

Frontline Supervisor



■ **Our EAP has several EA professionals on staff. Is it a good idea to give the name of one of the EA professionals to my employee at the time of making a supervisor referral, perhaps the one I know best?**

EAP principles do not specify whether a supervisor should provide the name of an employee assistance professional at the time of making a supervisor referral. Some supervisors do this of course, but choosing one's favorite employee assistance professional, or the one who consulted with you last, could, conceivably, hinder your employee's involvement with the EAP if the referral is not coordinated, or the EA professional is not available. Such a delay could lead to the employee's decision not to use the EAP, along with continuing performance problems. Remember that it is the employee's responsibility to make productive use of the EAP with whomever is assigned to work with him or her.

■ **My employee was referred by the EAP to an addiction treatment program. He has phoned me from the treatment program wanting to leave early and come back to work. Honestly, he sounds great. It is okay with me, but should I call the EAP, refer him to the EAP, or what?**

Addictive disease patients may feel excited about being newly abstinent from alcohol or drug use within days of entering a treatment program. However, they are not well. This is particularly true after a detoxification period. Much more is required of the patient to achieve continued abstinence and sobriety. This includes skills and education within a programmatic approach to long-term recovery. Early on, patients may be tempted to quit a treatment process, convinced that they are in control of their substance use and capable of "doing it on their own" (avoiding drug or alcohol use without treatment). This demonstrates a lack of understanding of the chronic disease process, but it is normal for new patients. Contact the EAP, and expect to have the return-to-work process coordinated by the EA professional working with your employee.

■ **My employee is a victim of a stalking ex-boyfriend. He does not call her at work, but she is frequently late or outside on the pay phone dealing with him. I've recommended the EAP, but she won't go. How do I**

Although your employee may be the victim of a stalker, her situation may not change, and her productivity issues may not improve, until she acts decisively with this relationship. Your employee still has choices, but apparently has not acted on them yet. You sympathize with her, and this is a natural response, but it is preventing you from holding her accountable for her performance issues. Your response is sending a message that she does not have to change. Be more assertive with the job issues along with an EAP referral (based upon the job issues), and it may motivate

help her? How do I get her to the EAP?

her to consider using the program to explore intervention options. It is sometimes difficult to be assertive with an employee having personal troubles, especially when he or she is a victim. But continuing productivity and availability problems are unacceptable. Explain what you must do if productivity issues and behavioral issues continue, including what disciplinary steps you will consider.

■ I will be confronting my employee about the smell of alcohol on his breath in accordance with our reasonable suspicion policy. Can you offer any quick tips prior to my meeting?

Managers charged with determining reasonable suspicion of alcohol or drug use in the workplace sometimes fail to follow the organization's policy, so be sure to review it, especially the definition of reasonable suspicion. Supervisor confusion about process, fear of making a mistake, the employee's reaction, and denial are factors in missteps and problems with following reasonable suspicion determination procedures. Be confident, respectful, and mindful of the dignity and confidentiality of the employee. When confronting your employee, expect denial and a unique explanation (e.g., use of cold medicine or a late night out). Do not waiver in your determination to follow the policy steps for obtaining an alcohol or drug test. Don't be accusatory, judgmental, or condescending. Intervene in a proper and prudent manner to prevent an employee from driving home if you suspect he or she has been drinking or using drugs.

■ I caught three of my employees sleeping in a truck while on the clock. All are good workers, but still may be fired. If they don't have health problems, what contributes to this behavior? Is it the work culture, lack of supervision, or just abuse?

Not all employees who sleep on the job have associated health problems, but you can't make this determination as a supervisor. This makes an EAP referral appropriate. Some employees who sleep on the job may be hardworking and productive, but find time to snooze, believing they won't get caught. A work unit where employees are inadequately supervised, or where fieldwork is the norm, may be more prone to employees sleeping on the job. Some employees who have never slept on the job may model those who do. Managers usually discover employees sleeping on the job when someone reports it, or employees are not found at an anticipated location. Intervention and prevention starts with active supervision, assured consequences for violating this work rule, and a clear message that sleeping on the job is unacceptable.

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