising workloads often cause development opportunities to be pushed to the back burner. We also know that it is our responsibility to develop a talented and engaged workforce.

But with limited time and money, is employment development a realistic goal? **Absolutely!** Current conditions may require us to be more creative with our efforts, but development opportunities are always possible. This bulletin will offer several ideas for consideration. Let us first challenge the two common barriers head on: 1) *Lack of time*. Even when schedules are tight and the clock moves fast, remember that we make time for that which is really important – so make employee development a priority. 2) *Lack of money*. Recognize that some of the best development opportunities do not cost much... or anything at all. Think of your own, most effective learning experiences and you will likely find that only a few of them required a monetary outlay.

The following ideas are categorized as “Job,” “Skill,” and “Career” development. “Job development” refers to activities that support the acquisition of skills and knowledge needed for a specific job function. “Skill development” refers to activities that support the expansion of an employee’s current skill set. (Skills pursued can directly support the employee’s current job or can position the employee for future advancement.) “Career development” refers to activities that support the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and experiences that align with an employee’s specific professional goals. Consider opportunities to implement these ideas with your work group.



Job Development

- **Cross-Training** – Structure time for employees to train each other on their individual job tasks. Not only will this help to support coverage during employee absences, but it will also help employees understand the interdependencies between tasks and identify ways to more effectively support each other.
- **Job Rotation** – Create a plan to move employees through various assignments to increase their knowledge of the department's overall operations. Variation of tasks also helps to reduce boredom and complacency. Partner less-experienced employees with veterans to expand understanding and to offer job shadowing opportunities.
- **Exchange Programs** – Work with peer supervisors of other departments with whom your group regularly interacts to identify ways to increase mutual understanding and strengthen relationships. Ideas could include having inter-departmental meetings, inviting representatives of other departments to present an overview of their operations, and designating liaisons or ambassadors from each department to attend staff meetings and address matters of common interest.
- **Best Practices Moment** – Designate time during each staff meeting for employees to share a tip, practice, or resource that has helped them become more effective at their job. (You could solicit all ideas or define a specific development area and encourage ideas that support it.) To encourage participation, enter the names of all those who share an idea into a raffle to leave 10 minutes early that day – or allow the winner to select the development area for which best practice ideas should be offered the next time.



Skill Development

- **Meeting Chair** – Have employees take turns running staff meetings. Define what their responsibilities will be (producing an agenda, managing the logistics like scheduling meeting space and preparing materials, facilitating discussion, producing minutes, etc.). *This activity supports the development of organization, facilitation, and leadership skills.*
- **Project Lead** – Take turns giving leadership of projects to different employees. Consider the various projects that your department is responsible for and empower employees to assume appropriate leadership roles. Projects could include ongoing efforts like supply management or employee announcements/newsletters, scheduled projects like quarterly reports, or special projects like major initiatives or employee volunteer activities. Assign co-leaders if the project is complex or if you want one employee to “job shadow” another. *This activity supports development of leadership, project management, and problem-solving skills.*

- **Grassroots Skill Sessions** – Recruit employees to form a development team that plans and presents periodic skill-building sessions for the entire work group. Sessions should focus on skills relevant to the majority of employees like communication, time management, conflict resolution, etc. Encourage employees to leverage existing knowledge experts in your organization. Establishing the team allows you to reinforce the importance of employee development, enables delegation of part of your development responsibility while offering leadership opportunities to employees who serve on the team, and encourages employees to become engaged in their own development. *This activity supports the development of a variety of skills.*
- **Clubs** – Encourage formation of clubs that support employee development. For example, a business book club could be established and members could meet monthly to discuss a business/skill-related book that they all read. Many organizations have their own Toastmasters International clubs to encourage development of communication skills. Membership in clubs should be voluntary and leadership should be delegated to employees. *This activity supports the development of a variety of skills.*

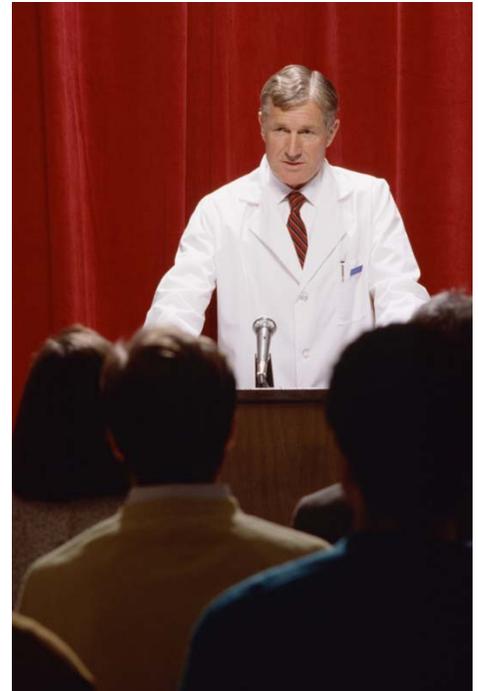
Career Development

- **Career Discussions** – Schedule periodic time to speak one-on-one with your employees regarding their career. These conversations should be separate from performance reviews and focus on the individual professional interests of employees. Time can be spent helping the employee develop career goals, exploring opportunities to align employee skills and interests with department tasks, and identifying developmental resources.
- **Lunch `N Learns** – Plan periodic presentations to address topics that support overall career development for employees. Topics could include resume writing, networking, creating a professional portfolio, etc. Invite speakers from Human Resources to lead the sessions.
- **Mentor** – Help employees find a mentor who can support their desired career path. Make introductions to professional contacts you may have.
- **Professional Organizations** – Encourage employees to join professional organizations. Although your organization may not be in a position to cover membership dues, you may be able to allow the employee time to attend meetings and/or workshops. Invite employees to share knowledge gained through professional memberships with other employees.



Some final reminders...

- 1) **If your organization has its own professional development department, use it!** Enlist their support in providing programs and helping to structure development plans. Encourage employees to explore the resource for their development needs and interests.
- 2) **Solicit best practices from peer supervisors** and find out what employee development initiatives they have used and found to be most effective.
- 3) **Demonstrate your development commitment to employees.** Create an environment that encourages employees to take responsibility for their development. Even if you can not offer specific resources to employees, designate time each month during which they are to do a development activity. Offer ideas such as developing career goals, completing online training, reading an industry publication, using a training CD acquired from the library, having a peer train them on an application, conducting an informational interview with another employee of the organization, updating their resume, etc.
- 4) **Model the behavior you expect from your employees** and take time for your own development.



Creative ways to encourage employee development abound. Identify what will work for your group, make the investment, and reap the rewards!

Remember... If you have an employee whose home problems are affecting work, or whose work problems are affecting home – then you have an employee who can benefit from EAP.

Optima EAP is available to help you, the supervisor, with any concerns you have about the welfare of your staff. You may call the EAP office to discuss your concerns with one of our counseling staff or get help to refer the employee. Optima EAP can be reached at (757) 363-6777 or 1-800-899-8174.

