

# THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

*Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees*

**February 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:** If I refer an employee to EAP for behavior and performance problems, how should I respond if asked, “Do you think I have personal problems?” And what if I really do think he or she has personal problems? And what if they are obvious?

**A:** Remind your employee that it is not your role to determine the existence of personal problems. Add that, no matter how obvious a personal problem might appear, the referral to EAP is still based upon performance problems that you have documented (quality of work, conduct/behavior, attitude, attendance, and availability issues). Further discussion with your employee about personal problems is risky. It often leads to a passive and unwitting approval by the supervisor of the employee’s decision to select another source of help or solution to the personal problem. Remind your employee that EAP exists as a helping resource, but it is his or her choice to accept or decline the supervisor referral. To help motivate employees who would naturally avoid seeking help for a personal problem associated with denial, be sure to discuss the likely outcome of continued unsatisfactory performance.

**Q:** We referred an employee to EAP rather than dismissing her for attendance problems. She went, but EAP had no recommendations. We are upset because she once again avoided consequences. Should EAP have recommended something? How should we react?

**A:** Your employee’s attendance problem may not be a symptom of a larger, treatable problem, or she may have resolved her problem before the EAP appointment. Regardless, your goal in making a supervisor referral was eliminating or reducing your employee’s attendance problem, not getting her into treatment. So, you made wise use of EAP. You made progress because you can now anticipate improved attendance. Even though EAP made no recommendations, your employee is still responsible for the changes you expect. If attendance does not improve, you could reconsider an administrative response you believe is appropriate. Until now, you may have experienced significant frustration in fruitlessly warning your employee. The present intervention does not have to be a repeat experience. It is a turning point with the promise of certain change that is within your control.

**Q:** My employee was absent without leave for three days. When he finally returned to work, he said EAP told him to take off to deal with “stress issues.” How should I react to this report?

**A:** Under the circumstances, you should expect your employee to be responsible for following established work rules when requesting or reporting his use of leave. EAP would not interfere with administrative

procedures by attempting to excuse your employee from work in the process of assisting the employee. Conceivably, a healthcare provider might make such a recommendation, but the employee would be responsible for arranging any leave. It is possible that a discussion occurred between your employee and EAP about a need to take off work. It is also possible your employee has been absent without leave and hopes referencing his involvement with EAP will help him avoid responsibility for this absence. You should expect a more satisfactory answer to your question if one is needed to support giving him the leave.

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