

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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

State Employee Assistance Program 1-877-237-8574 (Toll Free)

■ **What can I expect from the EAP when I seek help as a supervisor in managing a troubled employee?**

Expect the following from the EAP: 1) a patient, understanding, and professional hearing of your problems and concerns about your employee; 2) a discussion about performance issues, with the goal being to help you decide on a plan and approach to managing your employee; 3) guidance in effective documentation of performance and behavior problems; 4) guidance and support in confronting your employee about his or her performance and behavior problems; 5) competent and professional handling of your employee when you send him or her for help; 6) follow-up with treatment resources to determine whether the employee is receiving the services promised, and whether the prescribed treatment program is being followed, 7) follow-up with you, to the extent permitted by an information release signed by the employee; 8) continued assistance to help you adjust to a new, productive relationship with the formerly troubled employee.

■ **The EAP provided a critical incident stress debriefing six months ago, after an employee was killed. Everyone thought it was helpful. Many of us still complain of vague worries about life and death. Does this mean that the debriefing did not work? Should we call the EAP again?**

A critical incident stress debriefing (CISD) is a proven intervention tool to help thwart health problems resulting from exposure to a traumatic event, but it is not a guarantee against future difficulties being experienced by trauma victims. It is normal to experience stress reactions following a traumatic event, but these should diminish over time. Your EAP can provide you with a complete list of stress reactions, but a few include intrusive thoughts and images, recollections about the event, feelings of anger or sadness, or feeling insecure about personal safety or the safety of those you love. Additional help may be necessary if these reactions persist or interfere with your social and occupational functioning. Start by contacting the EAP to discuss your personal needs. Also discuss what you have observed on the job with your employees. The EAP will offer a suggestion on how to deal with the employees' residual effects of trauma.

■ **My employee appears stressed and has some job problems, but I am hesitant to make an EAP referral because I**

If your employee participates in the EAP, the employee assistance professional will assist her in deciding upon a plan to intervene with her problems. The EAP will not tell your employee what to do, but it would be unethical to avoid a discussion about time off if it meant jeopardizing her health or having her performance deteriorate further.

am worried that the EA professional will recommend she take leave, thereby interfering with our production goals. Should I be concerned?

When you make the supervisor referral, let the EAP know about the productivity issues of your work unit. The EAP can't accept conditions on its recommendations for the health or well-being of your employee, but it can consider solutions that will not interfere with productivity goals.

■ I have two employees who experience a lot of conflict. I know I can refer them to the EAP or, if things get worse, threaten disciplinary action. What more can I do to motivate them to change their behavior?

Helping your employees manage conflict and find workable solutions to differences is an indispensable skill for a manager. Many managers insist that employees deal with conflict, but then do not provide a structure to make success more likely. Your employees will find solutions faster and keep agreements better when you require parties in conflict to produce a written agreement that summarizes the nature of their conflict and the agreed upon solution. Get commitment from your employees for being accountable in acting in accordance with the solution, then follow up. It is easy for employees to fail at resolving conflict when they do not perceive a need to make compromises that an agreement may require. The result is often an unnecessary belief in the irreconcilable differences between two employees.

■ I was thinking of taking disciplinary action in response to my employee's conduct problems at work. She entered treatment for alcoholism, so I held off. Unfortunately, she quit treatment and went home. Should I quickly prepare the disciplinary action? If I don't, I think problems will continue.

Troubled employees who enter addiction treatment and suddenly leave against medical advice, rejecting further help, sometimes confuse supervisors who may wonder how to respond. If severe performance problems preceded admission to treatment, a supervisor may feel moved to levy a disciplinary action for prior performance or conduct issues, hoping to change the situation before the employee returns to work. Feeling angry or "taken advantage of" by the employee may add to this desire to be punitive. Would you feel the same way about an employee with a different type of illness? Discuss your feelings with the EAP, and develop a plan to manage the employee's performance. Work closely with your human resources specialist or manager to avoid taking an action that might appear arbitrary and lead to a grievance or legal challenge.

NOTES:

Look for the upcoming schedule of EAP supervisory training offered in 2004-05.

