

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **Is it appropriate to refer employees to the EAP when they have complaints about each other? When attempting to resolve complaints, I often find that they are complicated, are exacerbated by personality factors, and involve issues that extend beyond the workplace.**

It is expected that supervisors will mediate disputes between coworkers, but this presumes the conflicts are work related. To resolve disputes can mean personally sitting down to help iron things out, requiring employees to resolve issues on their own, or using approved resources within the organization to get the job done. Seeking help from the EAP is appropriate, especially if you quickly discover that the conflict has multiple parts beyond work-related matters. EAPs are experts at sorting things out and analyzing complicated conflicts. Often, resolving conflicts includes interventions with the problem at more than one level. An example would be helping an employee with a medical problem, anxiety, or other troublesome issue contributing to the conflict. Frequently, visible issues such as bickering, fighting over shared space, and disrespectful behavior have less visible contributing factors. Trying to resolve conflicts without involving these other dimensions becomes an exercise in futility and may enable their continuation.

■ **I don't see a lot of passion among employees in our workplace for the work they do or the exciting direction our company is heading in. What could be undermining employee passion?**

Passion is a compelling desire to engage the work organization and do the best job possible. Many factors help promote passion in employees. Some of these factors can be influenced more than others. Ideally, individual employees and positions should be examined to see what undermines passion. It is interesting to note that an employee may be passionate about a job that would never inspire others. This suggests passion is not solely an employer-driven phenomenon. For example, some employees bring their positive outlook and passion for life to the job. A passion-enabled work environment is one that offers employees the ability to exercise control over their work, know what is expected, have meaningful work, feel a sense of contribution, and know they are valued by management. If you recognize and appreciate employees privately and publically for what they do, and seek their input wherever possible, you'll create an environment that will pay off for everyone — and for the bottom line.

■ **I lent money to my employee, but I should have made a referral to the**

It is not unusual for employees to come to employers to ask for a loan. On the surface, it may not appear like a big deal, but money issues are almost always a symptom of something else more troublesome going on.

EAP instead. It seemed like the right thing to do, but other problems ensued, and the employee lost his job. I feel guilty about it because maybe it is my fault for not referring to the EAP.

■ More than any factor influencing the success of an EAP, confidentiality and the perception of confidentiality reign high. How do supervisors unwittingly jeopardize this positive perception of confidentiality, and how can they enhance it?

■ I have an employee who is perpetually cranky. It's a 20-year-long style of communication. Why? I don't know. I'm used to it, but new employees do not take to this person well. Do I make her personality style a problem for the EAP, or help new employees adapt?

Lending money may cause greater problems for the employee, because the next step required to resolve the real problem is usually delayed. This leaves open the possibility of a crisis that could cause harm to the employee or the organization. Experience shows that employees do not come to supervisors as their first choice to borrow money. This means that other sources of loans have usually been exhausted for one reason or another. Lending money puts you directly into the middle of the employee's personal problems, and if anything about these problems is shared with you, it will rarely be the complete story. The most compassionate step is referring your employee to the EAP.

Most supervisors know the importance of EAP confidentiality, but fewer understand the *dynamics of perception* of confidentiality and how fragile it is. An EAP may have lock-tight confidentiality and be in complete conformance with confidentiality laws, but if a supervisor improperly discloses to others or makes mention of the name of an employee he or she referred, repercussions could undermine the perception of confidentiality and harm EAP utilization. Reduced EAP utilization can increase risk to the organization, and reestablishing a strong perception of confidentiality can take a long time. Supervisors can help EAPs by regularly encouraging use of the program; talking up the confidential nature of the program; and never making conversation, even to their closest or most trustworthy associates, about those whom they've referred to the EAP.

Cranky employees demonstrate a bad attitude and behave rudely toward others who interact with them. Employees sometimes adapt to difficult coworkers, and that seems to minimize the severity of the problem. This is your experience. New employees recognize the behavior as inappropriate, while you see it as being less serious. The behavior causes distress, so it has a negative impact on productivity and worker health. There are many secondary negative effects associated with your cranky employee, so expecting everyone to adapt is not a good management strategy for this issue. You say you've adapted, but would productivity and work climate improve without this cranky style of behavior? Indeed, it would. Step out of the comfort zone you've created, collect proper documentation, discuss with your employee the changes you wish to see, and use the EAP as a resource to help. Expect resistance, but do not reinforce this behavioral problem by backing off.

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