

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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

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

■ **What should supervisors expect when using the EAP for assistance in managing a troubled employee? If I use the EAP, does this reflect badly on my supervisory skills?**

You can expect that EA professionals will be patient, understanding, and professional. Feeling heard will give you relief, and the EAP will help you document performance and behavior problems. You will also be given tips on how to properly confront the employee, if needed. When the employee's performance turns around, you may need follow-up support to adjust to the new dynamics of your relationship. If your employee's performance problems return, you will need to decide how to respond. Although the EAP cannot tell you what to do, you may want support as you consider your options. Turning to the EAP for consultative help is a smart move. It does not indicate that you are short on supervisory skills. When you have computer problems, you call a computer expert. When you need a wall painted, you call a painter. When you have people problems, call the EAP.

■ **I am a new supervisor. I long for the good old days when I could communicate openly with peers. Now I supervise them. Which is better, to earn respect by trying to be "one of the boys" or by detaching, being firm, and acting more aloof and businesslike?**

Those who supervise former peers must reevaluate prior relationships. As a supervisor, you must now use restraint over what you say and do because your new role will overshadow any familiarity of your previous role as a peer. You will lose the respect of your subordinates if you try to remain in your old role. This dynamic is well understood in the workplace. Employees want to have respect for the boss. They want to feel that they can count on you for tough decisions. Focusing on being a firm and fair supervisor is the best way to gain the respect of those you supervise. Many supervisors want to be liked and respected, but increasing familiarity with employees is not the way to go.

■ **I heard that employees with substance abuse problems have an unusually high rate of workers compensation injuries. I have an employee with a very high injury rate. Should I**

You should not refer your employee to the EAP to allay your suspicions about a substance abuse problem. You could be accused of harassing him or her or be subject to other employment related complaints. Making such a referral would also violate the principal of referring employees to the EAP based solely on job performance. If the employee's absences have contributed to poor performance, consider making the referral based upon these performances issues. Focus on performance

refer my employee to the EAP for a screening?

in your meetings with the employee. Be supportive and avoid becoming judgmental beyond the normal concerns any supervisor might have about such an accident frequency and its impact on performance. Do not speculate why there have been so many injuries. Your goal is to have your employee use the EAP. It is there that he or she will discover if something personal is contributing to the high injury rate.

■ **My employee is getting thinner and thinner. When I said she didn't look very well, she said she restricts her diet to no more than 500 calories per day. This must be a symptom of an eating disorder. Now what do I do?**

Although you are concerned, there may be very little you can do about it. As unhealthy as it appears, she may or may not have an eating disorder. However, expressing your concern and encouraging her to visit the EAP is appropriate. Is your employee's performance problematic? If so, making a supervisory referral based upon documented performance problems may help. If not, a possible eating disorder may eventually take its toll on her performance. Consult with the EAP. Together you may spot intervention options appropriate to your role. It is not unusual for supervisors to detect signs and symptoms of personal problems among employees under their supervision. However, if quality of work, attendance, and conduct in the workplace are not an issue, management's role is usually limited. Family and friends typically have more leverage and influence until then.

■ **My employee says he has an appointment with the EAP to get assistance in lodging a complaint against management. Will the EAP get involved in such a matter? Since he already has an appointment, is the answer, "yes?"**

Sometimes EAPs are improperly solicited to "take sides" and advocate for an employee in a complaint against management. Of course, this is a role EA professionals cannot play. Although employees may be reminded about other channels in the organization to assist them, such requests often set the stage to help troubled employees who would otherwise remain disgruntled. Many of these employees need better skills in communicating with supervisors, examining their behavior, and solving problems more effectively within their work units. Strong denial or other personal problems may inhibit their seeking such help. EA professionals explore issues brought by employees and they know there are often two sides to a story. What may begin as a plea to the EAP to join them in a pursuit against management ends with improved problem-solving skills and a willingness to constructively resolve disputes with management.

NOTES:

March is EAP Awareness Month! Have you signed up for an EAP supervisory training class? Call 615.741.1925 or 615.741.8643 for reservations.

