



SUPERVISOR NOTES

NE S ETTE O PE SONNE N E ENT I E S

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Employee Assistance Program 278-5018

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**In This Issue: Employee absent without leave
Documenting problems**

**Medical problems and referral to the EAP
EAP and employee termination meetings**

- **My employee has been absent without leave for three days. He hasn't phoned. No one has seen him, and he hasn't returned any calls. He was absent without leave six days last fall. Should I refer him to the EAP when he gets back?**

Check with Faculty & Staff Affairs or existing policies for guidance on dealing with an employee absent without leave (AWOL). You can't know for sure when your employee will return, so delaying an EAP referral wouldn't be recommended. If a serious behavioral-medical disorder underlies your employee's disappearance, an EAP referral now could make the difference between salvaging your employee or losing him entirely. If you send a certified letter to your employee, you could include your supervisor referral along with it. Although job abandonment and AWOL problems are serious infractions, they can sometimes be explained by certain medical illnesses or crises that overwhelm an employee's judgment to report the absence. These conditions could include a variety of mental illnesses, legal crises, alcohol or drug addictions, or even frightened employees with acute health problems. AWOL employees are frustrating because work must be reassigned and relief workers found. An EAP referral should always accompany any administrative or disciplinary response.

- **My employee has some medical problems that supposedly contribute to her lateness and quality of work. I don't see the connection. She reportedly has a doctor treating her, so is there any point in referring her to the EAP?**

You should make a referral based on recurring performance problems. Even though your employee has a medical doctor treating her condition, this does not preclude receiving help from the EAP. Not all physicians treat medical conditions effectively. Some medical conditions are difficult to treat or may require multi-disciplinary approaches. Symptoms may continue to affect performance, or may emerge under stress. Although EAP counselors are not medical doctors, helping employees resolve medical complaints by making referrals to specialists is common EAP

practice. Some medical conditions may be associated with depression, extreme tiredness, sleep difficulties, negative attitude, motivation, initiative, and decision-making. Chronic pain, arthritis, fibromyalgia, asthma, migraine headaches, effects of head injuries, and back pain are just a few conditions that may benefit from additional EAP support.

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- **My documentation of employee performance has been criticized for not being effective enough to support administrative actions I have proposed. What are some of the most common problems with supervisor documentation?**

The most common problems with supervisor documentation include: 1) The documentation lacks specifics. Example: "The employee regularly has poor attendance." Better: "Eight days of work were missed between March 3rd and March 20th." 2) The documentation includes emotional, subjective, or distracting language. Example: "The employee can't be trusted, takes advantage of everyone, and thinks he's better than others, etc." Better: "The employee took five unauthorized breaks last week, which burdened coworkers and their work schedules, causing major disruptions." 3) The documentation discusses performance problems, but the employee has not been made aware of the specific events contained in the documentation.

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- **We are planning to terminate an employee and are worried about his possible emotional reaction at the termination meeting. Can the EAP be present at the termination in case the employee "can't handle it?"**

The EAP will probably decline to participate directly in the termination interview with your employee because it would be an intrusive and uninvited solicitation of a person to become a client. This violates the principle of "client self-determination," an ethical boundary within most helping professions. The idea of using the EAP at a termination interview in the event an employee has an uncontrollable emotional reaction is not uncommon. Experience shows, however, that such fears by managers are usually not realized. It is appropriate to recommend the EAP at a termination interview. Managers may also find it helpful to consult with the EAP before meeting with an employee in order to help allay their fears and formulate a more effective dismissal meeting.

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.