

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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

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

■ **I referred my employee to the EAP because of his ongoing performance problems; however, the employee returned with no EAP recommendations. Frankly, I was surprised. I didn't send performance-related information to the EAP, but would it have made a difference? Why or why not?**

Providing details about your employee's performance problems plays a substantive role in helping the EA professional determine whether a personal problem affects performance. The lack of this information may have prevented the EAP from determining or diagnosing a personal problem, if one exists. Although behavior or medical problems can rarely be determined or diagnosed simply by knowing the nature of a performance problem, documentation supports a diagnostic interview. Hearing how the employee explains absenteeism, conduct problems, mistakes, lateness, trouble with the supervisor, interpersonal conflicts, and other performance shortcomings helps the EA professional gain an accurate understanding of the performance issues, their cause, and whether a personal problem exists. If performance information is unavailable to the EAP, the employee can always minimize or deny the severity of performance problems.

■ **I figure if I start dispensing progressive disciplinary action for my employee's performance problems, she will eventually quit. I would prefer this outcome to having her use the EAP. Am I obligated to make a supervisor referral to the EAP?**

Although an organization's EAP policy is unlikely to include a mandate to force supervisors to routinely refer troubled employees, support of the program is usually expected. Consider whether you have an ethical obligation to make a supervisor referral. Would management support a disciplinary action and your omitting such a reasonable step in resolving an employee problem? Typically, disciplinary actions and terminations are the least desirable ways in which to solve employee performance problems. Consider talking with the EAP about your feelings concerning this employee, the issues associated with her performance, and your supervision relationship. If your employee is qualified for her position, but is not performing satisfactorily, there is probably a way to help her. The EAP may also help you resolve interpersonal issues that lead you to believe the work unit is better off without her.

■ **I have an employee with a drinking problem. I know it because, frankly, I may have a bit of a drinking problem. My drinking doesn't get**

Referring your employee to the EAP does not entail discussing his personal problems, so you should not raise the alcohol issue. Instead, focus on his performance issues. Many supervisors mistakenly believe that they must offer the employee a diagnostic explanation to justify a supervisor referral to the EAP, in addition to the documented job performance problems. Although most supervisors have an

in the way of my work; however, his does. The problem is how to refer my employee to the EAP without him confronting me.

idea or can guess the nature of an employee's personal problems, mentioning them is a tactical error in supervisor referrals. Convincing your employee that the personal problem exists then overshadows the performance issue. Discuss your situation with the EAP prior to referral. The EA professional can give you guidance on what to say and how to say it. The EAP can also give you more information, if you desire it, on alcohol use and related health problems for your benefit.

■ My boss is questioning the poor performance evaluation I gave to my employee because past evaluations have been excellent under other supervisors. She says I have personal issues that interfere with my supervisory skills. Can the EAP help me?

You should meet with your supervisor to discuss her concerns about your management style. Write down, or obtain in writing, the specific issues that concern her. Then meet with the EAP. Together, you and the EA professional can explore the concerns that your supervisor has raised. It is certainly possible that the performance of your employee is different now than it was under past supervisors. If so, the EAP can help you consider more effective and objective ways of documenting your observations. It is also possible that you and your supervisor are both correct. She may have legitimate concerns about your management style, but your employee may also have performance problems. The EAP can help you sort out the issues and find strategies for dealing with each.

■ Some employees seem to have morale problems. My problem is that "poor morale" is a hard thing to document or describe. Is poor morale something upon which I can base a supervisor referral, or is it a symptom of something else?

Morale is an emotional condition of enthusiasm, confidence, or loyalty of an individual or group. With this definition of morale, it may be something you can't quickly or easily measure. Poor morale affects performance, and it is undesirable, but you are right, it is an issue you can't easily label as a duty, responsibility, or "essential function." You should be concerned about employee morale, but it will be easier if you determine what behaviors demonstrate enthusiasm, confidence in the work organization, and loyalty to the work unit or organization (or a lack of these behaviors). Use these measures to intervene, and if necessary make a referral to the EAP. As you endeavor to ensure that individual employees feel good about their jobs, you may discover issues within the work environment over which you have control that also affect morale. Don't overlook interventions that may resolve them.

NOTES:

To schedule your EAP supervisory training session, call 615-741-8643 or email alisha.d.smith@state.tn.us

