

EMPLOYEE COUNSELING PROGRAM FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Daytime: 410-366-1980 x 278/279



Eve./Holidays: 1-800-285-1537

■ **I just learned that an employee stole a marketing idea from a temporary employee. I am wondering if he can be relied upon to tell the truth. Can the EAP interview this employee, and perhaps give me an opinion as to his trustworthiness?**

While there are many types of personality tests and other diagnostic tools that assess one's character, they are not designed to separate the honest from the dishonest person. Even if the EAP could judge your employee's character, it would not be appropriate to use such information in your supervisory role. Focus your concern on performance measures, and refer your employee to the EAP based upon his unethical behavior. The EA professional will make an assessment to determine what your employee needs to do to act with more integrity. Talk to the EAP about managing a relationship with an employee you feel you can't trust. The EAP will also help your feelings of betrayal so you don't prejudge other employees or let your feelings of betrayal spill over into your dealings with others.

■ **An employee loves organizing office pools for sports events. Maybe it's harmless fun, but he treats it so seriously and pressures people to place big bets. Is this an issue for an EAP referral?**

If he pressures coworkers to wager money, it is inappropriate workplace behavior. (It is also an indicator of an intense and possibly unhealthy attraction to gambling, but you can't diagnose such a problem.) The EAP will consider whether compulsive gambling is an issue during an assessment and whether it is related to these betting schemes. The workplace disruption you have witnessed leads employers to develop policies that define what types of gambling activities, if any, are permissible at work. Some state laws prohibit betting pools outright, although such laws are rarely enforced. Employees who cannot control their gambling may exhibit warning signs, such as frequent unexplained absenteeism, severe mood swings, and repeated and increasingly desperate attempts to borrow money or manage their growing personal debt. And as online gambling gains popularity, it poses an increasing threat to employees with Web access at work.

■ **Sometimes the subway under our building is closed for bomb threats and we have to evacuate. When that happens, I reassure my team that we're safe. But deep down, I'm just as scared**

Individuals who fear for their safety may not be able to concentrate at work. Ask the EAP about what help is available. Many people in both supervisory and support roles suffered mental health issues after Sept. 11, 2001, especially if they witnessed the attacks. Coping can prove particularly hard when bomb threats or similar disruptions arise during the workday. The EAP can promote resiliency and encourage participants to reduce or at least manage "stressors" effectively. Examples may include learning to assess and respond to perceived threats in a calm, rational

■ **as they are. Can the EAP help us cope with these ongoing disruptions?**

manner and devising strategies to stay focused and maintain a healthy perspective amid surrounding uncertainty or even chaos. On a practical level, the EAP may suggest lifestyle changes such as reducing caffeine or alcohol intake and getting sufficient sleep.

■ **EA professionals obviously have relationships with people in the community, and some of them may be friends, relatives, or family members of employees. How can EAP clients be assured that their confidentiality won't be breached?**

State and federal laws, professional licensing rules, and the work organization's EAP policy govern confidentiality. Penalties can be severe if confidentiality is violated. Employees can be assured that their confidentiality is protected to the extent allowed by law, and that the EAP will not release information to anyone in the workplace without the employee's written consent. A few narrow exceptions may apply, such as if employees in the EAP pose imminent danger to themselves or others. As a manager, explain that when you refer employees to the EAP, the only follow-up information you receive is whether individuals kept their appointment. Speak positively about the EAP and confidentiality. This more than any other factor helps improve utilization.

■ **I get visibly irritated when employees say one thing and do another. I'm not rude, but I make my feelings clear and I'm not very forgiving. I'm apparently disliked for being "mean." But how else am I supposed to handle substandard behavior?**

You may have heard the saying, "The meaning of your communication is the response you get." You may not think you are rude, but what matters is what others think. If you frequently seem irritated with your staff, you make it tougher to build trust with them. The next time you get angry, experiment with a different response. For example, you can summarize the situation in a pleasant but perplexed tone and ask, "Can you help me understand how this happened?" Another approach: Define what constitutes substandard performance and then ask, "Based on that definition, do you think what happened here qualifies as substandard?" The more you invite employees to take responsibility for their actions, the more you will invite them to take charge of personal change. And by speaking in a calm, non-accusatory voice, you avoid appearing mean.

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