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## THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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*Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource – Employees*  
**Solutions Employee Assistance Program 1-800-526-3485**

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**Q** - *After I suggested my employee visit the EAP because of his performance problems, he reported that his discussion centered solely on my supervision shortcomings. Can I document this example of avoidance of personal responsibility?*

**A** - Your documentation should be based on your employee's work performance, attendance, and conduct, rather than on his discussion with the EAP. Assume you don't know what happened in the EAP interview, since no signed release form exists. Keep your employee's statements from interfering with whatever administrative decisions you feel are necessary. It's possible your employee focused only on his complaints about you, but trust that EAPs are experienced with helping employees who initially focus on their supervisor as the cause of their problems. Your employee may have a need to feel more in control of his decision to visit the EAP; telling you that you are the problem could be a way to do it. Regardless, improvement in job performance will be your best indication that the EAP focused on the right topics in the interview.

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**Q** - *My employee discussed his marital problems at length. Afterwards, I encouraged him to call the EAP. He said he would do so, but hasn't yet. Can the EAP call the employee at my request, based on the employee's definite desire for EAP help?*

**A** - EA professionals don't call employees because of requests or recommendations by third parties. A medical or psychiatric emergency that involves the EAP in some way might be cause for exception, but generally speaking, such a practice violates the ethical boundary of "client self-determination." Frequently, supervisors are more anxious for the employee to have an EAP appointment than the employee is, although it doesn't look like it. Fear that the employee won't call can cause the supervisor to urge the EAP to call first and get the ball rolling. Unfortunately, taking away employees' personal responsibility to call first would quickly alienate the workforce. Supervisors should refuse to discuss personal problems, and instead assist the employee to make an EAP appointment. Any other discussion would tend to reduce the sense of urgency important to initiating such a call.

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

Solutions EAP is a program of MidState Behavioral Health System and Behavioral Health Connecticut, LLC

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**Q** - *I can't accept my employee's continuing performance problems that I think result from her disability. I feel bad about it, but she can't perform some of her most important duties. I'm worried, because she could eventually be terminated.*

**A** - Ask your employee to explain why she is having difficulty. Her answer will help determine how you should proceed. Does she lack training? Is there a personal problem? Or does she need something to assist her? Your belief or her report that the disability causes difficulty in performing her job indicates that you should involve your human resources expert and follow his or her guidance concerning the employee's needs or problems. This resource person will help determine whether provisions of the Americans With Disabilities Act apply. You will then have a clearer picture of how to proceed. Your EAP may also consult with you or your HR expert. The employee's personal stress, or her problems coping with her disability, may benefit from services available in the community through an EAP referral. There is a community resource available for virtually every type of disability.

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**Q** - *In upper management's view, what are some of the most visible problem behaviors or attitudes that keep supervisors from ascending the career ladder?*

**A** - Many types of problems can interfere with advancement; here are a few of the most frequently reported: (1) Seeking power, rather than meaning, in higher positions. A move up should not be based on a desire for more control over others. (2) Low self-esteem, demonstrated by negative thinking and self-talk, and negative expectations about one's efforts and those of others. (3) Anxiety about success, or fear of success. Behavior that validates such fear often follows. (4) Inability to work as a team player. (5) Inability to identify one's contribution to a problem, often accompanied by "externalization" - the ability to blame other people, places, and things for problems. (6) Unwillingness to negotiate with others. This behavior moves the focus away from a goal and on to the means of achieving it. (7) Failure to remain valuable to the organization. Times are changing - Are an employee's skills? Consider asking the EAP for help in resolving any of these problems.

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**Q** - *We promoted an employee who has never experienced any job performance problems. Within weeks, he began struggling. Is it safe to say that this is a skill or ability issue, to avoid embarrassing him with a referral to the EAP?*

**A** - Supervisor referrals are based solely on performance problems, not on a belief by the supervisor that a personal problem also exists. Your employee's current job performance problems may have nothing to do with a personal problem, but to make this assumption requires making a diagnosis. You're not qualified to do this. Resistance to making a referral frequently results from the supervisor's discomfort with what the employee might think. Such fears are based on false beliefs about the "stigma" of having personal problems, the "types of people" who use the EAP, or even a denial that the employee is susceptible to personal problems. Remember that your employee is entitled to a supervisory referral if his performance becomes problematic. The EAP exists as a constructive tool to help you manage your most valuable resource, employees. Use it.