

Q. I think I am a good role model for my employees because I am dedicated to the company, a good listener, a team-builder, and a problem solver. Does this cover the bases or is there more to being a good role model? Is there a checklist for self-evaluation?



A. Being a role model is leading by example. If you adopt this view of your role, it encompasses nearly everything employees can see you do or hear you say. There's no perfection or checklist. Employees reflect on nearly everything you do, and all the implications for them. This is a natural process. If you don't take vacations, employees will be self-conscious taking vacations. Some may even model this behavior. If you come in late, employees notice it. Some may feel more freedom to come in late, too, or not worry so much about it. This dynamic can be applied to hundreds of matters. Regarding your role in leading by example, most behaviors fall under these headings: 1) How you prioritize your work and where you put your focus; 2) your attitude and demeanor, and communication style; 3) taking care of yourself, work-life balance, dress, exercise, use of leave, and work hours; 4) dedication to the employer and loyalty to the organization; 5) How you treat and interact with others, vulnerability and openness, and how you show appreciation.

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Q. What are the missteps of supportive supervisors who, although they really believe in the EAP, unwittingly send a message to employees in an organization that the EAP is not a safe source of help?

A. An EAP is designed to attract employees with its greatest asset being confidentiality. Employee-clients should have no doubts about it. Supervisor conduct that misaligns with these critical features can undermine the program. For example, an EAP is not a disciplinary program, but can be viewed as such if a supervisor's referral of an employee is perceived attitudinally as a punitive step in correcting performance. Supervisors who discuss the referral of an employee with others who have no need to know about it can damage the fragile nature of an EAP's perception of its being a safe place that maintains confidentiality. The bottom line is this: Employees will always have a collective opinion about the nature of EAP confidentiality. This word-of-mouth marketing is crucial, and supervisors must understand how vulnerable it is to being influenced for better or worse by what supervisors say and do.

Q. Can supervisors use the EAP to role-play different situations in confronting and correcting employee performance, even if not making a supervisor referral? What's the value in doing it, especially if the supervisor has decades of experience and has "seen it all"?

A. A key provision of the EAP core technology that defines the scope of EAP functions and practice is management consultation regarding productivity issues and troubled employees. In fact, this element is listed as #1 before employee assessment and referral functions. A strong relationship with managers being engaged with EAPs is essential to any program maximizing its value to the work organization. Role-play consultation is therefore an opportunity EAPs offer supervisors. It can help reduce manager stress when conducting corrective interviews, encourage supervisors' assertiveness with their subordinates, increase the likelihood of earlier EAP referrals, help managers encounter difficult employees more successfully, and in a global sense, reduce risk to the organization.