

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

GUNDERSEN
HEALTH SYSTEM.
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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.** If I have an employee with job performance problems, why wouldn't my insistence that they get help for a personal problem, if one exists, be as effective as a visit with EAP? If I can't motivate the employee, how can EAP?
- A.** Many employees are naturally defensive and typically focus on proving the supervisor wrong. This makes accepting performance problems and following a simple directive to seek help unlikely. With a supervisor referral, this dynamic changes. Techniques of motivational counseling used by EAP are then employed. Many studies have demonstrated that clients who are initially resistant or involuntary are nevertheless capable of superior outcomes from the counseling process. This is a key rationale for the existence of EAP. Employee Assistance professionals initially attempt to nurture whatever motivation a client brings to the EAP visit. The goal is to help the employee see that the gains of cooperating with EAP outweigh the pain and negative outcomes of failing to do so. These EAP skills, along with assurances of confidentiality, can motivate employees far beyond what the supervisor can do in his or her role.
- Q.** Some of my employees are more productive than others. Assuming none of them have personal problems interfering with their productivity, what explains differences in motivation? What is my role in helping them be as productive as possible?
- A.** Employee motivation is a broad subject of study. Two employees equally capable of producing the same amount of work may respond to different motivators. One employee may be internally motivated by the rewards of success in accomplishing goals, while another employee may accomplish the same goals, but motivated by fear of failure. Most employees have a balance of these two motivational tracks but favor one over the other. Manager supervision style may favor one of these employee types over the other, but finding a balance of both is ideal. Examining your management style (whether it is reward and praise oriented, or consequence and discipline oriented) can give clues to improvements in helping motivate your

employees. If you struggle with difficulties in changing your style, EAP may be able to help you discover why and find resources to support your goal of personal balance and change.

Q. What role does EAP play in increasing employee commitment to our organization?

A. Because most employees do not disclose their participation in EAP, especially to managers, management may not hear how important EAP is to employees or how moved many are to feel loyalty and commitment to the organization for offering such a service. Employee Assistance professionals frequently hear how thankful employees are that the company sponsors an employee assistance program. Occasionally some employees with performance problems and personal troubles falsely believe the organization is “out to get them” until they visit EAP. This may be the turning point in recognizing their contribution to the difficulties they face with the organization. What often follows is more commitment to the employer, the work unit and willingness to resolve personal problems. The employee comes to believe that the organization does have a stake in his or her success.

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