

Gundersen Lutheran Employee Assistance Program presents

The FRONTLINE Supervisor

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

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The following are answers to common questions supervisors have related to their employees and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to EAP for a management consultation at 608-775-4780 or 800-327-9991.

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

A. You can expect that Employee Assistance professionals will be patient, understanding, and professional. Feeling heard will give you relief, and 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 EAP cannot tell you what to do, you may want support as you consider your options. Turning to 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 EAP.

Q. 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?

A. 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.

Q. 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 refer my employee to EAP for a screening?

A. You should not refer your employee to 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 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 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 EAP. It is there that he or she will discover if something personal is contributing to the high injury rate.

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