

# THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

*Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource -- Employees*

BluePrint for Health® Employee Assistance Program 651-662-0900 or 1-800-432-5155

■ **An employee disregards the EAP because he thinks people should only see a Ph.D. psychologist, and the EAP staff he was referred to lack a Ph.D. (although they are certified and/or licensed professionals). How can I respond to this complaint?**

Your employee may not understand the EAP's role. It is not designed as a treatment center for mental health issues. Rather, the EAP's purpose is to assess and investigate an individual's problems and, if necessary, provide a referral to appropriate resources. Such a referral may include having an employee see a Ph.D. psychologist. EA professionals are highly qualified to perform assessments and make determinations on the best course of action to either assist employees or refer them to more specialized types of help. To help your employee reconsider use of the EAP, let him know that EA professionals are not entry-level professionals and that experience in addition to qualifications are what count. If your employee is looking for effective interviewing, motivational counseling, and skills in helping develop a plan for improvement, the EAP is the best place to go.

■ **My boss said that I need to be a more supportive supervisor. He couldn't give examples except to say "your team has to feel you support them." What can I do?**

**Look for opportunities** to show that you're responsive to your team's needs. If team members ask for resources to help them produce results, fight on their behalf to fulfill their requests. If they struggle to work through a tough problem, acknowledge the difficulty of their task and praise their effort. Consider work rules regarding pay in your organization and what flexibility may be available. For example, if employees work lots of unpaid overtime, can you provide paid time off later? If no, what other options exist to support them? Your boss may also want you to boost your team's morale—to motivate employees to persevere amid adversity. The best way to focus workers on a challenging mission is to shower them with support. Spend time just listening to them. Learn about their fears, concerns, and gripes. By paying attention to your team's comments, dignifying their views, and championing their interests, they will feel supported, and you will earn their admiration.

■ **When employees enter addiction treatment, is there a difference in outcome between those who are admitted with a sincere desire to get well versus those who are motivated to avoid a disciplinary action for problematic performance or behavior?**

**Although both types** of employees have different motivations for entering treatment, it is not possible to say who will be more successful in recovery and remain abstinent from drugs and alcohol. Supervisors and coworkers may be skeptical of the desire for admission by some employees who seem to make a sly move toward admission, but this skepticism is not well placed. Treatment is a powerful, life-changing event, and it can overtake addictive disease patients initially in strong denial upon admission, causing them to eventually desire a drug-free life. A strong association exists between workplace-related admissions and successful recovery, like those facilitated by EAPs. It has been closely observed by health professionals that when fear of job loss is present, an addictive disease patient's prognosis is good with support and follow-up after treatment. This exciting discovery has led to the proliferation of employee assistance programs and has saved untold numbers of jobs and lives.

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■ **One of my employees reportedly was seen storming out of an EAP session and very upset. I know she is under stress with serious personal issues. Nevertheless, should I say anything to her or investigate the matter?**

If this behavior occurred on the grounds of the organization, it may be relevant to the work situation. However, you should decide if it is serious enough to warrant investigation of it. If the EAP office is offsite, then it is a different matter, and you should assume that the EAP will effectively manage the incident. Although it is possible that your employee's visit to the EAP did not match her expectations, an outburst would be rare. EA professionals are experienced at managing a client's disappointment and still helping them. If it is appropriate to investigate the incident, conduct a private, one-on-one meeting to give the employee a chance to explain what happened, but do not probe the nature of her personal problems. Don't presume to know why she acted in a certain way or diagnose her behavior as tied to the stress she faces with personal matters.

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■ **In supervisor training, we are strongly warned not to ask employees personal questions or to discuss employees' personal problems. I find this a difficult task because it makes me appear cold. Can you discuss this a little more?**

Discussing an employee's personal problems usually results in a temporary cessation of job performance problems that may be caused by the employee's personal issues. After such discussions, there is often mutual satisfaction between the supervisor and the employee. The employee feels gratified and re-energized to exercise greater control of his or her personal problem and its symptoms, and the supervisor feels he or she successfully counseled the employee to change his or her behavior. These discussions are seductive, but hazardous, because they protract the performance problems, lead to crisis, and can serve to perpetuate underlying chronic disease. Often these discussions are motivated by the supervisor's natural desire to avoid disciplining an employee or participating in constructive confrontation. Consider consulting with the EAP to better understand your supervisory role and effective integration of the EAP in supervision.

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