

# Frontline Supervisor



■ **I fear taking action to correct performance with some employees because being too determined could lead to dismissal, thereby causing me to incur the anger and disapproval of top management. How does the EAP help these situations?**

■ **Competition makes around-the-clock communication almost essential. I don't hear many complaints, but are employees at risk for burnout by being so responsive to customers and work demands? How much pressure can I put on them?**

■ **What can a supervisor or manager do to facilitate the establishment of a positive work culture that promotes collaboration, innovation, and risk taking by employees to maximize their productivity?**

**EAPs help supervisors** feel more secure in taking action with employees to correct performance, even with the best and brightest, whose knowledge of the organization's fear of their loss leads them to resist change. Without an EAP, you have only persuasive skills to motivate your employee. Barring success, what's next are threats of disciplinary action. A cycle of improvement and deterioration that may lead to dismissal then follows. An EAP establishes a new dynamic in performance management. Suddenly, employees consider self-referral, avoiding disciplinary action by going to the EAP (with or without sincere intention of accepting help), or accepting the consequences for ongoing performance issues. Most employees will visit an EAP when formally referred by the supervisor. Regardless of their motivation initially, most also accept help and return with better levels of performance.

**Burnout and lower** productivity may be consequences of overwork, but realize that some employees like checking e-mail in the off-hours, first thing in the morning, and even before retiring in the evening. Others may sleep better knowing what awaits them as they walk through the door the next day. Technology allows employees to intervene earlier with problems and reduce their magnitude. Many companies exist only because of such advances in communication technology. Work-life balance is certainly important, but employees must define and redefine what this ultimately means to them. Good communication with your employees and willingness to negotiate with them can help ensure they are happy. This is the bottom line. Do you have this sort of relationship with them? If so, you increase the likelihood of having excited and engaged employees who go the extra mile, love work, and don't burn out.

**Terry Jones, the** founder of Travelocity.com, gave a keynote address at an annual meeting of corporate executives last month. His presentation focused on how to create a work culture that generates enthusiasm for innovation. Summarized below are key points he imparted to his audience. See which ones you can institute as a line manager in your work unit: 1) Don't be afraid to fail. "If you don't fail, you're not having enough at bats." 2) "Kill the project, not the person" if an idea doesn't work. 3) Study your failures like football teams review tapes of unsuccessful

plays. 4) Don't dismiss out of hand ideas of line staff and lower-level employees. This is where many great ideas originate. 5) Surround yourself with diverse talents that can synergize. Source: University of Texas, Press Release <http://bitly.com/terry-jones-1017>

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■ **Can you suggest specific language to use to make a formal supervisor referral when a potential disciplinary action exists if performance doesn't improve? I know to use the EAP in supervision, but I think hearing all the "pieces" to include would be helpful.**

**What you say to** employees may vary depending on the circumstances of the referral, so consulting with your EAP regarding each referral is a good idea. However, the following is a good general approach: "In light of our discussion regarding your ongoing performance problems, I am formally referring you to the EAP because the problems have not been corrected. Your referral is based only on performance issues. You should know that a disciplinary action may (will) be imposed if improvement is not forthcoming. Here is the name of the EA professional and the EAP phone number. Please accept this referral and make a call to schedule an appointment. (Consider: You are welcome to use my phone. Would you like to do that?) Joe, your contact with the EAP is confidential according to our policy. Participation is not recorded in your personnel file, and I won't be requesting to know or learning of any personal issues you discuss. I won't be able to learn of your attendance or cooperation either without a release, so please sign a consent form for that purpose only."

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■ **What sort of attitude should I display when referring an employee to the EAP? Should I be serious and stern or try to sell the employee on going with a smile and excitement? Perhaps my demeanor should be somewhere in between.**

**Remember it is** the employee's responsibility to accept a referral to the EAP, regardless of your approach. Your focus on performance and what happens if it improves or what happens if it does not improve is what will make all the difference in employee motivation. Therefore, do not use the EAP as a punitive device. Doing so can prompt your employee to suddenly reject the entire idea of using the EAP, whereas a more supportive approach would facilitate cooperation. See your employees as individuals and the valuable resources they truly are. Approach them with hope and a sense of opportunity and optimism. If you display this affirming attitude in your dealings with them, you will increase the EAP's appeal. This "program of attraction" dynamic is an important one in the promotion of any professional counseling, assistance, and self-help program.

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## NOTES