■ **How many times should I recommend the EAP to my employee for an ongoing saga of fights and domestic troubles at home that we hear about? The employee has never followed my recommendation to see the EAP. Should I refer the employee somewhere else?**

You should continue to recommend the EAP to your employee whenever information about a personal problem or serious concern is shared. The EAP will conduct a proper assessment and refer your employee to any specialized source of help. Any other type of recommendation to a source of counseling help, unless an emergency, would generally be improper. Although your employee has not attended the EAP yet, there is a strong possibility it will happen. Why? The problems being experienced by your employee appear to be chronic. This means he or she will likely experience periodic crises that will get worse over time. These crises are opportunities for your employee to choose a healthier path by accepting help from the EAP. So continue to recommend it.

■ **My department head gave me an uneasy look the other day because my employees were in the break room socializing and not working at their desks. Personally, I think there is value in socializing for morale, but how rigid should I be about curbing it?**

Your question is an age-old one for supervisors. You're right about socializing. It does benefit morale, and employees who enjoy each other are more likely to be energetic and stick around. That's good for productivity. Some management experts argue that socializing employees can be more productive and that interaction facilitates creativity, self-assessment, synergism, new ideas, and the employees' ability to learn about and recognize each other's strengths. However, it's true that socializing employees may avoid work or be easily distracted, so there is such a thing as too much socializing. But how much distraction, socializing, and hanging out in the break room is too much? You're the only one who can answer that question. Now that you have a better awareness of the benefits of socializing on the job, you can view and manage it as a resource rather than as an annoyance.

■ **I suggested my employee go to the EAP and then a few months later had to make a formal referral. The employee never went. That was two years ago. Today, things are great. This person is my best worker. I stayed focused**

Your experience is a good one to illustrate the benefits of the EAP. The EAP worked perfectly, and here's why: The employee assistance program is not simply a place where counselors wait for employees to show up either by themselves or via supervisor referral. More accurately, the EAP is a programmatic approach to the management of troubled employees and the risks that arise that are associated with human behavior and interaction in the work organization. Examples include conflict, morale issues, team building, supervisory skills development, and the need for consultative guidance offered to managers to deal with employee issues. The EAP was

on performance. The EAP didn't play a role, but I was glad it was there.

a tool for you to use in resolving the problems with your employee. You succeeded in managing your employee properly by staying focused on performance and insisting on change. Your employee felt that resolve and was motivated to make corrections. You used the EAP as a tool, although the employee did not attend. The corrective action you applied incorporating the EAP approach produced a better employee.

■ **Supervisors are not group therapists, so how can we play a role in resolving workplace negativity? I admit I see plenty of it, but if the work gets done, I am inclined to ignore it. Perhaps I am not aware of the true impact of negativity and strategies to help stop it.**

If you are unaware of the costs associated with workplace negativity or what strategies can fight it, you'll more easily ignore it, tolerate it, or even worse, join in it. Workplace negativity isn't just about employees griping or picking on each other or what's overheard in the restroom. Workplace negativity damages the work culture, and a deliberate approach is often needed to reverse it. Your primary tool for fighting negativity is communication. Intervening may not be easy, but the trick is to not give up. You may be unable to stop layoffs, but you may be able to facilitate support systems, improved communication, and quicker responses to unfounded rumors. Talk to the EAP, and be open-minded if asked about your supervision style; perhaps it contributes unwittingly to workplace negativity. Examining all angles is important. Strategies will vary depending on the issues, but once you decide upon an approach, be sure to establish systems that help you prevent the return to a negative work culture.

■ **Employees teased another worker about drinking large soda drinks. The employee was clearly not happy about it. I thought about speaking up, but figured it was okay for them to continue because the issue of large soda drinks is so prevalent in the news.**

Whether news exists about the harmful effects of smoking, large fountain drinks, red meat, or tanning beds, it is important as a supervisor to remain focused on maintaining respectful behavior in the workplace. The intensity of media attention to topical issues can make it seem "okay" to criticize others or treat them with less respect. Harassment in the workplace has a broad definition, and it takes the passive approval of only one authority figure to encourage some employees who may have kept silent to join in on treating others with disrespect. Most supervisors underestimate their level of influence with their employees. Realize that stepping in to correct this behavior may be welcomed. This is because many employees who behave disrespectfully also have second thoughts about it, even as they are participating. Your visible disapproval and corrective action as an authority figure can be powerful – not only for stopping disrespectful behavior but for reinforcing the importance of maintaining a positive and affirming workplace.

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