



The Frontline Supervisor

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource – Employees

Solutions Employee Assistance Program 1-800-526-3485

Q. I have referred many employees to the EAP, but now I think I could use the program. As a supervisor, I've become bored with my job. I don't have the same spunk that I used to, and I don't sleep well either. But boredom isn't something that the EAP can "fix," is it?

A. Your feelings of boredom may be a symptom of a larger issue that the EAP can help you examine. Supervisors must see themselves as individuals with the same psychological challenges as other employees, as opposed to somehow being immune to those challenges. If it turns out that you are simply bored and burned out by your job, the EAP can provide a supportive outlet for you to strategize and apply solutions. Depression, stress, or another condition could manifest itself as boredom or lethargy. You may feel ambivalent about using the EAP, even after years of referring employees who have benefited from the program. The decision to remain isolated and deal with problems without outside help or support has sometimes been referred to as the "Lone Ranger Syndrome" in EAP literature. Do yourself a favor and call the EAP.

Q. We employ an ethnically diverse mix of people. While there's no evidence of racism here, I sense trouble brewing. Is the EAP able to promote tolerance or cross-cultural awareness?

A. There's no single cure-all to create harmony in an ethnically diverse work environment. But the EAP can serve as a safe and effective outlet for individuals to express their work-related concerns or frustrations. Complaints of discrimination, however, should be addressed through human resources or management. If employees feel resentment toward others, they can vent to the EA professional and develop new ways to address interpersonal hostilities. For instance, they can learn strategies to improve how they collaborate in teams and look beyond their differences to achieve a greater good. At the same time, management can play a role in bringing a diverse workforce together. By setting an example of tolerance, fairness, and mutual understanding, the organization's managers can send a message for employees to follow their lead. It's precisely when trouble is brewing that these leaders should speak out about the need for equality, empathy, and shared goals.

Call Solutions EAP for free, confidential consultation regarding an employee you may want to refer to the EAP: 1-800-526-3485.

Look for Solutions on-line: www.solutions-eap.com

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Q. When I lead staff meetings, I notice that people don't listen to me. They talk among themselves and don't treat me with proper respect. How can I command attention without alienating them? I don't see this happening with other supervisors, and I can't determine what they do differently.

A. Employees will listen to you more respectfully if you apply savvy communication skills. For starters, never talk over others. If staffers talk among themselves, keep quiet. Your silence sends a message that you're going to wait until everyone's paying attention. When you're addressing your team and you suddenly notice a pocket of chitchat among the group, stop midsentence and stare at the talkers until they stop. Another technique to induce people to listen to you is to build suspense. Examples: Pose a dilemma and promise to resolve it at the end of the meeting—or withhold the latest sales figures until after you give employees a chance to guess. (You can give a fun gift to the winner.) Also, use your voice well. Vary your volume and tempo so that you don't lapse into a monotone. When you're about to share critical information, experiment with the technique of speaking softly so that everyone must listen carefully to hear what you say.

Q. My employee's wife called me and asked that I arrange an EAP referral for her husband, due to his anger problem. She asked me not to tell her husband we spoke. However, I have seen little evidence of his anger at work. Should I ignore her request, or should I use the information in some way?

A. Occasionally, family members who are desperate to see loved ones receive counseling, addiction treatment, or other kinds of help for personal problems, ask managers or bosses to intervene. Crossing this work-life boundary is something you should avoid. Your best response would be to refer family members or concerned persons to the EAP. Meanwhile the information provided by your employee's wife about his anger problem is not appropriate in your supervisory relationship. You should not accept on face value the complaints of family members when they make unsolicited calls to the workplace. If your employee's performance and personality do not pose a problem in the workplace—and if he rarely expresses anger—you are not in a position to act. Information offered by a family member, even if consistent with workplace behaviors, cannot be used to manage the employee.

Q. My employee suffered a string of personal tragedies recently. Although she assures me she's under a psychologist's care, she's as distraught as ever and her performance is declining. If she's already undergoing counseling, would it be overkill for me to involve the EAP?

A. The need to document your employee's declining performance justifies making a supervisor referral to the EAP no matter what kind of outside help she reports getting. An employee's reported participation in counseling should never be a determining factor in a supervisor's decision to make an EAP referral. You do not know if the right help is being received, or if the help is being dispensed in a proper manner. Because the EAP is designed to provide short-term help and refer individuals to other resources for long-term support, the timing might actually be opportune for her to participate. The EA professional may refer her to additional services to assist her in grappling with her problems, or may help her make better use of the help she is currently receiving. Sometimes EA professionals must convince employees that the help they currently receive is not suitable to resolving their problems or could make problems worse.