

# THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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

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

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■ **Sometimes I discover in the middle of a corrective interview that I am responsible for the performance problem of an employee. It might be due to lack of communication, faulty instructions, or lack of follow-up. Won't I lose respect if I apologize or admit it?**

**Few things are harder** than admitting fault, particularly in the middle of a corrective interview. But experienced managers know that no one was ever despised for admitting their mistakes. It is worse for your employee to walk away feeling unfairly corrected. Willingness to be open to admitting your own contribution to a problem can gain you respect and help your employee admit to his or her own role in the performance problem. It is a good practice when correcting performance to always ask yourself ahead of time whether you have some ownership in the problem. You might prevent the need for a corrective interview (something most supervisors do not like) or prevent having to discover your own role in the middle of the discussion.

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■ **I am a worrywart about how management thinks my work unit is doing. Although I have been a manager for several years, I can't seem to quiet myself down enough to enjoy my job. What can I do to change? Can the EAP help?**

**Although some worry** can arguably be considered a healthy and self-preserving virtue of a good manager, being in a state of excessive anxiety and distress will interfere with your ability to perform the duties of your position. Recognizing that your worrying cannot exist in isolation but will affect the employees you supervise can motivate you to gain better control over it. The EAP can help you locate sources of help and understanding in what contributes to your worrisome state. There are many approaches including thought blocking; stress management techniques; reinterpreting the balance between reality, fears, and worry; and making sure no medical condition contributes to your anxiety.

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■ **Our work unit's director has subtly discouraged employees from using the EAP because he does not want employees to "air the laundry" of our work unit along with personal problems. This information is also confidential, correct?**

**Confidentiality of EAP records** pertains not only to the identities of those who use the program and the personal information they share with employee assistance professionals, but also other information, such as sensitive issues and problems of work units, rumors, morale concerns, and more. This information is held in confidence in accordance with EAP policies and is not shared with other parts of the work organization. It is not unusual for a manager to be concerned about what is reported outside the work unit by employees, but managers have nothing to fear from the EAP. Employee assistance professionals frequently learn about many issues of the work organization, concerns of employee work groups, trends in morale, and more. But this is what makes employee

assistance professionals so valuable when they are invited to help plan programs and services that benefit employees, consult on policies that address employee issues, and make other contributions to the health of the organization.

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■ **I made a supervisor referral of an employee to the EAP, but I also decided to give her a written reprimand a couple of days later because there have been so many warnings. She then cancelled her EAP appointment. This clearly shows there was no personal problem, correct?**

**A disciplinary action that** immediately follows a supervisor referral can predictably undermine the referral. Your employee probably believed there was no longer a benefit to be gained from going to the EAP appointment after receiving the action. This does not mean that the disciplinary action was unwarranted. But it may have been more effectively employed as a backup alternative to the supervisor referral. Most employees accept supervisor referrals to prevent a disciplinary action for continued performance problems, to please the supervisor, or get help with a difficult personal problem they would rather manage on their own. Ironically, any of these reasons can lead to the successful resolution of a personal problem, even if associated with denial. A disciplinary action dispensed at the time of a referral removes the incentive for visiting the EAP. Consider making EAP referrals earlier to avoid feeling compelled to both refer the employee and dispense overdue disciplinary action.

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■ **My employee came straight out and told me he had a cocaine problem. I know the EAP does not do treatment, but only assessment, referral, and problem solving. Consequently, I referred him directly to a treatment program and he went. Did I do the right thing?**

**You are correct about the EAP's** role, but there is a lot more to it. The EAP would help determine the most effective form of treatment based upon the assessment, arrange for successful admission, coordinate follow-up and back-to-work meetings, consider family involvement in treatment, and assist with insurance matters. Your employee may also have co-existing problems. Cocaine addicts must be assessed for other drug use, especially alcohol. Some cocaine addicts who are also addicted to alcohol have only self-diagnosed their cocaine problem, but remain in denial about alcoholism. Cocaine addicts have a high degree of relapse without close follow-up that only the EAP can provide. Such a relapse could mean losing your employee. There is one more reason to use the EAP. Arranging treatment is outside the scope of your responsibilities as a supervisor, and can place you and your organization at risk should a problem with the referral arise.

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**NOTES:**

**Are you depressed** after the holidays? Did you drink and/or eat too much? If so, call 1-800-433-4468 or go online at [www.mentalhealthscreening.org/screening](http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/screening) (keyword tnscreen) for an anonymous, confidential, free self-test.

