

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

June 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. My employee used to take initiative and was an outstanding performer, but in the past year she has become an average performer. I can't refer her to EAP because her performance is still satisfactory, right?

A. Your employee's performance might register as satisfactory on a formal review, but still not be consistent with her potential. This can be described and documented. Although you may not be justified in taking an administrative action, you have a reason to make use of EAP. Consider asking your employee why her performance has changed so dramatically over the past year. Remember, this is not playing the role of an armchair diagnostician. Your employee may offer a personal problem as an explanation. At that point, you could encourage use of EAP to deal with it. A supervisor referral later would be based upon continuation of the performance problem, regardless of whether your employee disclosed something personal as its cause.

Q. What are the key ingredients supervisors should consider when helping an employee correct performance?

A. Helping an employee correct a performance problem employs steps known to facilitate change within the context of an effective relationship you have purposely developed over time. So, correcting performance and managing people is both an art and a science. Three important steps in correcting performance that are often neglected by supervisors include: 1) Placing emphasis on the problem rather than on the employee. This approach elicits a partnership with the employee to solve the problem rather than a defensive reaction to avoid guilt and blame. 2) Involving the employee in analyzing the problem. You may be certain of the problem's cause, but helping your employee analyze and examine the cause will instill greater commitment to resolve it. 3) Following up with your employee. This step reinforces your employee's investment in correcting the performance problem and inhibits a setback.

Q. Some companies are very political. Doing everything right and being seen with the right people is rewarded. Making mistakes or appearing out of line is not. I am worried that such a work culture could taint an employee's career if he or she went to EAP.

A. The history of EAP development includes fear and concern among cautious companies, particularly during the 1970's, when the stigma of seeking help for personal problems was considered by many to be worse than it is now. Despite it all, well-utilized EAPs emerged among the most hesitant of organizations. It was discovered that trust of EAP overcame the stigma of seeking help. This is aided by: 1) top management endorsement of EAP, with its endorsement well promoted; 2) an EAP policy and mechanisms to ensure confidentiality; 3) workforce interaction with the EAP staff, resulting in visibility and familiarity among potential users; and 4) longevity of EAP. Every level of the organization will eventually use an EAP that is well established. This improves their acceptance. Many people presuppose that police officers might not use EAP for the reasons you cite, but EAPs that serve police organizations often have high utilization rates. Indeed, once trust is established, the program flourishes.

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