

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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

March 2012

Q. *There is a common saying in management that employees don't leave companies, they leave supervisors. Obviously this means the quality of the supervisor-supervisee relationship is crucial. Does the EAP have a role in helping managers keep good relationships with the employees?*

A. The phrase is oversimplified, but an employee's relationship with the supervisor is the most important one. Unless this relationship is constructive and positive, the risk of losing a worker to another employer or, worse, to a competitor will remain unacceptably high. Kevin Sheridan, a business consultant specializing in talent management, reports in his new book, *Building a Magnetic Culture* (2012), that engaged employees are ten times more likely to feel their work is recognized, that their supervisors and top management care about them, and that they are getting useful regular feedback. Such employees are four times less likely to leave. Obviously the supervisor is a key influencer in helping employees get these needs met. EAPs have a role to play because their skills and abilities can help supervisors enhance their relationships with employees. The purview of EAP work is often the business of improving relationships; therefore, use of the EAP is an excellent strategy for increasing employee engagement and thus the improvement of business outcomes.

Q. *I believe everyone should contribute to and maintain a positive work culture. How can I help my employees play this positive role?*

A. The first steps to building a positive work culture begin with the employer and flow down from the top where all levels of management practice behaviors that line staff below them model. There are many components of a thriving positive work culture, but supervisory staff do have influence in helping their employees buy into positivity. It's been shown that positive work cultures tend to be easier to come by in flatter organizations where the up and down movement of information and ideas is not as slow or encumbered by bureaucracy. This highlights a key strategy you can employ to influence your employees: promote easier communication, faster communication, and the personal modeling of behaviors that support a positive work culture.

Q. *An employee died from a drug overdose. Everyone was saddened and surprised. The employee was one of our most loved. I heard something about a drug problem years ago, but never since, and performance was excellent. I am feeling guilty. Did I miss symptoms?*

A. Your employee could have relapsed without any warning signs you could have spotted. Drug addiction can be treated and abstinence achieved, and with a programmatic approach to maintaining abstinence, the illness is arrested. Abstinent employees refer to themselves as "recovering" or in recovery. Years of abstinence can pass, and achievements and performance may be outstanding, but the disease does not vanish. Addiction is a chronic illness. Experts in the addiction treatment field generally regard drug addiction as a progressive disease with no cure.

Every area of an addict's life is affected and must be treated: physical, emotional, and spiritual. A recovering addict without an active and effective approach to recovery has a higher risk of relapse over those who have such an approach. Consequences of any relapse are unpredictable, but death from a narcotic overdose for relapsed addicts is possible. When addicts in recovery overdose and die, there may be great difficulty in comprehending why. Treatment experts and members of the largest group of recovering people, Narcotics Anonymous, have observed that relapses usually occur in the absence of an adequate recovery program combined with a sudden or acute stressful life event or circumstance.

Q. What am I supposed to do with an employee who is obviously smart but always showing off how much he “thinks” he knows about what’s legal for me to do as a supervisor, what the organization can’t do, etc. It is a bit intimidating.

A. The employee you describe may have difficulty feeling responsible or subordinate to you, so controlling you by discussing or referencing legal matters to intimidate you is an effective way of feeling more in control. A wide range of issues can contribute to this negative and problematic behavior, including anger, mental health issues, and more. The behavior is inappropriate and disruptive to communication and building a working relationship, so it should be addressed. Consult with the EAP for guidance on your approach. Often, employee assistance professionals can spot tangential issues or consider underlying contributing factors to a problem like this one. Let your supervisor or leadership staff be aware of the difficulty you are experiencing with this employee.

Q. How do EAPs save the organization money with regard to the use of employee mental health benefits? Employees have to go to approved counselors associated with the benefit plans. Where is the EAP role if the employee does not need referral?

A. EAPs are usually aware of approved therapists in the community who have the expertise needed to treat a specific problem. This knowledge can assist the employee in making an informed choice from a list of approved providers. If a managed care referral is made to a therapist to treat a problem outside the therapist’s area of competence, the EAP may discover a problem in the client-therapist match during follow-up, and the EAP can consider how or whether to intervene to facilitate the employee’s finding a new treatment provider. An EAP may also speak to the treating therapist with the employee’s permission to lend support or suggestions to the treatment plan.



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