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# Solutions

A newsletter designed to support leadership and human resource staff.



**Acentra**  
HEALTH

*The following questions and answers offer practical guidance on common challenges supervisors may encounter in the workplace. Acentra Health, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), is here to provide confidential support and consultation to managers seeking assistance with a wide range of workplace issues.*

**One of my employees is part of the “the sandwich generation,” taking care of her elderly parents and also her teens, who I hear are sometimes getting in trouble. I want to be supportive, but her performance is slipping. I am referring her to the EAP for assistance, but what else can I do?**

Demonstrating support (beyond the referral to the EAP) and reassuring her about her value to the team will improve or at least bolster her resolve and ability to manage these issues successfully. Most situations with employees like this one include opportunities to discuss small ways accommodation can be made to make her circumstances less stressful. Have an open-ended discussion about flex time, scheduling, remote work, delegation of duties, and time needed to resolve issues. Of course, accountability must be part of your discussions, but here's how to do it while still showing maximum support: Be clear about work expectations, set some

measurable goals, and agree on regular check-ins to assess how things are going.

**What's the trick to giving effective feedback? I'm always worried about how it will be received and whether criticism will impact my relationship with my employees.**

When a rapport of trust hasn't been built with employees, they are more likely to struggle with accepting negative feedback. The reason is fairly simple. Without trust, feedback feels like judgment. This causes employees to instinctively become defensive to protect themselves. When trust exists, feedback from supervisors is more likely to be interpreted as guidance rather than criticism. Building rapport isn't complicated or full of psychological maneuvering. Your tools are your words and actions. Be genuinely concerned about your employees' well-being. Like you, they know what feels real and genuine. Be sure to “catch people doing things right.” Don't just provide corrective feedback. If you're a busy supervisor, it might be easier to move quickly, spot problems, make corrections, and keep things running. But if you take a few minutes to praise good work, you build rapport and employees will perceive you as supportive and concerned about their success. When an employee is thinking, “Wow, he or she



really wants me to do well," then you are building rapport.

**How should a supervisor respond to a subtle comment that could be interpreted as a threat of violence? For example, an employee says, "I am reaching the end of my rope, and no one here wants to see that happen. Trust me." Comments like this leave me feeling uneasy.**

An employee who makes a comment that causes you to feel concern is all you need to act. Always take these situations seriously. Start with documenting everything about the situation, especially the context. Record the date, who heard what was said, and your response while it is fresh in your memory. If you felt intimidated, document it. You don't have to interpret or decide the intent of a comment. Documenting tone is important, however. To do it, focus on how something is said, not just what. Use non-judgmental language to describe attitude, emotion, style of delivery, and body language. Gathering these four things will give management or Human Resources the information they need to guide you. Always consult with them. The EAP can also provide consultation and offer tips on how to document effectively. It is appropriate to say to an employee that their comments cause concern and feel intimidating, and

to ask exactly what they mean. This clarification gives the employee an opportunity to elaborate or correct their statement, but even more important, it communicates that such remarks are being taken seriously.

**I need to confront an employee about ongoing attendance problems, but I keep procrastinating. I feel pretty insecure about the process and fear I will not look like a leader or will be easily intimidated. I hear the EA professional can role-play with me? But, will it help?**

Role-playing is an effective tool for building supervisor confidence before meeting with employees for difficult conversations. Role-playing works because it affords safe practice with different possible scenarios. It also allows you to respond quicker and avoid the "Wow, how do I respond?" anxiety when confronted by an employee who has more longevity with the organization and appears more confident than you. After role-playing, you will have more clarity on how to approach the corrective interview with your employee. You'll come across as more professional. Reaching out to the EAP is a wise move, and as you seem to be aware, waiting too long only makes these situations harder to resolve.



**I know clinical depression is a medical condition and a serious problem nationwide. I read millions suffer from it. This must affect some employees in my work unit from time to time, but I have never seen a depressed employee in 20 years. What's the explanation?**

Clinical depression affects millions of people, but it often goes unnoticed in the workplace. Many employees mask symptoms with a positive attitude while quietly struggling. People often expect to see obvious sadness or withdrawal, but depression may show up instead as irritability, low creativity, incomplete tasks, or disengagement. Without classic signs, these behaviors are often mistaken for stress or simply viewed as personality traits (e.g., "That's just John being John"). In some cases, individuals may not even recognize their own long-standing depression. Watching for changes in performance remains the best way to spot employees who may need help. The EAP is a confidential, no-cost resource that can assess the situation, connect employees to treatment, and support them in managing their condition. Learn more about clinical depression [here](#).

## Employee Assistance Program

The EAP provides counseling sessions at no cost, as well as a wide variety of services to enhance overall well-being and support healthy work-life balance. In addition, the EAP is available to provide meaningful solutions to address the many challenging situations facing those in management roles. Leaders can take advantage of unlimited management consultations and receive guidance and assistance related to employee and team functioning concerns.

The EAP can be accessed anytime. For no-cost, confidential support from a licensed, experienced counselor, call today. You can also access helpful management tips and resources on the website.

 **Phone:** 1.800.833.3031

 **Website:** [EAPHelplink.com](http://EAPHelplink.com)

 **Company Code:** IOWA

*Solutions is a newsletter for managers, supervisors, and human resource staff eligible for Acentra Health services. Acentra Health EAP services provide assistance and guidance to supervisors dealing with workplace performance issues. This newsletter is intended for general information purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health professional. Individuals should follow the policies and procedures laid out by their human resource management department concerning use of the EAP. Some articles reprinted with permission from DFA Publishing and Consulting, LLC. Acentra Health, McLean, VA. All rights reserved.*