

THE CONTINUUM **EDGE**

INFORMATION FOR LEADERS



”

An employee's negative attitude is obviously an important performance issue. But an “attitude” is hard to describe because it has a strong mental component that is hard to quantify. Can you give me some direction on how to do it?

A: Most employees and supervisors agree that a negative attitude can disrupt the workplace and harm productivity. It often affects morale, collaboration and performance. Documenting it can be tricky because if documentation is vague, employees can deny it and say you were “reading me all wrong.”

When supervisors document attitude concerns, they often stop at general statements and don't include specific, observable examples. This undermines documentation. The right approach ensures clear, measurable detail that supports the concern and is less refutable.

USE THESE TWO STEPS:

- First, clearly label the attitude — pessimism, rudeness, blame-shifting, disengagement, apathy, cynicism, resistance, entitlement, sarcasm, victim mindset, etc.
- Then, describe the employee's behavior and tone.

CHECK OUT THESE EXAMPLES:

EXAMPLE #1: “Judy demonstrates a pattern of pessimism. She frequently makes statements such as ‘This will never work’ or ‘Good going, genius, now we’ll never meet the deadline.’”

EXAMPLE #2: Bill demonstrates an attitude of entitlement. He stated to the team, “You all are wasting my time; doing this work is not why I was hired.”

EXPERT TIP: Adding co-worker or customer impact strengthens documentation.





I tend to be too lenient with rulebreakers, tardy workers and underperformers. It's to avoid tension and conflict. Can Continuum EAP help me be more assertive and confident?

A: Continuum EAP can definitely help, but since employees have grown accustomed to your current style, some resistance is normal when you begin setting firmer standards; they may test whether you're serious about the new expectations. It won't take long for the Continuum professional to assist you with behavioral tasks to help you establish a new approach to managing employees. This is called solution-focused brief counseling, and it's an EAP specialty.

For example, after sharing information with the EAP (as a client), you may be assigned a homework task or two to build skills like assertiveness. The EAP may suggest that for the next two weeks, you address every instance of tardiness calmly within 24 hours. And you'll meet with the EAP to discuss your experience. Later, you may move on to brief corrective conversations with employees, role play them with the EAP, and examine what you said, what you felt during the corrective meeting, and how things turned out versus what you feared.



You can anticipate a supervisory style in about three to five EAP sessions.



- **I feel guilty considering disciplinary action for performance issues while an employee is already working with the EAP on personal problems.**
- **The advice to “just focus on performance” doesn't make it easier.**

A: It's not uncommon for supervisors to feel conflicted in this situation. Many don't fully understand that Continuum EAP serves two purposes: They provide compassionate help to employees while also supporting the organization's performance and productivity goals. In this regard, it's the employee's responsibility to meet performance expectations.

You're an empathetic supervisor, but empathy need not override performance standards. You may also see discipline as punitive rather than supportive. This common misalignment can impede your core supervisory responsibility to hold employees accountable. Your role is to make sure employees have clear goals, well-crafted expectations, and access to the appropriate

resources so they can do their job. You might find it helpful to review, with Continuum and HR, whether you've done everything possible to support the employee. (E.g., clear communication, performance improvement plan, etc.) Doing so will help you feel assured that you've fulfilled your duty to support the employee if you need to proceed with disciplinary measures.