

SOLUTIONS

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Question: I have never had an employee who needed a supervisor referral to the EAP, but I am sure many have personal issues in their lives and could benefit from it. When is a good time to remind people to use the EAP if they need it?

Answer: A busy, functional workplace can easily forget that an EAP is available. One great time to mention the EAP to each employee individually is to simply remind them that the program exists at their annual performance evaluation. Make it a habit, even if an employee is a top performer with outstanding marks. Some employees just don't think about the availability of the EAP. Talking about it during their review may prompt them to make the call about a nagging personal issue. Also remind your employees about the confidential nature of the EAP, and remember to note that it is available at no cost to them.

Question: My employee does not use his safety equipment. I have asked him many times to comply with our safety and OSHA standards, but to no avail. Maybe he doesn't care if he is fired or injured. Can the EAP possibly help?

Answer: Your question is a good one because it shows how easy it is for a supervisor to use diagnostic thinking—in this case by ruling out that an EAP referral would do any good. True, your employee may not care if he is fired for failure to comply with safety rules, but there could be other explanations, including problems with memory, training issues, communication or cultural barriers, or even a personality style that causes him to act in a non-compliant way by refusing to use safety equipment.

Could his failure to comply with safety rules be related to inconsistent use of rewards for and enforcement of those rules? This is a common reason for poor compliance. This is a work performance issue, and your EAP professional can help. Document his behavior and talk with him about your expectations for corrective action. Don't hesitate to consult with your human resource staff and EAP.

Question: Next week I have to dismiss an employee who is currently an EAP client. I am very apprehensive about it. Can I use the EAP to talk about my feelings and process my concerns? If I become a client, will this put the EAP in a difficult or untenable position?

Answer: The EAP is available to you, as it is to any employee, to discuss your concerns and offer support. Your meeting is confidential, and the EAP's focus will be on helping you with your concerns and apprehension about the dismissal. The EAP will not concern itself with the legitimacy of the planned action or with your employee's issues. To do so would sabotage the EAP mission. If you go to the EAP to obtain help for yourself, the EAP professional will focus on you. EAP professionals are adept at detaching from the emotional concerns of other cases in the organization—many of which might be linked—so they can focus on the employee in front of them. This is a skill and an art that makes the employee assistance profession truly unique.



Question: I am a new supervisor, and employees have begun coming to me with their need to talk about work issues. The issues include concerns about downsizing, performance, coworker conflicts, angry customers and more. How can I be a good listener?

Answer: The “active listening model” will help you demonstrate empathy with your employees in job-related discussions. Start by inviting an employee to a private place to talk. Make the person comfortable and demonstrate that you are glad he or she came by to talk. Let the employee talk about the issues or concerns. The more you talk, the less your employee will talk, so be careful about jumping in too quickly. When responding, don’t say, “I know how you feel.” Instead say, “It sounds like you were really concerned by that customer’s tone of voice.” Paraphrase what was said, so your employee feels heard. Ask questions using “who,” “what,” “where” and “how.” These four words elicit additional information, and your employee is less likely to forget something important in his or her story. Remember, this is not psychological counseling. These are practical listening skills for improving any relationship.

Question: I do not like to micromanage my employees, but at least two of them won’t finish their work in a timely manner unless I am directly involved in what they do. I could refer them to the EAP, but frankly I think things will get worse before they get better. So now what?

Answer: Rather than refer your employees to the EAP, consider visiting the EAP yourself. The EAP professional can help you find a way to make the changes you want and can coach you in how to detach from these employees. Although supervisors

frequently get the blame for micromanaging, some employees invite this type of relationship because they prefer it. Micromanaging forces employees to become dependent on the supervisor. In turn, the supervisor feels secure that the work is getting done the way he or she would do it. Many employees dislike being micromanaged. It is a key complaint identified in surveys and in research on employee morale. Still not all employees hate being micromanaged. Some prefer assurance that the supervisor is getting what he or she wants over being independent and in control of their work. These employees may feel anxious when they are not closely supervised, and they may avoid promotional opportunities that require them to be independent.

Question: The EAP provides short-term problem solving and counseling, but it refers people to psychotherapy. What’s the difference between the two?

Answer: EAP counseling concentrates on solutions that can address an individual’s concerns or struggles associated with activities of daily living. It is intended to be brief and solution focused. Psychotherapy is treatment for emotional problems where the relationship with the psychotherapist is a means (a tool) to help the client or patient make difficult changes in behavior, beliefs and habits of thinking to improve their life functioning. Most people who go to therapy do so after experiencing unresolved personal distress. They want to learn new ways of coping with life’s problems (especially conflicts in relationships) because the old ways no longer work.

Question: Is it appropriate for me to ask the EAP for advice on how best to communicate with my employee? Although I have no concerns about the quality of his work, he is not easy to approach and it is difficult to hold a conversation with him.

Answer: The EAP professional is available to consult with you on how to manage any relationship issues you experience with your employees. The EAP professional might help you discover not only more effective ways of communicating with your employee, but also what his behavior means. Furthermore, effective communication is the employee's responsibility as much as it is yours. If you assume that communication is solely your burden, you are eliminating a key measure of your employee's responsibility for interpersonal effectiveness. Talk to the EAP to explore whether you struggle with assertiveness and how you can help your employee be more accountable for behaviors that clearly impede the ability of others to communicate with him. The EAP will help you gain a clearer perspective along with practical help in communicating with employees.

Question: Evaluators or supervisors are often advised not to be their employees' friends. Does this mean we can't go to dinner, to a baseball game or to holiday parties at one another's homes?

Answer: Avoiding close friendships with those you supervise refers to the conflicts of interest that might arise when loyalties are divided between two opposing positions. Your friend requires loyalty, and so does your employer. When your employer's needs conflict with those of your employee who is also your friend, who are you to support? Avoiding friendship does not necessarily mean that you cannot socialize,

but you should consider the circumstances of your work culture and the implications of not conforming to the boundaries that naturally exist between you and your subordinates. Some even argue that employers have a right to demand loyalty or fidelity to their organizations, since they are paying their supervisors for it. Regardless, maintaining boundaries helps preserve both relationships—the one with your employer and the one with your employee.

Question: When my employee returns from lunch, where he usually has an alcoholic drink, he is much more outwardly friendly and pleasant. He doesn't appear drunk. This is not a violation of our drug and alcohol policy. He is often late in the morning for work; however, he never has alcohol on his breath. What should I do?

Answer: Document his lateness. Discuss with him your expectations that he will come to work on time, ready to work. You should refer your employee to the EAP if you have attempted to correct his tardiness but have been unsuccessful. Base the referral on his tardiness, not the alcohol use issue. The two issues could be related, but there is no way for you to know for sure. Even if they are related, the performance issue is chronic tardiness, not alcohol use affecting the workplace—at least not in a way that you can document yet. If your employee's behavior after lunch interferes with productivity or the work environment, you have grounds for making a referral. Many who suffer from alcoholism are late for work but do not drink before coming to work. Some may drink later in the day or directly after work to ward off ensuing withdrawal symptoms.



Question: I have an excellent relationship with each of my employees. Despite this, our workplace is characterized by cliques, backbiting, gossiping and worker conflicts. We almost never meet as a group because I work better one-on-one with employees. Am I missing something?

Answer: Employees benefit from opportunities to process stress, manage communication and identify group problems and solutions. Regular staff meetings are therefore important for maintaining good morale. Your one-on-one style is effective for managing individual relationships but not for managing groups. If employees don't have regular opportunities to sit across from one another and process stress in an organized manner, you will see interpersonal conflict emerge. The more stressful and demanding the work environment, the more likely there will be conflict. You must be willing to face your employees *as a group* as well as individually. Group meetings may be a bit frightening and may make you feel vulnerable, but there is no substitute for them. Seek input from the EAP on how to overcome your hesitation to use this approach.

Question: My employees are under a lot of pressure to perform, and it seems those who put in the most hours get ahead. How do I spot early signs of burnout if competition keeps people from complaining?

Answer: As you interact with employees, be on the lookout for statements or behaviors associated with being drained of emotional energy, being "snappy" or irritable, refusing to socialize with others, cynicism, appearing withdrawn and unexcited about events in the workplace that should perk them up, or complaints about relationships at home being troublesome. These may signal adverse effects of overwork, or they may mean something other than burnout. Either way, consult with your EAP to learn more about other symptoms and for guidance on making a supervisor referral to the EAP.

To speak with an EAP professional,
please call: **800.765.0770**

