

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



This supervisor newsletter is provided by:



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If an employee had an alcohol problem, I think I would know it. That is why I am so surprised that one of my employees was admitted to a detox unit over the weekend. This employee never drinks at work, and his performance is fine. I'm stumped.

Many employees with severe alcohol problems may not drink on the job.

Instead, they drink after work, on weekends, or in the mornings prior to work, or they experience binges you will never witness. Family members do witness such events, however, and a crisis at home may have led to the admission of your employee in this case. Perhaps DUI led to the crisis. Your employee could have perfectly acceptable performance at work, yet still have domestic problems caused by alcoholism. Like most people, you understand alcoholism from a limited point of view, because misconception and misinformation about the disease is pervasive. It is easy to decide that anyone who does not fit into that view is without a problem. Don't respond to your employee with disbelief upon his return. Instead, respond with support.

I referred an employee to the EAP and she seemed perfectly happy to go. However, I have learned that she never went. I didn't ask why, because her performance is fine now, but what could I have done, if anything, to make the employee more likely to follow through on my referral?

Any of these steps may facilitate your employee's following through with

a supervisor's referral to the EAP. All have been tried with various EAPs, and all have worked. Speak to the EAP if you have questions about any of them. 1) Reassure the employee that the program is confidential. 2) Say you won't discuss the referral with anyone in the work setting. 3) Assure the employee of confidentiality. 4) Mention the name of the EA professional with whom you spoke to discuss performance issues, and say that he or she is expecting a call from the employee. Provide the phone number of the EAP. Have a tentative appointment you have arranged in cooperation with the EAP, and if the employee accepts the referral, offer it as one option or cancel it. Allow the employee to visit the first EAP assessment on paid time.

I have to confess, I have not done a performance appraisal with my employees in a couple of years. I have had no complaints, and employees are doing well. With so much to do, I just keep postponing it. It's like exercise: I know I should do it, but I don't. What am I risking?

Most supervisors know that performance appraisals are a good thing for employees and the company, but most aren't aware of important and powerful secondary effects of doing performance appraisals. One is the ability to defuse ticking time bombs. Many employees will bring personal complaints to the performance appraisal table. You'll learn things you may never otherwise discover. Conflicts, unfairness, resource deficiencies, discriminatory problems, harassment, reports of theft, and existing safety risks all may show up at the performance appraisal discussion. Beyond these practical matters, performance appraisals empower employees and are a good way to bond with them. Performance appraisals help create loyalty and establish direction, help employees feel like they have goals and a stake in outcome, and help them feel in control of their lives. Experience shows that employees feel ignored and hurt if they don't get appraisals—even if they don't anticipate a good one!

It's been said that the EAP can be an alternative to discipline but not a substitute for it. This sounds like the same thing to me. Can you explain?

EAPs are programs that help employees improve job performance, in many cases by resolving personal problems that can interfere with job performance. Making the EAP an alternative to discipline affords the employee an opportunity to get help instead of being given a disciplinary action warranted for subpar performance or a workplace rule infraction. EAPs lose value when they are treated as substitutes for disciplinary action. This practice uses the EAP as a disciplinary response by the supervisor, who makes a referral to provide a consequence for subpar performance or work rule violations. The latter damages the EAP's perception by employees as a positive, safe, and constructive means to resolving personal problems that may interfere with job performance.

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