

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

May 2025

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.** I can't counsel my employees, but is there something appropriate that I can do to help them manage their stress better, particularly if they are not individually inclined to visit EAP?
- A.** There is a role for you to play, but it is linked to legitimate supervisory concerns. Do you see that your employees take the rest breaks to which they are entitled? Do you encourage line supervisors under your supervision not to interfere with such breaks? Do you take breaks yourself and model work-life balance? Doing so will help your employees feel it is okay to do the same. Ask your employees what you can do to help them manage work stress better. You may be surprised at the good suggestions they will make. Be sure to ask individual employees how they are doing during stressful times. A show of empathy goes a long way toward helping employees feel appreciated and will help them keep a balanced perspective when the going gets tough.
- Q.** I denied my employee's written request for some expensive office equipment. She has since demonstrated a hostile attitude toward me. Denying her request was appropriate and my prerogative, so why such a reaction?
- A.** Your employee's response to the denial of her request demonstrates her emotional reaction to it, but it is not possible to say what underlies her response. All of us are subject to management's decisions, and one tough lesson to learn is to avoid taking such denials personally. The general trend of satisfactory work performance allows most employees to put management decisions we don't agree with in perspective so we can remain focused on our jobs. Some employees do not cope with rejection well. For some, rejection causes shame, and rage may be the natural response. Such an employee may be convinced you have targeted him or her for unfair treatment. Explaining your rationale for the denial, rather than having her imagine what it might be, can open communication, demonstrate respect and reduce the risk of an adverse reaction. Consider an EAP referral if change isn't forthcoming.
- Q.** What role does EAP play in reducing the likelihood of grievances filed by employees in organizations?

A. EAP plays a preventive role in resolving personal problems that can contribute to conflict with management. This reduces grievances. In other words, a troubled employee helped is a risk reduced. Some problems like sexual harassment present such high risk to an organization that personnel policies may encourage employees to use the grievance process, if necessary, to stop it. The grievance process is an important tool in such an instance. Although a grievance can be time-consuming, the process can resolve disputes that could otherwise pose greater risks to all concerned. When helping employees with personal problems, considering the needs of both employees and the organization is often part of the EAP helping process. The ability to find this balance is the art of EAP work and what makes EAP so desirable. Sometimes the best and first step in any grievance process is talking with the supervisor. EAP frequently helps employees to do this more effectively.

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