

Gundersen Lutheran Employee Assistance Program presents

The FRONTLINE Supervisor

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

September 2010

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 are the goals of EAP when an employee seeks help?

A. EAP has 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 EAP, and less likely to decide who can and cannot be helped.

Q. 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 refer her to EAP for having a "cold personality?"

A. A supervisor referral to EAP is possible, but basing it on her personality style is not likely to motivate her to go to or to cooperate with 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 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.

Q. 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 EAP can help, but what can I do to soften the blows?

A. 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 employee's 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 EAP as a resource to manage stress, and encourage your employees to do the same.

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