I think great employees figure out what it takes to do outstanding work. I know what outstanding work means to me. Should I share my view or continue to have those who are outstanding emerge among their peers to show others “how it’s done”?

Be up front and specific with employees about what you believe they can do to demonstrate outstanding work performance. This is in the interest of your work organization. Some supervisors think that if they tell employees what outstanding performance represents then they have given away “the secret” somehow diminishing their ability to judge an employee’s initiative. This is false logic. If asking for additional or challenging work assignments or finding and sharing with peers the ways to make tedious or repetitive work more interesting is outstanding performance, say so. If demonstrating good communication, keeping you informed of work progress, or maintaining an upbeat attitude are outstanding work traits then let employees know it. The purpose of outstanding performance is the advancement of your organization’s mission. Don’t make it a mystery or a frustrating puzzle employees can’t pin down. Discover more outstanding employees by letting them know what great performance represents.

I feel bad if I consider disciplinary action for an employee having ongoing performance problems when they are also working with the EAP to resolve personal issues. The advice to “just focus on performance” doesn’t make me feel better.

Frequently supervisors do not have a complete understanding of both the helping or humanitarian rationale for EAPs and their equally important business rationale. Understanding these principles by talking about them with the employee assistance professional can help you see that improving performance is the responsibility of your employee. Your job is to offer every resource you can reasonably muster to help your employee perform satisfactorily. You may not be convinced that you have done everything reasonable to help your employee reach an acceptable level of performance. This would be a good discussion to have with the EAP. Good communication, written expectations or clear agreements with your employee, and a release signed by the employee if he or she will provide one, will give you clarity and the willingness to do the right thing for your employee and your employer.

The EAP can help but it is likely that you will need support, coaching, and more than a couple of meetings to accomplish your goal of making the changes you want. You should anticipate that employees will resist your efforts at a supervision “style makeover” because they have naturally grown to believe that you don’t take things seriously. The EAP may
quality work, can the EAP help me with some quick advice on turning things around?

Employee assistance professionals frequently consult with supervisors, but this consultation refers to helpful guidance on specific aspects of the supervisor’s role in making a referral to the EAP. It is not an appropriate role of the employee assistance professional to render a psychiatric opinion to management about the capacity of an employee client to withstand the effects or distress of a disciplinary action. Doing so would be outside the standards and acceptable functions that define EAPs. EAPs discuss with management limited information about employees, and then only what the employee agrees to share via a signed and properly executed consent. Further, involvement with your disciplinary choices would give the EAP an inappropriate and influential role in guiding these decisions and represent a conflict of interest that would handicap the organization and be a disservice to the employee.

I have an employee who impulsively says or does things at work that are socially inappropriate. Quality of work is okay, but you never know what may be blurted out at a meeting or in a hallway. Is this a problem with the employee’s common sense? Is it ADHD or something psychiatric?

Impulsive behavior by employees in the workplace can be frustrating for coworkers and management alike. It is a problem that can be caused by medical or mental disorders. Frequently these employees are disciplined or referred to employee assistance programs because of a specific act shocking enough to be considered harassing, offensive, disruptive, or intimidating to peers. Employees with impulsive behavior may be very bright but socially awkward. They may insist that an offensive act was without malicious intent or was misunderstood. Often they may also be frustrated at their inability to consistently control impulsive behavior. Be sure to document problems with these employees well before a referral to the EAP so the employee assistance professional can see the pattern and make a more effective determination as to what might be contributing to the problem.

If there is a situation where EAP can assist please do not hesitate to call or give the toll-free number 1.800.308.4934 to employees.