

Frontline Supervisor



■ **For many reasons, some supervisors are reluctant to confront employees and refer them to the EAP. What can influence supervisors and motivate them to make better use of the EAP?**

Initially, when an EAP is installed, supervisors may have difficulty incorporating it in their supervision practices. Preventing these problems is what makes supervisor training so important. Fortunately, most supervisors learn quickly that an EAP makes the job of managing employees easier. Other supervisors who are more reluctant can be helped to see the value of the EAP by observing next-level managers incorporating the program in their own supervision practices. This modeling has a powerful influence. More powerful still is holding supervisors accountable for using the EAP to manage their employees' performance and conduct problems. For example, an organization may consider effective use of the EAP by supervisors' in their annual reviews or evaluations. EAPs save money and improve productivity, which provides a rationale for this accountability.

■ **I wrote a note to my employee that said, "See me." I didn't mean for her to feel harassed, but that is how she took it. She said she didn't like "see-me." I was totally surprised. What's the problem with such a note?**

Many employees experience anxiety when asked to meet with a supervisor for an unknown reason. Being handed such a note generates anxiety because of the struggle imagining what it means or what you want. Such a note is usually interpreted negatively and viewed as a prelude to a confrontation or unpleasant news. Getting such a note (particularly on a Friday night) can cause an employee to fret an entire weekend. Many worried employees later discover that the note related only to a trivial matter. Consider providing more information to your employees if you must leave a note requesting to see you at a future date or time. Failure to do so can cause needless distraction, lost productivity, and undue anxiety. Many supervisors do not realize that they have so much influence. Try not to be a "see-me" supervisor to employees who report to you.

■ **My employee called to tell me she has been in a hospital for several weeks to treat her obesity. She is coming back to work next**

Asking how you can best support your employee is appropriate because she disclosed the nature of her medical absence to you. Unless she requests changes to her duties or work environment, you do not have to make preparations different from those you would make for any other employee absent because of an extended illness. Be sure to re-

week. Is there anything I should do to prepare for her return?

her that the EAP is available to assist her. The EAP can direct the employee to support groups, services, and other health information useful in recovery. Obesity is a serious healthcare problem and kills 300,000 people in the United States each year. Other industrialized nations suffer as well. The U.S. Surgeon General urges employers to support employees and create workplace programs to help employees achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Although an EAP is not a “weight loss program,” EAPs can play a significant role in supporting this goal.

■ Occasionally I have employees who demonstrate ongoing problems with ambition, avoidance in making tough decisions, procrastination, or not appearing interested in doing their best work. The EAP can't really help these types of employees very much, correct?

It is natural to think that employees with the long-term patterns of behavior that you describe can't change. However, this is a myth. The key is clearly identifying the deficient performance or conduct issue and working toward change, first by asking your employee to make the improvements and then using the EAP if changes aren't forthcoming. Behavior patterns or work styles that you describe can be rooted in chronic depression, and such depression can remain untreated for many years. Victims of long-term depression may have only a vague awareness or no awareness at all that they are depressed because adaptation has continued for many years. Employees that you perceive as “not going the extra mile” should not be considered as inappropriate for referral to the EAP. On the contrary, your referral to the EAP may be their first and only link to help.

■ We have a medical unit in our company that is available to see employees. If I have an employee with attendance problems who says he suffers from migraine headaches, is it better to refer him to the medical unit or to the EAP?

You may want to use both resources. Hopefully, your employee is under the care of a physician. Still, remind your employee that the organization has a medical unit available to see employees. If your employee's absenteeism increases, inquire about policies or procedures your organization uses to support or accommodate employees with medical problems. Work closely with your organization as you take steps to respond to continuing absenteeism. Maintain accurate records of your communication. At the very least, recommend in the strongest terms that your employee seek help. Attendance problems can be used as the basis for a referral to the EAP. The EAP will not treat your employee's migraines, but will assist him in getting to an appropriate source of help. The EAP will also conduct an assessment to determine whether other personal problems exist.

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