

# The Frontline Supervisor



Quality Employee Assistance Programs.

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**Q. We experienced a death at one of our industrial plants. The EAP came out to meet with employees and to offer support, but some close coworkers didn't show. I was surprised. Should I be concerned?**

A. It is difficult to know why some of your employees did not show up, but meetings of this type may be initially avoided by those directly affected by the death. They simply may not yet be ready to share their reactions with others. These employees may demonstrate their grief later, and each potentially in a different way. Let the EAP offer guidance on steps you can take to help your employees respond to their grief reactions. Don't rule out having more than one meeting where employees can come together and share and talk with each other. These meetings in the workplace are valuable, and they almost invariably become collaborative planning sessions where coworkers take charge of logistics, communication, funeral assistance, supporting the family, honoring the worker's memory, planning meals, tending to household chores, dealing with pets, managing the employee's belongings, and more. Be attuned to the productivity levels of your employees in the coming months and suggest the EAP for those who struggle to return to a desired level of productivity.

**Q. I am a recovering alcoholic and attend a weekly AA meeting, where I was surprised to see my employee. And he saw me. This employee has absenteeism problems. Should I avoid discussing this chance meeting with him at work? Is it breaking confidence if I mention it to the EAP?**

A. If your employee approaches you at work about the meeting, it would be your decision whether to share personal information or discuss the encounter. Approaching your employee first, however, would not be recommended. Alcoholics Anonymous has time-tested traditions related to how it functions, especially with regard to anonymity. It would be consistent with those traditions to not share your employee's participation with anyone. It is also not a work-related matter. EA professionals accept referrals without preconceived notions as to what might ultimately explain a personal problem. With this in mind, EA professionals typically screen for substance abuse issues as they engage the employee client. The history of the EA profession is based on this precept.

**Q. I read somewhere that supervisors should never get angry at their employees. I am not sure I agree with that advice. Isn't it better for employees to see the real person in a supervisor rather than a machine with no emotions?**

A. The supervisor's job is to coach, direct, develop, educate, and counsel employees on work issues. He or she performs these functions as a representative of the work organization with whom the employee has a pay-for-hire relationship. Supervisory functions do not include demonstration of anger that the organization feels toward employees for failure to perform satisfactorily. Because this role does not exist, the supervisor expressing anger is implying that his or her personal boundaries have been violated, and is supplanting the organization's relationship with his or her own. When employees disappoint, corrective tools and administrative measures exist to help them improve performance. A supervisor can feel anger, of course, but to act on these feelings and display an emotional reaction can only diminish the quality and effectiveness of the relationship the employee has with the organization.

**Q. Recently a rumor circulated that my employee lost \$100,000 in the stock market. A day later, he went on vacation. I feared he might commit suicide, but had no reason to phone 911. Upon his return, I did not inquire about the loss or recommend the EAP. Should I have?**

A. When you learn through the grapevine that an employee is in crisis, that knowledge, learned within the context of the work setting, makes inquiring about it appropriate. This is not the same as probing a personal matter and invading privacy. Many employees attempt to make extra money, take risks, and fall prey to Internet get-rich-quick schemes, or legitimate but high-risk money-making opportunities like options trading. Some of these after-hours activities can be associated with compulsive gambling or Internet addiction. Other personal problems may further exacerbate these issues. Obviously, suggesting the EAP is a good idea, and for this employee, doing so now might still be a good idea.

**Q. I have an employee whose teenager was caught at school with "bath salts." Now I hear the teen is in a drug treatment program somewhere in California. Is there any reason to suggest the employee contact the EAP, since the teen is in treatment?**

A. Suggesting the EAP as a source of help would be appropriate because of the personal problem that exists and availability of the program. It is likely that other behavioral-medical issues exist in this instance, because residential treatment is usually not provided for use of bath salts (illegal in many states, but available online). However, there will be recommendations by any treatment program for aftercare, follow-up, possibly 12-step meetings, and most likely self-groups for the parents. Unfortunately, treatment centers out of state are notorious for minimal follow-up after discharge, and do not typically identify solid resources and help necessary to keep the entire family plugged in to recovery. If the employee requests EAP assistance, these concerns and needs can be easily addressed.

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