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**Q.** I spoke with the employee assistance professional about my employee's performance issues prior to referral, and I suggested what might be going on with the employee psychologically. Will this cause a problem? Was it improper?

**A.** When speaking with an EA professional, the information you provide related to performance issues, attitude, conduct, attendance, and quality and quantity of work is relevant and helpful to understanding. However, there is no requirement that you censor your thoughts or concerns about what might contribute to the employee's problems. The EAP recognizes that your opinion or judgment is just that, your personal thoughts and opinion, but they will not be relied upon to diagnose your employee. Additionally, your conversation is confidential. It is not unusual for people to deliberate with themselves about psychological dynamics that contribute to a person's problem. However, do not expect the EA professional to engage with you in a discussion about psychological matters concerning your employee. This would be inappropriate.

**Q.** I have two employees experiencing conflict, and it is disruptive to the workplace. Should I refer these employees to the EAP, or is it OK for a supervisor such as me to help these two employees resolve the conflict with a structured approach first?

**A.** Conflict in the workplace is normal, often helpful, and to be expected. Of course, some conflicts can be harmful to productivity and morale. This is why supervisors should understand the basics of conflict resolution. A short summary of one approach is to meet privately with each employee first. Identify common ground, the larger goal, and each employee's perspective. Identify the root cause of the conflict. In a joint meeting, allow each person to discuss their thoughts and concerns with active listening skills. Encourage brainstorming for a potential solution between the employees. Create an action plan and a follow-up approach with timelines and responsibilities for each participant. Later, check in with each employee to see whether the conflict has been resolved. Use the EAP as a resource if a conflict remains, because sometimes a personality style or other problems undermine the process described above. Each employee should understand that ongoing conflict would be a performance issue and that they have a responsibility to demonstrate teamwork, collaboration, and support for a positive workplace.

**Q.** I attempted to refer my employee to the EAP because of interpersonal conflicts she frequently experiences. Unfortunately, I got talked out of it because she didn't think the EAP could help. I am giving her another chance. Should I have insisted?

**A.** You're using the EAP to help you resolve a performance issue with an employee. In this corrective interview, you decided not to follow through with a referral, but it does not mean you can't return to this discussion later. Your employee may not be fully aware of how the EAP can help, or she is resistant to getting help for the problems she has that affect performance. It is likely that after an interview of this type, you will see a period of days or weeks when performance is more than satisfactory. The urgency of the situation plays a role in this change. This is a good thing, but if personal issues that affect performance remain, then problems are likely to return. If this happens, simply pick up where you left off.

**Q.** What problems are caused by a supervisor who decides they simply do not have enough time to deal with an employee's poor performance issues?

**Q.** It was necessary to give my employee a written reprimand for a job infraction. The infraction wasn't career-ending, but it was severe. Now I only get the cold shoulder from this worker, and our discussions are always work focused. How do I deal with this tension, which seems to harm our work climate?

**A.** It is not unusual for an employee to feel anger for receiving a disciplinary action, especially if they believe it was unwarranted or excessive. How your employee responds to such actions is a performance issue. Meet with your employee to discuss his or her response to the disciplinary action. Define the response as a separate issue of concern. The objective is to help your employee deal constructively with the disciplinary action. Recommend the EAP again as a way of helping the employee cope. Be sure to demonstrate your expectations for a continuing positive and productive relationship. Remember, discipline isn't punishment. It's about correcting performance. If necessary, meet with the EAP yourself to ensure that no issues associated with your communication or supervision style are interfering with your goal of bringing stability and positivity back to this relationship.

**Q.** How can managers best support employees who are on the autism spectrum? Is there anything specific I need to know as I engage with this unique group of people?

**A.** Your job as a supervisor is supporting employees in general, but with neurodiverse employees the goal is to create a workplace that is inclusive and where they feel comfortable. These ideas should give you a good start: 1) Be clear and direct in your communication. Explain your expectations and give feedback. 2) Anticipate that employees will take more time to process information or respond to questions. So, allow them to take that extra time. 3) Incorporate structure, predictability, and routines in the work environment. This will allow those on the autism spectrum to feel more comfortable and confident on the job. 4) Use visual aids when explaining routines and procedures. 5) Give feedback to help those on the spectrum improve and when they are doing a good job. 6) If possible, create a quiet workspace for spectrum employees, or perhaps grant a request for noise-canceling headphones, so they can work more efficiently. 7) Consider education and awareness programs, perhaps through the EAP, that can help coworkers foster understanding and acceptance of neurodiverse workers and differences in their communication styles and behaviors.

**Q.** I can't afford to lose my employee. However, he has numerous work issues that I plead with him to correct. Although they are not huge, and they don't interfere with the positive financial impact he brings, I worry whether his performance will someday suffer in serious ways.

**A.** Your employee is not making changes because he does not perceive the need to do so. There are many motivational approaches to explore, but you will need to tailor your approach to his situation. This is where your EAP can be of enormous help. Discuss with the employee assistance professional the circumstances of this employee's problems. Then decide whether any or a combination of these factors might create a sense of urgency to change. Explore the following options: 1) Coach your worker to improve his skills and abilities. 2) Clarify your expectations to improve his ability to set goals and objectives. 3) Identify ways to recognize and reward the worker for achievements and hard work. 4) Improve your feedback, whether you focus on its frequency, intensity, quality, and/or urgency. 5) Evaluate whether the work is challenging enough and offers a sense of purpose. 6) Assess your own communication style, approachability, and supervisory skills to see whether improvements can lead to the changes the employee needs to make.