

Frontline Supervisor



■ **I know supervisors can't get involved in employees' personal problems, but if this is the EAP's expertise, what else can they discuss with supervisors? I don't tend to think about the EAP in any other way. Am I missing something?**

Although employee assistance programs are primarily known for helping employees resolve personal problems, they were originally fashioned to be equally available to supervisors for consulting on conduct and behavioral issues of employees. Strategies for managing and arranging a supervisor referral, as well as post-referral guidance, are also valuable services. These services are often under-promoted because many employees mistakenly view them as being aligned with management. Of course, this EAP role does help employees and is complementary to an EAP's direct service functions. Nevertheless, many supervisors don't recall the availability of these services when they could be most helpful. Every employee referred by a supervisor has his or her own unique set of circumstances, so a supervisory consultation with the EAP prior to referral can help ensure follow-through. This concern with helping both employees and supervisors is what gives EAPs the reputation of being "pro-people, pro-organization."

■ **My employee said he is drinking after many years of being sober. Work performance is outstanding. Is there anything I should be doing about this situation?**

There is no issue within the scope of your supervisory responsibilities that requires your intervention. You are not privy to information related to this employee's medical history or the circumstances, so you can't evaluate or guess what might be of concern in this situation. Even if you did have complete understanding of the medical background, the issue of having no performance issues dictates your response to the situation. Relapses typically lead to job performance, attendance, and/or conduct issues, but there is no way to predict if or when these might occur. Because your employee shared with you a brief history and his current situation with regard to alcohol use, you may wish to remind him that the EAP exists as a source of help should he decide he needs it in the future.

■ **It seems like everyone is complaining about stress. What contributes to all these complaints? Is it just a popular thing about**

The Workers Compensation Research Institute (WCRI), whose customers are property casualty insurance companies, has studied workplace stress and the rise in societal complaints about it. Because many states pay workers compensation for "work stress injuries" and some states pay even when the connection to stress is minimal, insurers have a financial stake in this problem. Although the last WCRI report was published 20

which to complain? Is there an official definition of job stress? And what is the difference between job stress and just plain hard work?

years ago, the factors examined then remain relevant today. Loss of industrial jobs and an increase in white collar jobs has contributed to a rise in complaints about stress because 70% of stress claims are filed by white collar workers. Differences in how generations of workers respond to stress and economic realities also play a part. The Centers for Disease Control defines job stress as “the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker.” This definition argues for supervisors to play a role in the reduction of factors within their control that contribute to stress. Source: www.tiny.cc/stress-why.

■ I am a new supervisor. I tend to avoid conflict. Perhaps it is my lack of experience that explains my avoidance issues. But I wonder whether my avoidance is explained by something more deeply personal than a simple lack of experience. What should I do?

Being a new supervisor and not having prior experience in leadership positions can be intimidating and difficult. Generally, supervisors and managers improve as they participate in various forms of continuing education and reach out to experienced supervisors willing to coach and advise them. Experience is the best teacher, of course. None of these steps guarantee the acquisition of effective leadership skills. Indeed, many supervisors acquire attitudes about styles of supervision that undermine their leadership abilities. Self-awareness and interest in your personal growth are essential to becoming a good manager. These will lead you to challenge and overcome personal weaknesses, quirks, and other foibles that get in the way of your goal. The EAP can help you discover and overcome these personal challenges. This includes helping you develop an education and/or counseling plan.

■ We are all doing more with less. Helping employees cope with this reality is the supervisor’s job. I don’t see this “more with less” trend changing. What guidance exists for supervisors on how to meet this modern challenge?

The answer to this question varies among employers. It is an important one to consider because employees will gravitate toward burnout, and it will affect the bottom line if there are no creative solutions. Turnover and low morale are two examples. Part of the answer lies in helping employees help each other. This idea of developing a “high nurture” workforce focuses on employees improving communication, sharing skills, getting intra- and inter-organizational training, cooperating with each other more, solving problems together, inspiring and praising one another, recognizing and rewarding one another, processing stress together, and generally building cohesiveness. These “intangible efficiencies” are already proven ways of building and maintaining high morale and lowering the risk of burnout. Look for more attention in the literature to the harnessing of these intrinsic resources in order to keep a workforce happy, healthy, and productive.

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For assistance call 508-990-0777 or 800-327-2723