

The Frontline Supervisor

**Publication of Wayne Corporation
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Q. Is it helpful for a supervisor to disclose that he or she is a client of the EAP, and even to offer an encouraging stand-up testimonial at a group orientation to support the EAP and encourage its use by employees?

A. There is no need to disclose your participation in an EAP as a way of encouraging employees to use the program. Some CEOs have made such announcements in larger public forums like EAP orientations, and it may be more impactful the higher up the manager is placed in the organization. However, there is no research that demonstrates such announcements improve utilization. More helpful to employees' likelihood of using an EAP is speaking positively about the program regularly and reminding employees about its confidentiality provisions. Not doing so may contribute to a false perception that confidentiality is lacking, whereas doing so beats back this false perception. This word-of-mouth promotion works with any product or service. Frequently repeating a positive message about the EAP produces more results than a single, major announcement of acceptance by a key manager.

Q. I have attempted to refer my employee to the EAP four times. Each time, the employee gave me good reasons not to refer him. These included how he was addressing his problems. Now I am on attempt number five! Where am I going wrong?

A. Consult with the EAP to better understand what makes for an effective referral. Some troubled employees provide compelling reasons for the supervisor to postpone corrective action for performance issues. Referring an employee to the EAP or taking any job action is not a pleasurable thing. Naturally, any rationale to postpone these actions is welcome. This is what leads many supervisors to experience your circumstances. Be decisive, however, because the chronic nature of problems may be associated with greater risk. Chronic problems often culminate in larger crises, and these can have significant consequences for the organization. Reducing this risk by combining proper administrative decisions with use of the EAP is what makes the program the perfect partner in loss prevention.

Q. How do supervisors and employees interfere with the perception that the EAP is confidential?

A. The familiar saying “Perception is reality” applies well to EAPs. The level of confidentiality perceived by employees corresponds to the credibility of the EAP. Some strategic thoughtfulness about helping the EAP maintain a strong perception of confidentiality is therefore important to program utilization. This reduces risk to the organization, of course. Supervisors can damage an EAP’s credibility by what they say or do. For example, do not discuss employee referrals with those who do not have a right or need to know about them, and resist asking employees about what happened in the EAP interview. Do not insert records of participation in a file that others in management (or their administrative help) would have access to in the future. In addition, the EAP professional should not visit your office to consult with you about a troubled employee. Every EAP is a bit different, and can provide supervisors with dos and don’ts that help preserve and protect the program.

Q. I know supervisors should play a role in reducing stress, but my big fear is that the penalty for helping employees reduce stress is lower productivity. Isn’t it a catch-22?

A. Many supervisors fear that if they are proactive in helping employees deal with stress, everyone in the workplace will slow down, thereby harming productivity. According to the 2016 Work and Well-Being Survey released in June by the American Psychological Association, the five most stressful problems facing employees are long hours, low pay, lack of opportunity for growth and advancement, too heavy a workload, and unrealistic job expectations. The survey shows that at least 40%-50% of employees report either “very significant stress” or “somewhat significant stress” associated with these factors. Supervisors obviously have varying degrees of control, but simply by talking with your employees, you will discover ways to reduce their stress but not their productivity. In fact, reducing employee stress is more likely to *increase* productivity!

Source: <http://www.apaexcellence.org> [Search: “2016 work life study”]

Q. My boss wants me to deal with my “anger issues” and suggested anger management classes. I admit that under pressure I sometimes act like a hothead, but isn’t my boss being an “armchair diagnostician” by saying that I have anger issues?

A. Your boss can see and experience your anger. This makes it an observable and legitimate problem for him or her to address. As with absenteeism and disorganization, angry behavior that is disruptive can be quantified by the number of incidents and its effect on others. So your boss is not acting as an armchair diagnostician with such a statement. However, deciding on the cause of your anger, suggesting the type of counseling needed, or making a decision that you don’t need the EAP but anger management classes would all be examples of acting as an armchair diagnostician. Anger management counseling helps a person gain control over his or her reaction to feeling irritated and annoyed. Many people referred for anger management are

really struggling with rage, which is a very intense and violent (or bordering on violent) response. Often an event or incident can trigger rage. You should self-refer to the EAP to discuss the anger issue first. The EAP will lead to the right form of help.

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