

Q. Is it appropriate for a supervisor to raise mental health issues with employees, such as pointing out that an employee “looks stressed out”? This might prompt employees to consider using the EAP.

A. Although it is not uncommon for a manager to use phrases such as “you look a little stressed out,” those might be misinterpreted by your employee. So, why not consider a different question with a business purpose, such as “you appear rushed and are fumbling with your work. Is there something I can do to help? Is everything all right?” This can lead the employee to mention something personal, in which case you can respond by recommending the EAP as a resource. Mental health in the workplace has received much attention in business news recently. This does not mean that supervisors should probe mental health issues or become diagnosticians. Continue to focus on performance issues that don’t resolve. You will ultimately refer employees with personal problems earlier and more often.



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Q. What are the costs of misconduct in the workplace, and what are the dominant behaviors constituting misconduct?

A. There are many areas of misconduct, but the three that drive costs are discrimination, sexual harassment, and bullying. A recent study by Vault found that the cost of workplace misconduct nationally is about \$20.2 billion per year. When an employee leaves an organization because of these behaviors, the cost to hire a new worker averages \$4126. And that is a low average, because this cost estimator from the Society of Human Resource Management is several years old and does not include many indirect costs. The latest report on misconduct in the workplace can be found at <https://vaultplatform.com/the-trust-gap/> (a short form appears before you can download the 16-page document). Among the findings, of women who have experienced sexual harassment, only one in five reports it despite today’s education, policies, and legal remedies. Fear of retaliation and impact on one’s career still drive the hesitancy to report victimization.

Q. I have always struggled with being assertive. As a new supervisor, I can imagine some problems this might cause. Are there any problems outside my awareness that I should be careful to avoid?

A. Supervisors who struggle with assertiveness often fear saying no. Rather than state unequivocally to their employees that something won’t happen or can’t happen, and risk disappointment or anger, they may give the impression that there is hope or that they will “look into it.” Whether it is about a pay raise or some other question, they give employees the expectation of an affirmative outcome. For the supervisor, the goal at the time is avoiding anger or conflict with workers. Their strategy is to “wait and see” with a middle-of-the-road approach. Later, when the thing hoped for does not materialize, anger and accusations of broken promises occur. Trust is lost among staff. Unassertive supervisors often know they are setting themselves up for these conflicts, but the need to avoid conflict in the moment overrides their better judgment at the time. If you struggle with this level of assertiveness, contact the EAP.