

The Frontline Supervisor



Quality Employee Assistance Programs.

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Q. I am frustrated and angry with my employee for coming to work late. Sometimes, I lose my cool. However, I am not letting the employee get away with it. I encourage coworkers to confront the behavior. A fellow manager said I am an enabler. How so?

A. Enabling exists because you are failing to implement a strategic approach to resolving this problem, and the emotional and personal involvement prevents its implementation. When an employee exhibits unacceptable performance like poor work quality, tardiness, or conduct problems on the job, it is appropriate to confront it. Hopefully, things improve. The correct approach relieves you from the emotional involvement you have experienced. The EAP model allows you to step away from all the emotionality. Instead, you make the assumption that some personal problem or concern outside the employee's control drives the behavior. A ladder of progressive steps ultimately motivates the employee to get help. Talk to the EAP about these progressive steps. You will most likely be successful in getting your employee to accept help because, when properly implemented, the EAP intervention steps demonstrate to the employee that the organization will not permit an ongoing problem with attendance.

Q. I recognized the spouse of one of my employees in the emergency room of our local hospital. I was there for a minor cut on my hand. The spouse was drunk and out of control, and I was surprised by the behavior I witnessed. Should I tell my employee and recommend the EAP?

A. In a private meeting, let your employee know what you witnessed and suggest the EAP. Don't probe or elaborate. Your employee may offer an explanation. Accept it. As a side note, hospital emergency rooms are overworked and busy places. Utilization review nurses or social workers typically follow up cases, but many slip through the cracks. Let the hospital ER know that your company has an EAP. Hospitals sometimes reach out to EAPs, make referrals to them, and pass the ball to them to continue where they left off. The patient may or may not accept the ER's referral to the EAP. Still, with regard to assessment, referral, and follow-up, the EAP is typically able to expend more effort than ER staff. Everyone benefits. If your company has thousands of employees, it is likely that the ER sees many throughout the year.

Q. Can an EAP advise our management group on the possible psychological effects of a pending disciplinary action on an employee who is not a client of the EAP?

A. An EAP might discuss a manager's concern about a pending decision to use disciplinary action, to help him or her gain clarity, offer support in managing stress associated with the decision, or address personal fears. However, the EAP would not render a psychological judgment in general regarding risk of a disciplinary action. Doing so interferes with management processes and violates an ethical boundary of non-interference by EAPs. If the EAP engaged in this process, it could be viewed as authorizing, consenting to, approving, and sanctioning the decision. This would produce a schism within your management group if the EAP, as an expert, trumped others' opinions. Some managers might agree, while others not. Management would feel forced to accept whatever the EAP recommended. This bind would take a toll on the EAP's ability to attract employees and managers. A consult with HR, a third-party consultant, or other management advisors should be considered.

Q. I saw an online article that said bad bosses can make employees sick. What are they referring to, and exactly what boss issues affect employees most?

A. Studies show that 50% of employees have quit a job because of a bad boss. One study reported that 75% consider their boss a major source of stress, but most have no plans to quit. The health issue is stress. Here's a list of common complaints from a Harris Poll in order of severity: 1) not recognizing employee achievements; 2) not giving clear directions; 3) not having time to meet with employees; 4) refusing to talk with subordinates, 5) taking credit for others' ideas; 6) not offering constructive criticism; 7) not knowing an employee's name; 8) refusing to talk with people on the phone or in person; and 9) not asking about employees' lives outside of work. Nearly all of these fall in the realm of communication, and some you may find surprising. For example, employees want you to know more about them personally. Do any apply to you? Your EAP will help you become a champ on any of these issues. Source: Interactive/Harris poll of 1,000 workers.

Q. Can you give me a basic formula or a "do it by the numbers" way to write a corrective memo, one that explains step-by-step what to include?

A. Follow these numbers and your documentation should be effective. Letter to employee: 1) On (date), _____ incident occurred. 2) Specifically, _____ (what was seen, heard, said, happened, etc.). 3) Mention negative effects or outcome of incident on immediate work unit or operation. 4) State unacceptability of event/incident and why it is unacceptable. 5) Reference any similar past events. For example, _____. 6) State larger impact and effect on productivity for organization. 7) State that you are anticipating this won't happen again. 8) Invite employee to meet and discuss issues, concerns, or precipitating events to prevent any future incident. 9) Provide a strong recommendation to visit the EAP confidentially to discuss any problem that may be associated with the issue. 10) Give phone number to EAP. 11) Thank employee for attention to the matter. 12) Invite employee to discuss any other concerns. 13) Copy next-level supervisor and 14) copy EAP. This is one example of a structured memo with essential elements. However, your HR department may also have recommendations for you.

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