

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource--Employees

Q. *Will my employee be less successful in accepting or using help offered by the employee assistance program if a release is not signed so I can learn about participation?*

A. Not necessarily, but employees formally referred to the EAP by supervisors may have a motivational advantage over their self-referred peers when a release is signed. The reason is simple. An employee who knows management is aware of participation and cooperation with the EAP, even if details of a personal problem aren't disclosed, frequently possesses a greater sense of urgency to follow through with treatment recommendations. This increases the likelihood of success with treatment or counseling goals. This unique dynamic of the EAP process can help motivate employees to follow through and successfully treat even the most difficult personal problems. Don't underestimate the supervisor's role and the influence of diligent follow up, especially if a release is not signed. Staying focused on performance and insisting on change often makes all the difference.

Q. *Our company has many National Guard troops who have returned from overseas. How lenient should supervisors be with these employees? Don't they deserve a break because of their stress and leniency when performance problems arise?*

A. It is natural to weigh the circumstances of your employees and be lenient as a way of

accommodating them. However, unless a specific request is made for a reasonable accommodation, it is generally better to treat employees equally and all as fully capable. Do not assume these employees require different standards for how their performance should be judged. Many employees experience performance problems attributable to traumas and personal issues. Although the stress of war and its toll on the psyche is extraordinary, your employees will benefit most by being held to the same performance standards and work rules as other employees. Most soldiers returning from overseas will tell you they want to be treated no differently than their peers. Remember not to make assumptions or diagnostic conclusions about your employees.

Q. *My fellow managers and I have been educated in the signs and symptoms of alcohol abuse on the job, but isn't the most important part of training learning to avoid being manipulated and dispelling misconceptions about alcoholism?*

A. Knowing the signs, symptoms, and workplace impact of alcohol use is important. However, it's also important that you stay in control of a constructive confrontation with your employee by being on your guard against alcoholic manipulation and well-honed defense mechanisms. That will determine whether you are ultimately successful in making a supervisor referral, a referral for a drug test, or are willing to take action in response to problematic events.

Employees affected by addictive diseases rely upon their relationships with others to remain in denial, and to continue believing that they are in control of their alcohol use and an environment that helps to confront them about it. Consult with your employee assistance program provider before meeting with your employee to discuss performance or conduct issues. Doing so will help keep you from being drawn into a subjective discussion that the employee is likely to control.

Q. I know EAPs can help employees return to satisfactory levels of job performance and that this helps the bottom line. But isn't it a stretch to say that EAPs help reduce costs associated with things such as litigation, injuries, or even damaged equipment?

A. Employees affected by severe personal problems may experience a wide range of behavioral issues, many of which directly affect the bottom line. However, like an iceberg, other cost benefits exist beneath the surface. Reduced turnover or absenteeism, for example, has secondary cost benefits. The hiring of temporary workers or paying overtime to others to complete work assignments is avoided. When the EAP helps an employee who otherwise would have been terminated, the risk of litigation, legal expenses, paperwork, and lost management time is avoided. A drug addict who enters treatment and recovery may no longer steal materials that are resold for drugs. An employee no longer distracted by a personal crisis may avoid a costly accident. Almost any cost benefit has multiple other cost savings associated with it, and this makes an EAP a great investment.

Q. I have an employee who wants to bring her 8-year-old child to work because she does not feel the child is "safe" at home with an unemployed roommate. I said OK once, but the request has come up again. How can the EAP help? Should I ask why she doesn't trust the roommate?

A. It is appropriate to ask why she feels the child is not safe at home because she disclosed her concern, and because the safety of a child is the paramount issue. Ask that your employee phone the EAP to get help for this problem. Bring the issue to the attention of your manager so you aren't operating in isolation trying to address it. There could be a host of reasons why your employee does not want to leave the child at home, some of which may or may not be cause for alarm. The EAP will ask other personal questions necessary to discover the nature of the problem and try to discover what resources are needed to address this issue.



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