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WELLNESS SOLUTIONSSM

A Monthly Newsletter for Supervisors

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource — Employees

Q. I think great employees figure out what it takes to do outstanding work. I know what outstanding work means to me, but should I share my view or continue to have those who are outstanding emerge among their peers to show others "how it's done."

A. Be up front and specific with employees about what you believe they can do to demonstrate outstanding work performance. This is in the interest of your work organization. Some supervisors think that if they tell employees what outstanding performance represents, then they have given away "the secret" and somehow this will diminish their ability to judge an employee's initiative. This is false logic. If asking for additional or challenging work assignments or finding and sharing with peers the ways to make tedious or repetitive work more interesting is outstanding performance, say so. If demonstrating good communication, keeping you informed of work progress, or maintaining a positively upbeat and contagious attitude are outstanding work traits, then let employees know it. The purpose of outstanding performance is the advancement of your organization's mission. Don't make it a mystery or a frustrating puzzle employees can't pin down. Discover more outstanding employees by letting them know what great performance represents.

Q. I feel like a heel if I consider disciplinary action for an employee having ongoing performance problems, if they are also working with the EAP to resolve personal issues. The advice to "just focus on performance" doesn't make me feel better.

A. Frequently supervisors do not have a complete understanding of both the helping or humanitarian rationale for EAPs and their equally important business rationale. Understanding these principles however, by talking about them with the employee assistance professional, can help you see that improving performance is the responsibility of your employee. Your job is to offer every resource you can reasonably muster to help your employee perform satisfactorily. You may not be convinced that you have done everything reasonable to help your employee meet an acceptable levels of performance. This is would be a good discussion to have with the EAP. Good communication, written expectations or clear agreements with your employee, and a release signed by the employee, if he or she will provide one, will give you clarity and the willingness to do the right thing for your employee and your employer.

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Q. If I am too soft as a supervisor and need to get more assertive with employees who break rules, come in late, or don't produce quality work, can the EAP help me with some quick advice on turning things around?

A. The EAP can help, but it is likely that you will need support, coaching, and more than a of couple meetings to accomplish your goal of making the changes you want. You should anticipate that employees will resist your efforts at a supervision style "makeover" because they have naturally grown to believe that you don't take things seriously. The EAP may have other resources to recommend after an assessment. The EAP will probably offer to coach you for a while until you establish a new set of expectations and acceptable level of cooperation from your employees. The EAP will also help you respond appropriately to behaviors and non-behaviors that you will demonstrate resistance. You may need your manager's support along the way, too. The EAP help will also consult with you on managing the reactions of individual employees, some of whom may resist more than others.

Q. EAPs offer consultation to supervisors. As part of this consultative role, can they advise management on the possible effects of a disciplinary action and its potential effect on an employee's mental state?

A. Employee assistance professionals frequently consult with supervisors, but this consultation refers to helpful guidance on specific aspects of the supervisor's role in making a referral to the EAP. It is not an appropriate role of the employee assistance professional to render a psychiatric opinion to management about the capacity of an employee client to withstand the effects or distress of a disciplinary action. Doing so would be outside standards and acceptable functions that define EAPs. EAPs discuss with management limited information about employees, and then only what the employee agrees to share with a signed and properly executed consent. Further, involvement with your disciplinary choices would give the EAP a inappropriate and influential role in guiding these decisions and represent a conflict of interest that would handicap the organization and be a disservice to the employee.

Q. I have an employee who impulsively says or does things at work that are socially inappropriate. Quality of work is okay, but you never know what may be blurted out at meeting or in a hallway. Is a problem with the employee's "social filters" or common sense?

A. Impulsive behavior by employees in the workplace can be frustrating for coworkers and management alike. It is a problem that can be caused by medial or mental disorders. Frequently these employees are disciplined or referred to employee assistance programs because of a specific act shocking enough to be considered harassment, offensive, disruptive, or intimidating to peers. Employees with impulsive behavior may be very bright, but socially awkward. They may insist an offensive act was without malicious intent or misunderstood. Often however, they may also be frustrated at their inability to consistently control impulsive behavior. Be sure to document problems with these employees well before a referral to the EAP, so the employee assistance professional can see the pattern and make a more effective determination as to what might be contributing to the problem.