

The Frontline Supervisor



Quality Employee Assistance Programs.

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Q. Could EAPs play a role in helping management identify positive traits of employees—such as eagerness to learn, being a team player, and willingness to take initiative—through the interviewing process so that we could have best hires?

A. EAPs follow standards of practice that would conflict with the assignment of screening employees for personality style, temperament, and character attributes to assist in hiring. Although an EA professional might be capable of such a task, it would easily undermine the goal of an EAP being a safe and neutral source of confidential assistance to employees. A dual role of judging employees to aid in management's hiring decisions also would interfere with the perception of the EAP as a program of attraction that draws employees to seek help in a safe setting of openness, safety, and receptivity. EAPs can offer education to supervisors and managers on improving communication, building positive relationships with employees, and engaging with them to enhance their productivity; but, acting purely as an extension of management's need to classify workers for hire would cause the EAP to be rejected and to be seen as suspect.

Q. I have sensed a lot of anxiety among employees over the past couple of months associated with world events, politics, terrorism threats, and economic insecurity. Everyone knows about the EAP, but can the EAP do presentations for us and what might such a presentation comprise?

A. When EAPs help employees with anxiety or other concerns, they carefully rule out other conditions that may mimic anxiety or make anxiety worse. Although your employees know about the EAP, be sure to suggest the program to those you recognize as having more obvious needs. To classify everyone's reactions to events as "anxiety" could mean that employees with more urgent needs are being overlooked. Talk to the EAP about a presentation. An EAP presentation might include reinterpreting and reacting more effectively to hyped news, especially changing one's habitual reactions to it. This might include teaching strategies for countering negativity; interrupting negative feedback loops; avoiding catastrophic thinking that stirs anxiety and panic; learning strategies for limiting exposure; learning relaxation techniques; learning to keep motivational, spiritual, and affirming literature handy; and using strategies for instantly countering doomsday thinking. The goal is to help employees do their own "reality check" using cognitive/behavioral strategies, and guiding them in countering worry, stopping fretting, and curtailing misdirecting personal energy better spent on more desirable pursuits.

Q. I have an employee who looks like a meth user, not unlike those before-and-after photos you can see on the internet. I don't know if she uses meth, but are these physical signs I can use to encourage EAP self-referral?

A. It is appropriate to inquire about the status of an employee who appears ill. Although stating that she looks like a meth user would not be appropriate, recommending that she take advantage of organizational resources, including the EAP, is reasonable. Not all meth addicts have classic facial scarring from picking at their skin, at least not initially. However, other signs of use may include paranoia, hallucinations, repetitive motor activity, memory loss, aggressive or violent behavior, mood disturbances, severe dental problems, etc. Addictive diseases are chronic and progressive, so things are going to get worse if meth is an issue. At the very least, you should understand your organization's fitness for duty policy. A fitness for duty policy encompasses suitability for being at work in order to guard against an employee who may be unsafe to himself/herself or others. Talk with the EAP and consult on this situation to identify what other issues exist and could be used to recommend help or perhaps a formal referral that would lead to a full assessment.

Q. I am too much of a micromanager; I admit it. But I am not sure how to change this pattern I have acquired. Do I need counseling in order to deal with my anxiety and learn how to let it go?

A. You do not need counseling yet. Try this practical intervention first. To free yourself and let go, learn coaching techniques so that those you delegate to will have your earned your confidence and you can free yourself from the need to control details. If you learn how to coach, you will enjoy and relish delegating tasks. Well-coached employees are creative forces that can be counted on to provide solutions that supervisors haven't considered. Also, your employees to whom you delegate will utilize their own unique talents and approaches to solve problems. The most popular book on coaching available from online bookstores is the "HBR Guide to Coaching Employees." It is simple and straightforward.

Q. How to engage employees is important, but I think the missing piece is making sure they know what they are doing, how they will be measured, and how they fit into the grand scheme of things, in other words, clarity and purpose. Am I right?

A. Yes. To highlight your point, Jim Moran, professor of Business Administration at Florida State University's College of Business studied the issue of employees who are kept in the dark about their full purpose, and especially what they were accountable for doing. In his study of 750 workers, both white- and blue-collar, incredibly, less than 20 percent really felt certain they knew what was expected of them each day at work. Employees who are uncertain about their jobs showed 60 percent less trust of leadership. They also experienced 50 percent more frustration overall. They had 40 percent higher workloads. And 33 percent of these employees with ambiguous understandings of their jobs were more likely to look for another job and slack off. Obviously, these issues point to engagement problems. Source: Press release. Go to <http://news.fsu.edu> (Search: "Left in dark")

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