

Q. As a new supervisor, I feel new stresses I have never experienced before. I know I have the skills for this job, but the anxiety keeps me from enjoying it. Can the EAP help me be calmer, focused, and deliberate in how I approach all the required new skills managers must employ, or should I get a coach?



A. As a new supervisor experiencing worry and strain, you may benefit from a two-track approach. This would include getting a coach or supervision mentor, but also working periodically and confidentially with the EAP, where you can share what is more deeply personal about your experience and fears. The EAP can help you gain insight and acquire new skills related to communication; examine prior coping skills for managing problems in your life and learn new ones; and learn about self-awareness, relationship development, stress management, managing the experience of feeling overwhelmed, dealing with self-doubts, and overcoming the impostor syndrome (a normal, nearly universal experience of new hires or appointees fearing they don't know what they are doing and that others will suddenly discover it).

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Q. How can supervisors support isolated workers who are now telecommuting? My telecommuting workers have doubled, and I am wondering what sort of problems these employees will be experiencing.

A. Supporting employees during the national response to the coronavirus requires establishing a mutually agreeable communication plan with appropriate frequency that can help telecommuters. Several media reports have discussed how over 70% of employees have experienced sleep disturbances because of the pandemic, but research on employee isolation shows it alone can also negatively affect sleep. Research has shown that family conflicts also affect the performance of telecommuters. Depression is an ailment shown to be associated with working in isolation. Ironically, research has also shown isolated employees are more susceptible to viruses because their immune systems become weaker. Presenteeism can also be a larger problem for telecommuters because they are concerned what others think, and fear losing a desired telecommuting position if not they can't work. Supervisors have the ability to listen, be supportive, and mitigate some of these factors, but it is also obvious that the EAP can be more important than ever.

Sources: "The Psychological Impact of Teleworking: Stress, Emotions, and Health"; Mann and Holdsworth (ScienceAlert, Feb 3 2019)

Q. My employee went to the EAP after disclosing domestic violence issues at home. I'm nervous. Issues of this type can spill into the workplace. I'd like her to sign a release so I can at least hear that things are working out well at the EAP. Is this appropriate?

A. This is a self-referral encouraged by you, and of course she is not obligated to sign a release of information. Nothing prohibits you from asking your employee to voluntarily sign a release so you can receive the most minimal information, but trust the EAP to manage this referral properly. If a threat or safety issue emerged or was discovered by the EAP, confidentiality provisions would permit disclosure so you could be readily informed. This is the recommended approach to helping you feel assured that this case is in good hands. This approach is also in line with proper EAP principles and application.