■ **Lately, we have been discussing police stress in our organization. I would like to see officers take advantage of the EAP, but they resist self-referring for personal problems. Do officers avoid self-referral because of fear that it will make them appear weak?**

It is a myth that police officers do not visit EAPs via self-referral. Many journal articles discuss police stress and avoidance of asking for help over concern for how this is perceived by others. However, experience shows that a decision to self-refer is more closely aligned with safety and willingness to be vulnerable. This is influenced by perceived competence of the EA professional, program capability, confidentiality, and convenience. Motivation to use an EAP depends on assurances of confidentiality, of course, but this must be communicated strategically in numerous ways that create a solid perception of believability. Word-of-mouth promotion is essential, but this can only be influenced and aided by factors such as clearly written and frequently promoted assurances of confidentiality. Other factors include visibility, tenure, and familiarity with the employee assistance professional likely to meet with officers, physical location, counseling times, and ability to visit the program at convenient times in civilian clothes. Critical for management is strict adherence to the nondisclosure of information associated with a signed release. The above are interlocking pieces. Examining and nurturing each allows an EAP to maximize utilization and reduce skepticism.

■ **I oversee EMTs and firefighters. Many of them deny being under any stress. Is it a waste of time to have them attend a stress management class? Will they learn anything? I inquired, but most of them seemed to indicate no interest in a class or were noncommittal.**

It seems there are two issues common among these employees where a duty to serve requires a selfless commitment to others and a willingness to place others' well-being ahead of their own. It's this: recognizing stress and acknowledging it. With the EAP's help, educate employees about stress, anyway. Include what stress is, how it works, how it harms, how to manage it, and symptoms associated with ongoing stress when it is ignored and the physiologic response of the body when it becomes chronic. They will mostly likely listen despite how it appears. Even if they do not, you've done the right thing.

■ **Sexual harassment prevention has been in the news lately. But I do not hear much about**

Behavior that is intimidating, hostile, or offensive to reasonable people is considered harassment. Characteristically, it is unwanted. So, notice and do not tolerate unwelcome or offensive conduct. Harassment can be illegal when it is based on sex (including sexual orientation, pregnancy,

other types of harassment. What other sorts of issues associated with harassment and unwanted behavior should supervisors be aware of so we can confront these issues early?

and gender identity), race, color, national origin, religion, age, disability, and/or even genetic information. Do you see behavior that can be considered detrimental to an employee's work performance, professional advancement, and/or mental health? Examples include offensive jokes, slurs, epithets or name-calling, undue attention, physical assaults or threats, unwelcome touching or contact, intimidation, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, constant or unwelcome questions about an individual's identity, and offensive objects or pictures. Consult with your manager and/or HR adviser for clarification on matters concerning harassment. Referring employees who participate in these behaviors to the EAP, and documenting corrective actions, are crucial.

■ **I was hired to replace a supervisor who left the organization. There is a history of conflict, and I need to earn trust. I can tell this won't be easy due to past experiences. How do I get employees to trust me? Is there any role for the EAP in helping me?**

Although your employees had experiences with the prior supervisor that created a sense of distrust, it is human nature to trust another person over fearing them. The benefits of a trusting relationship far outweigh your employees' remaining distrustful. For now, their distrust is about self-preservation, so you have the natural urge to trust on your side. Allow trust and approachability to naturally emerge by practicing several behaviors recommended for any supervisor. Do not allow the sense of distrust to cause you to avoid your employees. Engage with your direct reports and share "small" but personal things about yourself. Your employees will make a mental note of these interactions and your willingness to be vulnerable. This demonstrates you are initiating trust with them first, which is naturally reciprocal. Beyond personal engagement, demonstrate trust in other ways by backing and supporting your employees. Take chances with their abilities and capabilities. Some of your employees may resist trusting you longer than others do. Resistance from some individuals due to past experiences and personal issues may occur. The EAP can consult with you on these issues to help you build the winning team you want.

■ **This year, I am on a mission to get my employees more engaged. If I do this right, what are the top benefits I am likely to see? Also, can the EAP help me with this project? It's not about counseling employees, but perhaps the EAP's "people knowledge" can assist me.**

Yes, talk with the EAP. You will find many research reports and analytical data on this topic to guide you. You can anticipate that the most significant return on your investment of energy with this project will be employees who are willing to do more than expected, are more productive, and get along better with each other. You may see improvement in attendance, fewer sick days, and higher morale. Hint: Research shows that you will make a big impact by listening to their opinions, being clear in what you ask and expect from them, and recognizing their contributions both privately and in front of peers.

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