

FrontLine Supervisor

UT Employee Assistance Program • (800) 346-3549

■ **I have an employee who gets into fights with customers. He's had run-ins with coworkers, DUIs, and scrapes with the law. He's a classic hothead. I want to fire him, but I fear violent retaliation. Can the EAP help or tell me what to do?**

Your employee has persistent and severe conduct problems. Therefore, a management referral to the EAP is appropriate. You could wait and see whether the EAP can help the employee change his behavior, but you should discuss the postponement of dismissal with your management advisers. The EAP can't participate in administrative decisions. Always consult with management resources and advisers when you fear for your safety. If you refer him to the EAP, you may wish to view it as an accommodation to help the employee deal with his problems. The EAP will assess anger issues, use of alcohol, and other risk issues. A release will keep you apprised of participation and cooperation with program recommendations. Note that you always should refer employees to an EAP at the earliest sign of persistent conduct issues. This affords a better opportunity to intervene with chronic employee behavioral problems, which often grow worse.

■ **My employee's work is good, and frankly, he is my best mechanic. There is nothing to document regarding performance, but he has a bad attitude with his lack of humor, gruff style, isolation, and cynicism; he does not mesh well with us. Can the EAP help?**

Yes, the EAP can help. You do have job performance issues that you can document and upon which you can base a referral. It's attitude at work. Attitude can be described in a way that makes it measurable. The EAP can consult with you on useful language to consider in documentation, and it will do so with you confidentially. Useful language is critical because your organization may need such memos in the future to support performance management decisions. The task is to describe the manner in which your employee conducts himself, the disposition and temperament he displays, and most important, the impact on others. This is key to effective documentation—describing the harm or cost to the organization in lost productivity, lower morale, conflict, lost team cohesion, etc.

■ **I recently read that anxiety is common among workers of all ages, especially younger workers. What performance or workplace symptoms would indicate an employee suffers with**

Looking for mental health symptoms is not an efficient way of identifying troubled employees from a management perspective. Focusing on performance standards you want improved and then considering a referral to the EAP when they do not get better is the way to go. Are you puzzled by an employee who turned down a promotion for the third time? What about an employee who always avoids the annual holiday party? These employees may be exhibiting symptoms of two quite different forms of anxiety—or they may not be symptoms of anxiety at all.

an employee suffers with an anxiety disorder?

forms of anxiety—or they may not be symptoms of anxiety at all. There is a wide spectrum of anxiety disorders. Everyone experiences some anxiety from time to time, but many with severe forms of anxiety may perform in a superior fashion.

■ **We are pushing this year to hire more veterans. It's the right thing to do, and we believe it will be a win-win. What are some of the key issues we should keep in mind after we begin hiring?**

Be proactive and communicate effectively with veterans. Surveys of vets who are employed in the civilian workforce find that most think their unique skills—ones that would directly help the employer—aren't fully or effectively used. So, when supervising vets, dialogue with them about their ideas, skills, and potential. Put them to the test. Vets are trained in taking or giving directions and then performing to their maximum ability. They are not necessarily conditioned to play the devil's advocate, question authority, hold brainstorming sessions, or delve into discussions about how employees feel. These participatory workplace behaviors of the modern era may require more prompting to pull vets into them. If you are hiring vets, consider the special report released last year that will aid you in maximizing your effectiveness in working with vets. It's called "Mission Critical: Unlocking the Value of Veterans in the Workforce." Find it at online bookstores. Don't forget to make the EAP available and have its message communicated to family members and spouses. These persons can help reach vets if personal problems arise.

■ **After making a formal supervisor referral to the EAP, why is further communication about participation and cooperation necessary from the EAP? My concern is change or improved job performance. I either see it or I don't.**

Communicating with the supervisor following a formal referral for performance problems represents best practice for EAPs in managing troubled workers. It recognizes that employees are motivated, in part, to follow through because of concern over their job security. Eliminating this dynamic reduces accountability and invites a loss of urgency on the part of the EAP client. An EAP does not equate to a counseling service. It is a programmatic approach to managing troubled workers whose performance issues may be caused by personal problems. The two approaches are radically different helping systems. The former is entirely apart from the workplace or any other system. An EAP, on the other hand, exists because of its primary business purpose, which is helping the workforce remain happy, healthy, and productive. Part of this must be motivating the most difficult and most troubled workers to follow through with its recommendations.

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