

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

April 2024

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have related to their employees and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to EAP for a management consultation at (608) 775-4780 or (800) 327-9991.

- Q.** Our company has an EAP that is well promoted. I have always wondered whether such visibility for the program is a good thing. Doesn't this say to our customers that there are a lot of personal problems in our organization?
- A.** When EAPs began their rapid growth in popularity during the 1970s, some business executives worried about whether EAPs would make it appear as though a company was openly admitting it had troubled employees. There was fear this would be bad for business. Indeed, the idea of talking openly about troubled employees in one's organization was new. But troubled employees have always been around. The financial benefits and positive impact on the workforce because of having an EAP overcame these fears, and the EAP movement blossomed. Big companies acquired EAPs first and then came smaller companies. No evidence ever emerged to show that talking about troubled employees was bad for business. Instead, having an EAP became a way for an organization to show that it cared about its employees and viewed them as a valuable resource.
- Q.** I referred an employee to EAP three years ago. He went, but his performance problems remained. I've tolerated the problems since, but an incident that caused some embarrassment to our department is causing me to consider dismissal. Is there any point to using EAP now?
- A.** After referring your employee to EAP, you continued to tacitly accept substandard performance because you did not act to intervene with the problems that remained. Your employee must own the consequences of failing to provide satisfactory job performance, but he may have been influenced by this false perception of approval. After a significant incident associated with performance, employees are typically motivated to make changes in their performance while readily accepting EAP recommendations. This is a good reason to try another supervisor referral. The length of time since the last referral also supports this action. Be clear about the standard of performance required of your employee and establish a follow-up plan. Contract with your employee for satisfactory performance, and then act in response to performance that remains poor.
- Q:** Several employees are complaining that a co-worker often smells badly of alcohol. When confronted, she says she doesn't drink. Is there anything I can do if no attendance or performance problems exist?
- A:** Relying on your company's drug policy is an important first step, but if alcohol use is not addressed, there is still much you can do. Your employee obviously smells bad regardless of what is causing this

odor. This could be cause for taking action to correct a problem that renders her work environment objectionable to others. If coworkers are offended, you can bet that your customers are too. This means your employee's effectiveness is diminished; therefore, her job performance is being affected. It is important to make clear to your employee the consequences of continuing to smell so bad. For instance, continuing to smell bad and being required to leave the work environment could interfere with her ability to remain qualified for her job. This alone may be enough to motivate her to seek an EAP appointment. EAP can then conduct a thorough evaluation to determine the true nature of your employee's problem.

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