The following questions and answers are designed to help provide assistance related to issues that supervisors may be facing. Kepro, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides confidential consultation to managers seeking guidance related to a variety of workplace challenges.

I'm not sure I completely understand how I can be utilizing the EAP as a supervisor when it comes to assisting with job performance. Isn't it a counseling program?

As a supervisor, certainly you would want to encourage any employee that mentions personal challenges to contact the EAP. What you may not realize is that you can suggest that an employee take advantage of the EAP as part of improving their job performance. EAP counselors can help employees assess factors that could be interfering with their ability to meet workplace demands and perform at their best. Consult with your Human Resource department to determine whether your organization's policy supports formal/mandatory referrals, or in other words requiring follow-up with the EAP as a condition of employment. The employee would need to contact Kepro and attend counseling appointments as part of a performance improvement plan.

I was discussing my employee's attendance problem with her when she mentioned that family issues were causing her to be late for work. She added that she would be contacting the EAP. I look forward to positive changes, but should I have done anything more?

Beyond following up later and monitoring for positive changes in her attendance, the situation with this employee seems to have been handled well. This would be considered a “self-referral” to the EAP at this point, but there are a couple of tips worth considering. Depending on the seriousness of this attendance issue, offering the employee the opportunity to use your phone or to call the EAP “now” from your office might be effective in helping ensure she does in fact follow through with the EAP. It is the employee’s choice, of course. The second is to be supportive, but also clear that if the attendance problem does not change, then you will be considering the next steps in correcting the problem. This will also facilitate follow-through because a disciplinary step is implied.

You will also want to document the attendance history and consult with your Human Resource department to be sure you are following all proper procedures.

I put a lot of energy into mentoring and supporting my employees. When they don’t deliver the quality of work I would expect or follow through in a timely manner to requests, I have a hard time not taking it personally.

Viewing your employees as ungrateful invites you to take their shortcomings personally, experience more stress, delay referral to the EAP, and be angry with them. You feel taken advantage of, and the risk is that you will experience a desire to retaliate, terminate, or “teach them a lesson.” Perhaps you have heard the expression, “Employees are our organization’s most valuable resource.” It offers a clue to help you understand how best to work with employees when they disappoint you. Wanting your employees to be happy and productive is a good thing, and the EAP plays a key role in helping you do this, but you will use the EAP less when you are emotional and feel personally hurt in response to employees not living up to your expectations. When you use the “employees are a resource” paradigm, you respond differently. You become more strategic, and this means a possible referral to the EAP sooner.

My employee went to the EAP. She is a domestic abuse victim, and there are legal, financial, and child custody issues that she is dealing with. She is off work right now. I want her to take all the time she needs, but how long should I wait? What’s fair? What is the EAP’s role?

In this situation, it is important that you and your manager, along with your HR advisor, stay in close communication. Choose someone as lead communicator. Ask the employee what conditions are necessary for her to return to work. Then follow up. A breakdown in communication and a lack of being proactive to keep communication moving along are what cause situations like this to get more complicated. Timely communication and clear expectations will help your employee remain engaged, follow through, and complete numerous stressful tasks she likely must handle. If you ask the employee to sign a release of information and speak to the EAP, you will feel more assured and less anxious about the employee’s status and return to work.
What can supervisors do to help their employees correct performance more efficiently? I have often met with employees to discuss problems that need fixing, but I have later been surprised by what’s been forgotten or not understood despite what appeared to be a well-communicated meeting.

If you have been a supervisor for any length of time, you have likely noticed how an employee may be very attentive in a corrective interview as you explain a problem, but later it is as though they were daydreaming the entire time they were looking you straight in the eye. You may have asked to have key points in the meeting repeated, but later the details are surprisingly overlooked. There are many reasons for this phenomenon, including attention deficit issues due to stress, fear, or even possibly depression or medical issues. It is common for such employees not to return later for clarification, fearful of the manager's response to their apparent lack of attention. For these reasons, practice putting problems in writing along with the key points needing attention. Doing so early when problems arise may eliminate the need for a meeting entirely. If a pattern of inattention remains, refer the employee to the EAP based on performance shortcomings.

Is a “constructive confrontation” with an employee an interview that always includes mention of some potential disciplinary action to help motivate the worker to feel more urgency about making changes in performance?

The term “constructive confrontation” has many definitions and applications in human interaction, but in the work setting it typically refers to a purposeful and planned meeting with an employee experiencing performance or conduct issues in an effort to motivate the employee to make improvements or desired changes. Although a constructive confrontation may utilize mention of disciplinary action, this is not a required element. Most employees perceive the supervisor to be a legitimate authority figure who has control or influence over the disciplinary processes. This is a dynamic of authority, and it is not overlooked by employees when confronted by supervisors. This dynamic is also helpful to instill motivation. Supervisors who socialize frequently with subordinates or are viewed by them as a friend may experience more difficulty in succeeding with constructive confrontations. This is because the dynamic of authority has eroded. Reasserting this authority can be tough because it requires choices that stress the friendship.

Kepro’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The Employee Assistance Program through Kepro assists organizations and their workforce in managing the personal challenges that impact employee well-being, performance and effectiveness. Kepro’s life management consultants employ a comprehensive approach that identifies issues impacting the employee and assists them in developing meaningful solutions.

The Employee Assistance Program can be accessed any-time, for free, confidential support from a professional consultant or online resource. Call or log on today.

Phone: 1.800.833.3031
Website: www.EAPHelplink.com
Company Code: IOWA

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