

Q. How do I coach an employee with a negative attitude? Until now, I have ignored or avoided this employee. Should I continue this approach and coach others to do the same, or intervene? If I intervene, what steps can I use before finally referring to the EAP?



A. Negativity is an attitude issue within the definition of job performance. Other factors include quality of work, quantity of work, attendance, appearance, behavior, and availability. Meet with your employee and discuss the negativity. Share examples so there is no dispute over what you observe. Negative attitudes can stem from many causes. Some are benign, but off-putting, like a cynical sense of humor. Others are more serious, like major complaints about the organization or supervisor or dislike of one's job. Your conversation will probably yield a good explanation for the negativity, because most employees are aware of their personality issues gained from past confrontations or relationship struggles with others. Ask your employee how your relationship with him or her can facilitate a more positive disposition. Do not tell others to cope better with negativity. Negativity has a contagious influence, so refer to the EAP rather than risk morale problems.

Q. Is it ever appropriate to encourage employees to quit their job versus referring them to the EAP? I think some employees would do better with another employer and would be happier and healthier as a result.

A. Employee assistance programs are in the business of helping employees resolve personal problems that may affect job performance, so it would never be advisable to encourage an employee to quit as a solution to his or her personal issues if the EAP has not been afforded the opportunity to help the employee. It would be improper for the EAP to endorse or discourage disciplinary or administrative actions, but certainly the EAP referral should be attempted early in the process of this situation you describe. If you have not done so, refer now. The EAP can then help the employee make the best decision based upon all the issues discovered in the assessment interview.

Q. A couple of weeks ago, I met with my employee to discuss attendance issues and make a referral to the EAP. The EAP referral was rejected, but surprisingly, attendance has been perfect ever since. Should I tell the EAP about this meeting?

A. Although this meeting was two weeks ago, let the EAP know about it. Inform your employee you have done so. Encourage use of the program once more. There are a few reasons for doing this. (1) The EA professional may offer guidance to you on managing your employee's attendance issues. (2) Your employee's knowledge of your contact with the EAP may facilitate changing his or her mind, and information you supplied will allow a more complete assessment. (3) Your employee may have attendance issues in the near future and realize help is needed, thereby self-referring in a crisis. (4) The EAP would encourage and educate the employee about the value of signing a release.

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