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Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor

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■ **Is it appropriate for me to ask the EAP for advice on how to best communicate with my employee? Although he has no performance issues, he is not easy to approach and it is difficult to hold a conversation with him.**

It is appropriate to use the EAP as a consultant to help you manage any communication issues you experience with your employees. The employee assistance professional might lead you to discover not only more effective ways of communicating with your employee, but also what his behavior means. Furthermore, effective communication is the employee's responsibility as much as it is yours. If you assume that communication is solely your burden, you are eliminating a key measure of your employee's responsibility for interpersonal effectiveness. Talk to the EAP to explore whether you struggle with assertiveness and how you can help your employee be more accountable for behaviors that clearly impede the ability of others to communicate with him. The EAP will help you gain a clearer perspective along with the practical help that you seek.

■ **We safely sent an employee home who had been drinking on the job. I would say he barely looked intoxicated when I saw him in my office. He reappeared two days later to face disciplinary action, but as uncanny as this sounds, he had no memory of the event! Is this possible?**

Your employee appears to have experienced an alcohol-related blackout. A complete blackout is an amnesiac state characterized by the inability to recall an experience or event in any detail as a result of being intoxicated, even though the drinker did not pass out or fall asleep. The occurrence of blackouts—along with other signs and symptoms—is considered during the diagnosis of alcoholism. Blackouts are directly related to high tolerance to alcohol, or the ability to consume large quantities of alcohol without typical and expected effects. The individual might not appear intoxicated, but memory and recall function are impaired. Some recovering alcoholics have reported blackout periods, lasting hours, days, and even weeks, while on drinking binges. For many, what happened during these periods of time is never recalled.

■ **Next week I have to dismiss an employee who is currently an EAP client. I am very apprehensive about it. Can I use the EAP to talk about my feelings**

The EAP is available to you, as it is to any employee, to discuss your concerns about the anticipated event. Your meeting is confidential, and the EAP's focus will be on helping you with your concerns and apprehension about the event. The EAP will not concern itself with the legitimacy of the planned action or with your employee's issues. To do so would sabotage the EAP mission. If you go to the EAP to obtain help for yourself, the EA professional

and process my concerns? If I become a client, will this put the EAP in a difficult or untenable position?

will focus on you. EA professionals are adept at detaching from the emotional concerns of other cases in the organization—many of which might be linked—so they can focus on the employee in front of them. This is a skill and an art that makes the employee assistance profession truly unique.

■ I want to help my staff to think and act independently, but I am often a “mother hen” to them. I’m changing, but how can I best identify employees who are too dependent, and how can I more effectively “push them out of the nest?”

Let your employees know that you want them to think and work creatively and independently while you step back a little, and that you need their help to accomplish that goal. Clearly explain their assignments and ask them to bring their ideas and solutions to you prior to asking your opinion. This will encourage independent thinking, improve efficiency, and reduce your stress. You will soon be a manager instead of a guru. You can identify employees who need help by their inability to anticipate and think through problems, their fear of making decisions, their inability to find appropriate solutions, and their lack of initiative.

■ My employee called in sick on Monday, saying he would be in on Tuesday. Tuesday came but not the employee. He didn’t call again until Thursday, at which time he said he would be in on Friday. He didn’t show on Friday. What causes this type of non-attendance pattern?

Many supervisors have experienced this type of call-in and no-show behavior pattern. Experienced EA professionals have discovered that many types of personal problems can contribute to this behavior. These problems range from legal entanglements to drug or alcohol abuse, severe marital discord, or crises with troubled teenagers. An important point to note is that despite his failure to show up for work, your employee feels an investment in his job as evidenced by his repeated contact with you. Therefore, you can use his job security as a powerful tool to motivate him to accept help through the EAP. You might feel the urge to fire such an employee outright. However, you should consider focusing on corrective action and on the EAP process, in which a supervisor referral can be very effective, especially if it has not been tried yet. It might lead to the resolution of the employee’s problem, whatever that may be.

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