

Frontline Supervisor



■ **To foster creativity among my staff, I encourage teamwork so that people can share ideas. But that doesn't seem to work for a couple of my employees who tend to be too individualistic. Should I refer these two to the EAP or treat them differently?**

Try giving them what they need first. Teamwork serves many purposes and, when necessary, it is vital that employees learn to work on teams to achieve organizational goals. However, teams often won't maximize employees' creative contributions. Organizations that emphasize individual achievement over teamwork will often spur more innovation from their staff, according to a new study published in *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* (May 2006), a research journal. That's because teamwork leads to conformity, and creativity thrives when independent individuals get to think for themselves and express their differences. Try making room for nonconformists. Encourage people to speak freely and follow their own schedules—even decorate their offices as they see fit (within broad guidelines). Provide quiet areas for contemplation. Some companies set up an "idea room" filled with flip charts, brain-teaser games, and headphones so that employees can unwind and let their minds run wild.

■ **A few of my employees have family members stationed overseas in the military. They are worried, but they do their best. How can I help them? Should I refer them to the EAP?**

The EAP can provide support for your employees and help them with their anxieties. EA professionals will not only listen and offer support, but may also recognize sleeping, eating, or work-related problems that are by-products of your employees' frequent worrying. As their supervisor, you should understand that your employees might behave uncharacteristically during this difficult time. If they're unusually angry, irritable, or absentminded, it may be because of their anxiety. Your patience and compassion can help everyone cope. Be willing to listen intently if they open up. Above all, don't tell them not to worry so much or insist that everything will be fine. Your well-meaning attempt to reassure them can backfire because they know their loved ones are at risk and you cannot protect them.

■ **I recently replaced a well-liked supervisor who died suddenly. I feel like I'll never come out from behind my predecessor's**

The EAP can help you grapple with the inevitable discomfort that you face in this unusual situation. It's often hard to fill the shoes of a well-regarded supervisor. But the challenge is far greater and more complex when the person has died. Others—from employees to peers to bosses—will automatically compare you to your predecessor. They may try outwardly to accept you on your own terms, but subconsciously they feel

shadow. Can the EAP help?

negativity towards you or display awkwardness when relating to you. That's all beyond your control. But you can control your behavior. With the help of the EAP, you can discuss steps you can take to respect the person's memory while gradually carving out your own professional identity. For example, you can work with colleagues to organize an annual fund-raiser as a tribute to your predecessor.

■ One of my employees asked me the other day if the EAP could help her stop smoking. That's not part of the EAP's role, is it?

The EAP can give referrals to smoking cessation classes and provide ongoing support to anyone who wants to stop smoking. Talking with an EA professional can serve as an effective follow-up to a class. At the EAP, your employee can discuss why she's determined to quit and can gain strength and willpower by reaffirming her goal and sharing her experience. The EAP can also offer practical pointers on how to combat cravings. Examples include drinking water to ward off the temptation to smoke or following a daily exercise routine to lose weight while remaining smoke free. Research shows that the odds of successful smoking cessation improve when individuals gain encouragement from a supportive team of allies. This team can include family, friends, co-workers, and the EAP.

■ I supervise well-paid technicians and lower-paid support staff. The technicians like to talk about their fancy new purchases and lavish vacations, and I sense it makes the others jealous. How can I get them to stop bragging about how they spend their money?

Individuals will chat during the workday—and if you try to tell them what they can and cannot talk about, you will fuel resentment. To address the potential hurt feelings of your lower-paid employees, make sure they know how much you value them. Take them to lunch to show your appreciation. Recognize their contributions at staff meetings. Cross-train them so they can gain skills to advance their careers. Meanwhile, meet privately with a contingent of some of the most-respected technicians and share your concern. Solicit ideas on how they think the better-paid employees can do a better job of bonding with support staff or at least working together more effectively without sparking jealousy. Ideally, you want the technicians to decide for themselves to stop their bragging for the greater good of the team.

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Call for assistance
508.990.0777 or 800.327.2723