

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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

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

■ **My employee has a restraining order against a boyfriend. If he shows up at work, I am supposed to call the police. Management and HR have been informed. Should I refer her to the EAP because her personal problems are interfering with the workplace?**

Your employee cannot be held responsible for the behavior of another person and the decision of a court to protect her from that person with a restraining order. If your employee's performance (i.e., her conduct, quality of work, or attendance) is not an issue, a supervisor referral would not be appropriate. However, the EAP can still be helpful. A restraining order, particularly one that has a "no contact" provision in it, often indicates that violence or a threat of harm has been perpetrated against the person who sought the order. Such employees may experience much anxiety, which could certainly affect performance. It is appropriate to mention the EAP to your employee and encourage her to take advantage of its services.

■ **What are the goals of an EAP when an employee seeks help?**

EAPs have four primary goals in working with employees. These goals include (1) identifying employees whose personal problems adversely affect job performance; (2) assessing the problems of employees, determining what resources are necessary to help them, and establishing a plan of action to access resources or services; (3) motivating employees to seek and accept appropriate help; and (4) helping employees get the services they need. To accomplish these goals, employee assistance professionals may use many strategies. Follow-up is important to ensure that employees don't face unnecessary roadblocks or lose motivation in implementing action plans. When supervisors and employees understand these goals, they are more likely to use EAPs, and less likely to decide who can and cannot be helped.

■ **My employee has an attitude you could cut with a knife. When you pass by her desk, she looks the other way. One time she punched a wall when she was angry, but that happened two years ago. Can I**

A supervisor referral to the EAP is possible, but basing it on her personality style is not likely to motivate her to go to or to cooperate with the EAP. You want her to make changes, so you need to articulate what these changes are more concretely, in terms of her performance. Ask yourself, "What can I see or hear that can be labeled as unsatisfactory?" If she fails to look at customers when they are speaking to her, this may be a problem, and it is a measurable behavior. Do any customers complain, or can you find out about their complaints? Complaints by customers are

refer her to the EAP for having a “cold personality?”

also measurable. Your belief that she has a cold personality is subjective. Determining how to articulate facts independently of your feelings will help you document problems, get the employee to accept the feedback and an EAP referral, and ultimately make the changes you desire.

■ **It is going to be a tough year for my employees. All departments are facing large budget cuts, and there is a freeze on hiring. Other decisions yet to be made will threaten morale. I know the EAP can help, but what can I do to soften the blows?**

Maintain a well-established communication system between you and your employees to help preserve their morale in times of high stress. Morale is often independent of stress and work pressure. A military combat unit under high stress, for example, can still possess high morale. Create two-way conversations with employees daily, or at least several times a week. This doesn't take much time. Twenty to 30 minutes a day to check on how things are going may be all that is needed. Failing to do this may result in lower morale in the face of increased work stress. Also conduct group meetings. They are crucial to keeping the lines of communication open between you and your employees. When decisions by management that may cause difficulties for employees must be communicated, be careful not to soften their impact unrealistically. Consider using the EAP as a resource to manage stress, and encourage your employees to do the same.

■ **What does the term “feedback seeking” mean when referring to attempts made by troubled employees to acquire better performance evaluations than they are entitled?**

Feedback seeking is an employee's solicitation of informal praise from a supervisor so he or she can later argue against a poor performance appraisal. Often feedback seekers will surprise the supervisor and get the praise they want because they choose a time or place for the request that is not appropriate for a complete response. Any encouraging words are remembered. When an unsatisfactory appraisal is later given for a feedback seeker, the supervisor may discover that the employee recalls every word of praise received during the evaluation period. The supervisor may then feel guilty or put on the spot, leading him or her to readjust the performance appraisal.

NOTES:

Sign up today for EAP supervisor training. Contact your training officer or call the EAP at 615-741-8643.

