



# SUPERVISOR NOTES

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A NEWSLETTER OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IDEAS

## Employee Assistance Program

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**Question: Our organization has faced many recent job cuts and morale has been adversely affected. Despite my attempts as a supervisor to boost morale, I have not seen much improvement. How can the EAP help?**

Answer: Although the morale of your workgroup has not improved, the EAP can still be a partner in helping employees recapture a sense of purpose in their jobs and confidence in the future of the organization. Some employees suffer more than others from low morale. Making a referral to the EAP when productivity, enthusiasm, confidence, and loyalty to the work organization are problematic can help employees cope with underlying stress and anxiety. In some cases, the EAP may help employees clarify their career goals. The ability of the EAP to penetrate all levels of the organization makes it an unmatched consultative resource. The EAP can also provide insight to management and help the organization determine how it can gather information about morale problems and formulate interventions that match the unique culture of the organization.

**Question: I have an employee who periodically comes to work with bruises on her arms, and sometimes her neck. I suspect domestic abuse of some sort, but I don't want to invade her privacy. How can I approach this situation, and better yet, convince her to go to the EAP?**

Answer: Your observations about the condition of your employee are a key reason for the increased attention being given nationally to domestic abuse and its effect on workplace productivity. Employers are in a unique position to help, especially when an EAP is available. You can see the bruises so it is appropriate to let her know what you have observed. Saying that you "notice the bruises," and "are concerned that someone may be hurting you", is prudent and appropriate. Do not push her to disclose more personal information about the origin of the bruises, but realize that your statements may elicit such information. Encouraging her to use the EAP is the next step. If there are performance issues that result from the abuse, such as reduced productivity or excessive absences, focus on the performance problems in an empathetic and caring manner, and take the necessary next steps.

**Question: My employee is very manipulative. My concern is that if I make a supervisor referral to the EAP, my employee will put the focus on me, and have the EA professional believing that I am the problem, not her. How can I ensure this does not happen?**

Answer: It is not unusual for employees to blame their job performance problems on the supervisor, but this typically does not interfere with an EA professional's ability to identify key issues and personal problems of a troubled employee. Sometimes supervisor behaviors do contribute to problems employees face. If these behaviors are realistic concerns, EA professionals provide appropriate guidance or referral to other sources of organizational support without compromising the balanced relationship they maintain between management and the employee workforce.

**Question: My employee told me he used to be a cocaine addict many years ago, and now only drinks alcohol. I heard that cocaine addicts weren't supposed to drink alcohol, and that doing so is a relapse. Should I refer him to the EAP?**

Answer: The treatment of cocaine addicts normally entails education, counseling, and support with the goal of remaining abstinent from all drugs that affect mood, not just cocaine. This includes avoiding the use of alcohol. Use of any mood-altering substance (psychoactive drug) can precipitate relapse to the drug of choice – in this case cocaine. Although you are correct that his use of alcohol is probably contrary to effective management of addictive disease, your focus must remain on his job performance. Since he has disclosed his drug addiction history to you, it is appropriate to remind him that the EAP exists to help him should he begin to experience the adverse effects of his use of substances, no matter what they are.

**Question: My employee is impulsive in speech and behavior, makes crude jokes, invades the privacy of others, invites himself to lunch, and is irritating to many people. Is this an EAP issue? In my opinion, he is simply an immature man in his fifties.**

Answer: Your employee's behavior is unacceptable and disruptive to the workplace. It is therefore appropriate to document it and insist that it stop. The behavior may be immature and impulsive, but it could also be associated with other medical or behavioral health conditions you are unable to diagnose. Hyperactive and impulsive behavior could be related to adult attention deficit disorder, drug use, or other medical problems. It is natural to assume that there are simple explanations for behaviors we find irritating, but this is not always the case. The more upset we become and the more angrily we react to such behavior, the more we believe the person has the ability to control it. This dynamic is a common one that prevents many people from getting the health care or treatment they need.

***Call the EAP for a confidential consultation about supervisory concerns, job-related issues or personal problems.***

Information contained in *Supervisor Notes* is for general information purposes only and is not intended as specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. For specific guidance on handling individual employee problems, consult with your Employee Assistance Program professional.

