

FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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MIIA
Employee
Assistance
Program

800.451.1834

EAP Confidentiality



Q. More than any factor influencing the success of an EAP, confidentiality and the perception of confidentiality reign high. How do supervisors unwittingly jeopardize

this positive perception of confidentiality, and how can they enhance it?

A. Most supervisors know the importance of EAP confidentiality, but fewer understand the *dynamics* of perception of confidentiality, and how fragile that perception can be. An EAP may have lock-tight confidentiality and be in complete compliance with confidentiality laws, but if a supervisor improperly discloses to others or makes mention of the name of an employee he or she referred, repercussions could undermine the perception of confidentiality and harm EAP utilization. Reduced EAP utilization can increase risk to the organization, and reestablishing a strong perception of confidentiality can take a long time. Supervisors can help the EAP by regularly encouraging use of the program, talking up the confidential nature of the program, and never discussing the employees they've referred to the EAP, even with their closest or most trustworthy associates.

The Cranky Employee

Q. I have an employee who is perpetually cranky. It's a 20-year-long style of communication. Why? I don't know. I'm used to it, but new employees do not take to this person well. Do I make her personality style a problem for the EAP, or do I help new employees adapt to her?



A. Cranky employees demonstrate a bad attitude and behave rudely toward those who interact with them. Employees sometimes adapt to difficult

coworkers, and that seems to minimize the severity of the problem. This has been your experience. New employees, however, recognize the behavior as inappropriate; it causes distress, and has a negative impact on productivity and worker health. There are many secondary detrimental effects associated with negativity, so expecting everyone to adapt is not a good management strategy for this issue. You say you've adapted, but productivity and work climate would improve without this cranky style of behavior. Step out of the comfort zone you've created, collect proper documentation, discuss with your employee the changes you wish to see, and use the EAP as a resource to help. Expect resistance, but do not reinforce this behavioral problem by backing off.

Management Consultation Services

- Employee Performance
- Change Management
- Workplace Trauma
- Conflict Resolution
- Layoff Support
- Lunch & Learn Seminars
- Management Trainings
- Organizational Stress

Employee Services

Confidential Counseling

- Addiction
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Family Issues
- Stress Management
- Work Concerns

Resources & Referrals

- Legal
- Financial
- Child Care
- Elder Care

Promoting Cooperation

Q. How can I help employees be less territorial, and more open to others' ideas, perspectives, and suggestions when they need to work together as a team?



A. Creating a positive team environment requires a work culture that maintains and nurtures cooperation, so that it becomes a

tradition. Without this supportive environment, teams fracture and individuals become competitive. Conflicts ensue, cliques emerge, and productivity suffers. Symptoms of such fracturing include poor information sharing and communication, lack of mutual help in solving problems, and vying for credit. The good news is that people have innate skills to work in teams. Discover what reinforces lack of cooperation and undermines team thinking. Consider giving everyone a refresher in how teams work and their value. Hold discussions to process specific roadblocks to the team's effectiveness. Next, add practical exercises designed to build more trust. Be sure to set expectations, and ask the EAP for possible resources to help your effort. Make sure teams meet, and reward both team cooperation and individual participation going forward.

Avoiding the Counseling Role

Q. I know supervisors should not be discussing personal problems with employees, and should instead refer to the EAP. I don't wish to interfere with employees seeking help, but how do I become a supervisor who no longer listens, when I've always played this role?

A. You can still be a warm and approachable supervisor who listens. In fact, nothing could be more helpful to the EAP, because you are trusted by employees and in an ideal position to facilitate their self-referral. The important issue is avoiding the counseling role. Crossing this line impedes employee motivation to seek proper help from the EAP. It also dissipates a feeling of urgency needed to hurdle the resistance most employees face in their decision to get professional help. Listen and be encouraging and supportive, but make the EAP the trusted source of help for the complete answer or solution to their troubles.

Documenting Performance Problems

Q. When documenting performance problems of troubled employees, what critical factors should I bear in mind so the documentation is effective when given to an employee in a corrective letter or used later in an administrative action?

A. Most troubled employees are frustrated and defensive because of their inability to self-treat or resolve a personal problem. This leads them to practice denial and react adversely to confrontations, and to read a corrective letter or warning notice with an eye toward finding any part of it that could be viewed as inaccurate, untrue, or exaggerated. This means your documentation must be accurate, detailed, and written with the understanding that your employee will seek to find fault with it. The most problematic corrective memos omit specifics, use subjective language, focus on employee personality issues, or use psychological terms that refer to the personality of the employee rather than the behavior. Use the consultative help of your EAP to gain insight on how to avoid documentation missteps.



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