

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

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Frontline Supervisor



UConn Health Center EAP 860-679-2877 or 800-852-4392

■ **My employee argues with me in ways that I would not have dreamt of when I was his age 25 years ago. What can I do about a disrespectful employee? Is this part of the “transformational” world we live in, or do I need to be more assertive?**

Some things should not change. One of them is respect and civility. You must assert your authority with an employee who is disrespectful. Meet with your employee and list incidents that are unacceptable. State that the behaviors will incur consequences if the disrespect continues. Your employee may claim that he is not being disrespectful, but you’ll need to define the standards of behavior and expect change. The good news is that you will probably be successful in correcting this behavior in one interview because most employees heed direct messages of this sort. The EAP can help, but don’t let these behaviors continue too long before making a referral. Other issues may contribute to an inability to control this behavior and the EAP would sort them out.

■ **I have an employee who does not participate in any after-hour activities that the other employees attend. She’s a great performer, but I tend to think more highly of employees who join in the fun. Should I inquire about why she does not join in? Maybe there’s a personal problem.**

Employees who do not participate in social activities are often judged harshly for what appears to be their avoidant or “antisocial” style by those who feel annoyed or rejected by their absence. More often than not, these employees are not demonstrating struggles with work-life balance or mental health issues associated with social avoidance. Instead, they may have close and valued relationships away from work that more effectively meet their needs. Many dedicated workers won’t see potential gains in undirected social activity. Some prefer closer, more intimate associations and are unmoved by peer pressure to join in other social opportunities. Some employees simply prefer their own company and the solitude of their creative thoughts. Try sharing how much you would personally like this employee to join you and the group. Emphasize the creativity or new ideas that often emerge in a less pressured setting, and share how much others would value his or her company. This direct invitation may break the ice.

■ **Did the EAP fail to work if performance problems remained after the employee went to the program and cooperated with the EAP? What’s next now that problems remain?**

Not every employee referred to the EAP will resolve personal problems or performance issues. Still, EAPs serve the valuable purpose of giving you another alternative to tolerating or terminating troubled employees. Ideally, employees should return to prior levels of performance or even better, but even if not, the program still worked as a service for the employee and as a management tool for you to intervene. You should make a decision about your next step. The EAP cannot advise you about what this administrative reaction should be, but let the EAP know about the status of

your employee regardless of your decision so it can evaluate the employee further. Unless some agreement with your employee exists, nothing precludes making another supervisor referral. Your employee assistance program worked as intended, but employees are in control of whether they use its services and benefit from them.

■ I know the EAP is confidential, but when I attempted to refer my employee recently he resisted, saying that he didn't trust the program. I feel stuck with this excuse. How should I respond? Should I permit or recommend another source of assistance?

You should recommend only the EAP. An established EAP is the only official source of help for personal problems that your organization permits you to officially recommend. No other source of help will include key activities that make EAPs work successfully. Recommending another source of help would also be a mistake because it would invite problems and issues associated with lack of accountability and problematic communication. Only your EAP operates with the proper understanding of how to help employees, interface with supervisors, control access to information, follow up, intervene with problems during follow-up, direct employees to proper resources, or re-motivate employees, if necessary. EAPs follow confidentiality laws and communication procedures that typically are more stringent than those of community resources.

■ I referred my employee to the EAP for performance issues, but was asked, "What will the EAP do or say to me?" I know the EAP helps employees, but I couldn't be specific. I think the employee is worried about sharing too much with the EAP.

Most employees do not realize that EAPs do not treat employees psychologically and only interview as much as needed to ascertain the true nature of the personal problem, with the goal of getting the employee to the right source of help. This is a critical distinction that can help employees feel more willing to go for help. Assessment and referral are the operative terms. EAPs who would attempt a long-term treatment relationship, or in-depth clinical examination of an employee's issues better left to the treatment resource, risk having other employees who are friends of a client become fearful that they too would be probed too personally about their problems. All this is good information for your employee to know. Employees do typically disclose highly personal information in assessments, but EAPs know how to interview properly to gather only the necessary information.

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