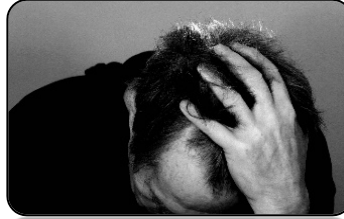


Q. My employee works overtime almost every day. This is an outstanding worker with high productivity. However, I think help from the EAP is needed because the work effort is too obsessive. This isn't your typical employee with personal problems and poor performance. It's the opposite. How do I proceed?



A. It's indisputable that employees who work too much are not performing at their best, nor in the best interest of the organization. Although their productivity may be high, their well-being is in jeopardy, and this does not bode well for the organization's most valuable resource, which is employees. For the same reason, one would not abuse a piece of machinery to get more productivity out of it, thereby shortening its lifespan and potential. Your employee's performance is not outstanding in the true sense of this term, so do not label it as such. Instead, define what you mean by appropriate work on the job and how an employee can earn the top rating. Then expect it. Overworked employees cost too much in burnout, teamwork deterioration, and decline in effective relationships on the job. Something has to fall short, and it is likely found among these factors. Counsel your employee to make the changes, and refer the employee to the EAP based on his or her inability to follow through. There is something going on that explains the overwork. The EAP will discover what it is, and help the employee resolve it.

Q. When documenting evidence of reasonable suspicion of substance abuse, what should I be cautious about not omitting so my documentation is useful and effective?

A. Common omissions when creating documentation to support reasonable suspicion of substance abuse include failure to contrast behaviors witnessed with those normally observed. These other non-problematic behaviors show that what you have observed is not easily explained away by another cause. For example, if you witness an employee's uncontrollable and inappropriate laughter—a possible indication of illicit drug use—be sure to describe how the employee's mood and demeanor normally appear. Likewise, if an employee is behaving in a belligerent or aggressive manner, be sure to state that no provocation existed prior to the disturbing behavior, if indeed none was witnessed. These contrasts help make your documentation credible. In the latter example, the behavior documented is far less likely to be challenged and dismissed as a happy-go-lucky personality style.

Q. Which is the proper way to view an EAP from the supervisor's perspective: (a) as a counseling program to help employees resolve personal problems or (b) as a performance improvement program?

A. If you chose "b," you are correct. Because supervisors do not, cannot, and should not diagnose personal problems, they remain focused on performance, attendance, work quality, and workplace behavior. Likewise, this view of the EAP will result in more employees being identified as having some personal problem needing care, counseling, support, or treatment in order to resolve a performance issue. This answer may seem counterintuitive or ironic; however, it is important to remember that EAPs are not designed as counseling or therapy programs in the generally accepted definition of these terms. Likewise, employee assistance professionals (properly written as "EA professionals") are not "counselors" or "therapists" as these terms are generally defined, although the EA professional's skills and abilities may be similar. From the employee's perspective, of course, EAPs are usually viewed as programs to help resolve personal problems.

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Q. How can the EAP help me as a supervisor cope with significant organizational change that is causing great stress among employees right now? We may be losing staff, and the change we are experiencing is taking everyone by surprise.

A. Change isn't easy, especially if it takes you by surprise, but the EAP can help you take change in stride, stay positive, see the benefits of change, and preserve a sense of teamwork among your staff. Change typically involves stages of resolution similar to those of grief. These include denial, resistance, acceptance, and finally, commitment. Anticipate the EAP helping you answer the question "How do I keep a positive outlook in the face of change?" This can be tough, but your organization relies on you to accomplish this. In this regard, never condemn organizational change outright to your staff. Avoid being labeled a malcontent. Do solicit your staff's input and feelings, and make time for venting. Most organizational change is about cost savings and efficiency. This comes with pain for some, but the upside is security in the long run for the organization and positives that flow to employees generally.

Q. Every supervisor wants to know more about how to excite employees and show appreciation without having to rely on a budget to do it. What are some of the most overlooked ways of showing appreciation, beyond saying "thank you"?

A. There are many resources and dozens of books on how to show appreciation to employees without financial support to do it. Saying "thank you" periodically is one way, but nothing beats a handwritten note for doing so. The three parts to the ideal thank-you are 1) writing the words "thank you" in the first sentence (e.g., Susan, I want to thank you for...), 2) saying you appreciate the action/work/effort and why, and 3) explaining the positive impact of the employee's action on the organization. Of course, no technique should be overused, because its impact will lessen with repetition. However, in this digital age of texting and emailing, the psychological impact of a written thank-you from a boss is important. Few employees will not retain it or will fail to tell others.