

# The FRONTLINE Supervisor

*Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees*

January 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:** My employees are frequently irate and nearly rebellious at the outcome of their performance evaluations each year. I dread this annual duty of mine and, as a result, I skip it periodically. How can I minimize their reaction?
- A:** Unfortunately, the simple answer of "grade as fairly as possible," is not a guarantee that employees will accept their performance evaluations. Employees who work very closely with each other are more likely to be upset over performance evaluations when they are dissimilar. They believe they have an accurate perception of their own work quality and that of their peers. Frequent communication with the supervisor is essential so that annual evaluations are less of a surprise or shock. Consider meeting briefly and privately with each of your employees four times a year (including the annual performance review). Be specific. Ask the employee for a self-evaluation. Then provide your feedback and judgment of his or her work. Justify your ratings if you disagree. This process improves your relationship with each employee and reduces conflict at the final evaluation.
- Q:** My employee complains that he has a sleep disorder and, consequently, has trouble getting to work on time. He excitedly talks about what his doctor is doing for him, but I don't see any progress. Is this an EAP matter?
- A:** An employee with a chronic performance problem may admit to a personal problem and disclose an intervention plan that seems plausible. It can be compelling under such circumstances to postpone an administrative response even as the problem grows worse. Supervisors faced with such employees can feel as though there is no easy answer or next step in attempting to resolve a chronic performance issue. Typically, it is a mistake to accept such a plan outright in lieu of making a supervisor referral to EAP. Deciding that EAP is "not necessary" is a diagnostic decision because of the presumption that the

employee's plan is proper. It is better not to judge the employee's intervention plan. Accept the employee's answer, but make a referral to EAP.

**Q:** Although EAP is voluntary, regardless of whether an employee is self-referred or referred by the supervisor, I often emphasize to employees that my referral of them is "mandatory." It helps me feel more certain that they will go. Is this ok?

**A:** Telling your employee that a referral is mandatory when EAP is voluntary is inconsistent with EAP's policy. It's not what management had in mind when the program was established. Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines mandatory as "containing or constituting a command; obligatory." This definition is not consistent with EAP's ethics and accepted EAP practice. Some supervisors use the term "mandatory" as a substitute for "supervisor referral" in common expression. This also diminishes the positive perception of EAP. EAP is more effective when it attracts employees. Attempting to make a supervisor referral mandatory confuses employees about the nature and purpose of EAP. EAP suddenly appears punitive or aligned with management. Support your employees, insist on accountability, and encourage employees to view a referral as an offer of assistance. Most employees will seek help without the need to coerce them.

Information contained in the FrontLine Supervisor is for general information purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. For specific guidance on handling individual employee problems, consult with your Employee Assistance Professional. Copyright ©2010 by DFA Publishing & Consulting, LLC. All rights reserved.