

The FRONTLINE Supervisor

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

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.

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- Q:** One of our employees racked up a bunch of charges on one of those "900 phone services." He was disciplined and has paid the company back. Should we involve EAP and make a supervisor referral.
- A:** It would be appropriate to make a supervisor referral to EAP. Your employee's willingness to risk discipline or even his job security to access a "900 phone service" at the company's expense demonstrates his willingness to cross boundaries most employees wouldn't consider crossing. This is an indication that other personal problems could exist that may or may not be work-related. They may also cause considerable distress for him or others. It is likely that your employee is remorseful and feels extremely embarrassed over this matter. Still, he may need additional support or professional counseling to gain control of his behavior. The crisis of being discovered should motivate your employee to accept and follow through with almost any reasonable recommendation made by EAP.
- Q:** There is high turnover in our department, which makes it difficult to detect job performance declines in employees. Any suggestions on spotting trends in the performance of short-timers?
- A:** You can spot declines by establishing a "performance index" for those who have been with you for short periods of time. Upon hire, note carefully the performance patterns of new employees, particularly if the duties of the position are not new. Use this level of performance as a baseline from which to gauge future expectations for performance. Declines later on should be contrasted in a corrective interview against the more successful performance you have observed in the past. You can establish a performance index with new employees or even with those who have transferred internally to your supervision. If troubled, transferred employees may have "honeymoon periods" of good

performance inspired by the new changes that influence temporary self-control over symptoms of personal problems. A performance index can help you spot emergence of the unresolved problem, making it possible to intervene later.

- Q.** In discussions, my employee frequently makes statements that are completely off the topic. Her memory is also poor. She has worked for the company 35 years. Most of us are beginning to work around her. This is just part of getting old, right?
- A.** Many things, both medical and otherwise, could explain the problem experienced by your employee. Make a referral based upon performance issues. EAP can help determine what the problem is and what resources might assist her. When coworkers witness growing communication and memory dysfunction in a fellow worker, they may adapt or find ways of coping. This natural - and enabling - process can unfortunately permit a medical condition, if one exists, to grow worse. Your employee may be exhibiting very early symptoms of a health care problem that affects her cognition, but do not assume it is simply age-related. Awareness for health issues of aging will naturally increase as America ages. This awareness can be a step toward helping valuable workers sooner, however expect your employee to meet the expectations for her position.

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