

SOLUTIONS

NEWSLETTER

Offering practical solutions to help leadership and HR professionals navigate workplace challenges through real-world Q&A.

Volume 28, Issue 3



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.

What is “Lone Ranger syndrome” as it pertains to supervisor practices and using the EAP?

Lone Ranger syndrome describes a set of behaviors commonly associated with supervisors who believe they are solely responsible for managing employee performance problems and helping troubled employees resolve personal issues, typically without relying on organizational resources such as the EAP. In short, it refers to a strong, often misguided, sense of independence.

These supervisors view themselves as dependable and loyal performers, but they risk becoming overwhelmed and susceptible to burnout. Their inability or unwillingness to ask for help can become a workplace risk. The term was coined in the 1970s by Art Purvis, an Employee Relations Manager with the Federal Office of Personnel Management.

Examining Lone Ranger syndrome helps supervisors gain self-awareness and understand the value of EAPs in relieving them of the unrealistic burden of becoming involved in employees’ personal problems. The key hurdle is convincing oneself that asking for help is both acceptable and beneficial.

We have an employee on the job who has been sober for many years. He has no performance issues but has used the EAP as a resource in the past. Reportedly, his doctor is recommending smoking marijuana to help treat insomnia and depression. I am worried about relapse. Should I contact the EAP?

Contact your EAP professional to discuss your concerns about the employee. Afterwards, keep track of your employee’s performance as you would any other worker, and stay attuned to performance issues. Since performance isn’t currently problematic, your options are limited to confidentially processing these worries through the EAP.

Using psychoactive substances is typically considered a relapse for those recovering from alcohol use disorder (alcoholism) even if job performance remains acceptable. Relapses tend toward a chronic path and eventual use of the primary drug of choice.



Your role however as a manager is to focus on the individual's job performance and follow your policies if this ever becomes problematic.

How can a supervisor effectively implement a structured debriefing after a workplace incident? Or should we rely on the EAP to help manage these types of events?

The EAP is available to help our organization communicate with employees and address the emotional impact of traumatic workplace events. You should call the EAP when any of the following occur:

- Serious workplace incidents (e.g., severe injury, medical emergency, accident)
- Death of a coworker
- Violence related events (e.g. workplace violence, threats, assault, robbery, active shooter incidents)
- Disasters and emergencies (e.g. hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, fires, explosions)
- Indirect exposure in the workplace to traumatic or disturbing events

Secondary trauma means that even employees who were not directly involved may experience anxiety, irritability, sleep problems, and changes in work performance. Early EAP involvement helps employees normalize and cope with these reactions while reducing the potential for long-term impact.

In the meantime, consider talking with the EAP now about your role and your work unit's needs in advance of an incident. Also review your organization's critical incident policies and procedures, if available. Avoid waiting for an incident to occur before diving into this material.

An incident may require you to take a leadership role in managing a workplace response and having clarity about expectations, resources, and procedures beforehand will help you step in to manage the situation appropriately and bridge the response until EAP assistance can be arranged.

I tend to be too lenient with rulebreakers, tardy workers, and underperformers. It's to avoid tension and conflict. Can our EAP help me be more assertive and less insecure? How?

The EAP can definitely help, but since employees have grown accustomed to your current style, some resistance is normal when you begin setting firmer standards. Tardy or underperforming employees may test whether you're serious about the new expectations.

The EAP is a 24/7 program offering a quick turnaround when outreach is initially made. EAP offers solution-focused approaches. For example, after sharing information with the EAP, you may be assigned a homework task or two to build skills like assertiveness. The EAP might suggest that for the next two weeks, you address every instance of tardiness calmly within 24 hours. You'll then speak with the EAP professional to discuss your experience.

Later, you may move on to brief corrective conversations with employees, role play them with the EAP, and examine what you said, what you felt during the corrective meeting, and how things turned out versus what you feared. Don't forget that your HR resources may also be helpful.



ACENTRA HEALTH PODCASTS

Acentra Health produces podcasts covering a variety of well-being topics. Listen to this month's podcasts by visiting: eap.acentra.com/podcast/.



Employee Assistance Program

Your 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, your 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**

 **Company Code: IOWA**

