

Q An employee is returning to work after the death of a family member. I want to be supportive, but I also need to manage the workload. How do I approach this without appearing too work-focused? I'm very concerned that their grief will make it hard to keep up with our productivity demands.

When an employee is coming back after a death in the family, start by meeting with them privately and just acknowledging what happened. Something as simple as “I'm sorry for your loss. It's good to see you” goes a long way. Let the conversation go where it goes. You can bring up workload naturally by asking what would help them ease back into things. You might be surprised: a lot of employees will want to talk about the loss for a minute and then move pretty quickly into wanting to talk about work, almost as a way to get back to normal. Let them lead that. When you do get to the work talk, be clear about what needs attention right away, what can wait, and who they can go to if you're not around. Set up a check-in a few days out so you're not leaving them to figure it out alone. Grief doesn't move on a schedule, and it hits people's focus, energy, and patience differently. Here in Hawaii, where extended family and community obligations around a death can go on for days or weeks longer than people from other places might expect, that can be even more true. Stay supportive, keep your expectations clear, and check in more than you'd normally think to. That's how you'll catch it early if they're struggling more than they're letting on. And don't forget to remind them the EAP is there if they need it.

Q I assign work, but some employees give me no updates unless I ask. The work may eventually get done, yet I lose time chasing these folks down to find out what's going on. How can I change this without micromanaging, which, of course, every employee hates?

This one really comes down to communication, which is behind most performance issues you'll run into as a supervisor. Fix that and you'll head off a lot of other headaches before they start. The trick is building updates into the assignment from day one, instead of leaving it open-ended and then wondering why you're chasing people. When you hand off a task, be clear on three things: what “done” looks like, when you need it, and what's riding on its progress. Then agree on a simple check-in rhythm, something like, “Send me a quick note every Thursday, even if it's just ‘all on track.’” For longer projects that stretch out over months, set milestones rather than letting things drift or relying on hallway “how's it going” chats. At each milestone, ask them to cover what's done, what's left, and whether they need a decision or help from you. Do this consistently and you'll get faster work, less stress on your end, and a lot fewer fire drills.

Q I'm hiring for a position with a steep learning curve, so no applicant will be able to jump right in. I've found that eagerness to learn can matter as much as, or more than, prior experience. How can I spot that quality in a candidate and evaluate whether they're willing to put in the effort to learn this job?

Think back to the last time you had to pick up something totally new at work. Chances are you asked a bunch of questions, tried stuff, got some of it wrong, and adjusted as you went. That's exactly the story you want to hear from a candidate. Ask them to walk you through a time they had to learn something quickly: how they got started, what they did when they hit a wall, whether they actually used feedback or brushed it off. Plenty of people will tell you they're fast learners, but fewer can back that up with a real example. It also helps to give every candidate the same realistic... *(Continued)*



(Continued) ...scenario from the job and see how they'd approach learning it. You're looking for a workable process, not a perfect answer. Keep in mind that even the most eager learners can get frustrated or overwhelmed once they're actually in the role, and they can be pretty hard on themselves about it. Once you've hired them, notice their progress along the way, and let them know early that the EAP is there if stress or anything personal starts getting in the way.

Frontline Supervisor

Q One of my employees regularly challenges the team's ideas. Some coworkers call him difficult, to say the least, but his suggestions are often useful. Could the EAP help me manage this situation?

A Sounds like you've got someone whose ideas are genuinely valuable, but whose delivery is costing him relationships on the team. Yes, the EAP can help here, either by working with him directly or by coaching you on how to manage him or make a referral if your own efforts stall out. The important thing is separating his intellect from his style: you don't want him walking away thinking he's being punished for being smart, when really it's how he's coming across. Start by acknowledging what he brings to the table. Then get specific about the impact. Saying "people think you're abrasive" won't land and won't change anything. Point to actual behaviors: rolling his eyes, sighing, cutting people off. And point to what it's doing to the room: people going quiet, checking out, holding back ideas they'd otherwise share. If you coach him directly and it doesn't move the needle, that's the point to loop in the EAP for a more formal referral.

Q I believe supervisors would think about praising employees for good work more often if they knew the benefits of doing it. What are they?

A There's more to this than just making someone's day. When you recognize a real contribution in front of the team, or a bigger group, it does something for the whole organization, not just that one person. Public praise ripples outward: it lifts morale and tells everyone else that effort actually gets noticed here. The key is being specific instead of generic. "Great job, Maria" doesn't do much, but telling the team "Maria noticed a customer problem we'd been stuck on for years, pulled the team together, and got it solved. Great job." gives everyone something to learn from and shows exactly what good work looks like. One thing worth keeping in mind, especially here: not everyone wants the spotlight. Plenty of people, and it's pretty common locally, would rather have that same recognition given quietly, one-on-one, than in front of a crowd. When you're not sure, just ask the person ahead of time how they'd rather be recognized. Bottom line: praising people well helps the employee, the team, and the organization, and it doesn't cost you a thing.

Continued EAP Challenge for the top Supervisors, Managers, and HR Professionals:

Your organization has received new EAP brochures with a Company Passcode to access **My Stress Tools** – a new suite of helpful tools on our website to manage stress. **Your homework:**

- (1) Go to the EAP website either by scanning the QR code on the new brochure or going to <https://eapacific.com/employees/my-stress-tools.html>;
- (2) Register for My Stress Tools (Call us if you need your organization's Passcode. It's also on the new brochure);
- (3) Take the Stress Profiler and discover what small thing(s) you could do to reduce your stress this year;
- (4) Start doing that; and (5) Promote this so your team reduces their stress and burnout and has a better year!

Your stressed employees probably won't do much if you don't believe it will help. Using **one small free tool** to reduce YOUR stress will make them much more likely to take advantage of your experience and recommendations!



Employee Assistance of the Pacific

1600 Kapiolani Blvd., Suite 1610 Honolulu, HI 96814

www.EAPacific.com

(808) 597-8222

Toll-Free (877) 597-8222

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