

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

January 2023

Referrals to EAP need not necessarily be driven by poor work performance. Employees who confide to their supervisors that they are dealing with personal or family problems can and should be reminded of the availability of EAP as a resource.

As a supervisor or manager, please make sure that EAP promotional materials such as posters, cards, or brochures are displayed in areas where employees can access them. Does your coffee or break room have these materials? Consider also placing posters on informational bulletin boards or in employee bathrooms. If you are in need of promotional materials, please contact EAP and we'll be happy to get them out to you.

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:** It's been my impression that EAP is only for employees facing really serious problems like alcoholism, drug addiction, or acute psychiatric problems. I now know this is not true, but what contributes to this false perception?
- A:** EAP is appropriate for virtually any personal problem an employee may face. No matter how much education to the contrary, some supervisors will believe EAP is only for severe problems of the type you mention. Supervisors most likely to hold this view are those who have the most experience at involving themselves in the less critical personal problems their employees face. In such instances, only those personal problems viewed as unmanageable or overwhelming to the supervisor are considered for referral to EAP. The rest are mistakenly viewed as part of the supervisor's responsibility in the relationship with the employee. Encouraging managers not to try to handle their employees' non-critical personal problems is one of the biggest challenges EAP faces. This is particularly true where the boundary between the management of performance and personal problems has not been well established.
- Q:** I'm a strong believer in EAP, and encourage others to take advantage of it. Other supervisors agree, but many put off making a referral until the employee is almost "out the door." Why does this occur?
- A:** There are many reasons some supervisors' resist referring employees to EAP, including fear of confrontation and ignorance of EAP. One rarely mentioned issue is the supervisor's inability to change the way he or she views problem employees. Some consider EAP only for good performing employees who have personal problems, not for poor employees who don't exhibit personal problems. Both types of employees, however, qualify for referral to EAP. Some supervisors have difficulty understanding how a poor performing employee could have personal problems and not make them known,

and they may wait for a crisis before making an EAP referral. Too often, the supervisor makes the referral at the point at which he or she believes the employee to be unsalvageable. Because the supervisor's patience has long since run out, getting the employee to leave outweighs the desire to see performance problems corrected.

Q: I have finally decided to terminate an employee, after having continuing performance problems with her. Before I do, I'd like to convince her to go to EAP. Can I help her see the value in doing so?

A: Typically, this approach does not work very well. If indeed you have decided to terminate the employee, it will be awkward to suggest an EAP referral with the hope that things might turn around. If you are unsure of the nature of her problems, suggesting she use EAP to deal with the crisis of termination is a possibility, but most employees will view seeking help at such a late stage as ineffective. Your challenge, as is every supervisor's, is to maximize the benefit of EAP by referring employees to it as early as possible. Typically, this is when job performance problems are persistent despite your attempts to correct them, but not yet severe.

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