

# 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:** Although I'm the boss, I have a worker who shows disrespect, yells at me, and attempts to manipulate with guilt. Over the years, I guess I have gotten used to it. My own supervisor has put pressure on me to deal with it.
- A:** Although you admittedly have contributed to your problem by accepting this behavior, it is still possible to take action in order to establish a more appropriate relationship. The first step is to make a committed decision that you want this behavior to stop. You must then be willing to take steps to ensure that it does stop. Be clear in your own mind what must change. Does your employee interrupt, yell, refuse to follow instructions, argue, or question your decisions or your abilities? If so, include them on a list of the behaviors you find unacceptable. Be specific. Meet with the employee, and instead of just saying you want him or her to stop being disrespectful, identify the behaviors that must change using the list you've created. Specify the kinds of responses you want instead. Also, specify what the consequences will be for the continued behavioral problems. Recommend EAP to your employee, of course.
- Q:** My employee has severe absenteeism problems that have affected morale. He has good skills, but his coworkers are complaining. I feel a lot of pressure to terminate him. I fear using EAP because this might delay his departure.
- A:** Absenteeism problems are highly amenable to EAP intervention, particularly when you see evidence of your employee's skills and abilities. For this reason alone, you should consider using EAP. Experience shows that the employee and the organization will be better off if you make the referral. You would be feeling less pressure now if you had referred earlier when the attendance problems first emerged, but do not allow this misstep to dissuade you from referral now. You will probably see improvement in his attendance pattern the moment you make the supervisor referral. This is a natural response, but it won't last

without follow-through with EAP's recommendations. Act to support your employee when the pattern stops, or follow through with your next step when or if the attendance pattern recurs.

**Q:** Can supervisors consult with EAP professionals on general supervision questions in addition to the traditional consulting they provide on managing troubled employees and referring them to EAP?

**A:** Over time, EAP professionals develop a broad base of knowledge of effective supervision practices, including resolving problems of poor motivation, low morale, staff conflicts, and other performance management and supervision problems. EAP professionals may be one of the most knowledgeable groups of experts on improving employee productivity, although this strength is less mentioned in traditional business literature than their helping role. The International Association of Employee Assistance Professionals' official definition of an EAP acknowledges this capability. The EAP professionals here at Gundersen Lutheran can be an excellent source for helping you find solutions to tough supervision problems. Remember that EAP is not a substitute for Human Resources. EAP professionals do not direct or approve supervisor decisions or administrative actions, so it is important to own your decisions and their outcomes. EAP frequently will refer a supervisor to their HROM for guidance when there are policy issues or potential risk management concerns.

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