

Frontline Supervisor



■ **During a recent training, we learned that the EAP is not a disciplinary program. I think that is obvious, so why are supervisors reminded of this during supervisory training?**

Although EAPs are not disciplinary programs, they can sometimes be misperceived as disciplinary or aligned with the organization's disciplinary process. When a supervisor makes a referral and acts as though it is a consequence of unsatisfactory performance, the process can feel punitive to the employee, and it can invite poor cooperation with the EAP. Avoiding this misperception by being aware of one's attitude when making a referral is a key responsibility of supervisors. Treat a supervisor referral as a positive opportunity for an employee to obtain help for a personal problem that may be contributing to a performance problem. Avoid any display of anger during a corrective interview while making a supervisor referral. Realize that the employee will readily share his or her perception of the supervisor referral process with coworkers, particularly if it is negative. This can reduce the EAP's use and value to your organization.

■ **My employee complains about chronic pain from a medical condition that affects his hip. He sees a doctor, and his work is satisfactory. Should I recommend the EAP or make a supervisor referral? Is chronic pain an issue the EAP would handle?**

If your employee's performance is satisfactory there is no need to make a supervisor referral. Don't be surprised, however, if his performance improves with better pain management. Suggest he take advantage of the EAP through a self-referral. The Journal of the American Medical Association (November 2003) recently reported on research that measured lost productivity in the workplace resulting from pain conditions. The study included a random sample of nearly 30,000 employees. Thirteen percent of the workforce experienced a loss in productive time because of a common pain condition. The most common pain conditions experienced by employees are headaches, followed by back pain, arthritis, and other musculoskeletal pain. Treatment of chronic pain is a specialized area of practice for medical doctors and many mental health professionals. Biofeedback, hypnosis, and other specialized approaches to managing pain are popular.

■ **My employee has always avoided air travel, yet it is essential to her job. I've avoided confronting her,**

Understanding the eventual outcome of not confronting your employee and making a supervisor referral will help you take action. For example, will the organization force you to terminate her if she does not participate in business travel? What consequences do you personally

and have sent others in her place. But I can't do it anymore. I need to make an EAP referral, but I don't want to accuse her of fear of flying. What should I do?

face from superiors if you cannot successfully intervene with her performance issue? Could it be argued that you let your employee avoid business travel for so long that an "implied agreement" altered the essential functions of her job? You can avoid discussing her fear of flying. From your perspective, the issue is her inability or unwillingness to comply with all the essential functions of her job. You may need to make a firm offer: Take required business trips and if needed use the EAP to help you, or accept the organization's response to the continuing problem. Be clear about what the response or consequences might be. Predictably, your employee will visit the EAP. Once she visits the EAP, a professional will help her meet her goal of overcoming her fear of flying.

■ How can I keep my employees excited about their jobs and reduce boredom? My budget doesn't permit me to reward employees for good work, but perhaps there are other ways I can keep them feeling good about what they do.

Perhaps no task is more important than helping your employees stay excited about their jobs. Accomplish this task by paying attention to what your employees are doing. You will discover what turns them on and be able to give them more of what they want. Ask your employees: What will help you grow and stay challenged in your job? What was the most exciting and challenging experience you had in the past year? What new things did you learn? What new things would you like to learn next year? It is normal for most employees to feel some boredom after a few years on a job. Most employees fight boredom by discovering new ways of remaining interested in their jobs, but others need some help. The above questions will help you keep them fired up before they start to lose energy and drive and begin looking elsewhere for excitement.

■ Should I supply the EA professional with my notes concerning my employee's suspected misconduct, even though it is not part of my official documentation? I think it will give the EAP a better understanding of what has been going on in our office.

If you make a supervisor referral, only provide documentation pertaining to your employee's job performance problems (conduct, attendance, quality of work, etc.) that you can substantiate. You may suspect your employee's involvement in other types of problematic behavior, but it won't be useful in an EAP interview. The EAP would not want to retain such information in its records if the employee was not aware of it. You should consider discarding such information. Keeping it could come back to haunt you later if it ends up somewhere else in the organization where it could cause harm to your employee's reputation or career.

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