



# FrontLine Supervisor

UTMB • (844) 872-5986

■ **I suggested to one of my employees that he contact the EAP for help with a performance problem. Although he initially agreed, he appears to have changed his mind, and the issue at work remains unresolved. The EAP is highly trusted, so what would be the most likely explanation?**

**There could be many** reasons for the employee's loss of motivation. It appears that your direct conversation sparked a willingness to act, but it is also possible that he agreed in the moment just to please you and to avoid any deeper confrontation—especially if he was feeling exposed or uncomfortable with a personal problem he did not want discovered. Once the meeting ends, the motivation to follow through often fades even if it was sincere. Suggest that an employee make the call from your office when making a referral because the momentum of your discussion is fresh. It might feel awkward, but improves the chances of follow-through. It also reduces the risk of an employee's problems getting worse, which could be costly. This phone-now approach helps overcome second thoughts, and it also helps the employee accept that using the EAP is a strength, not a weakness or cause for shame.

■ **I sense my employee has relapsed after treatment for an alcohol use disorder. I suspect it because I have gut instincts about it. This is based on my long history with him, catching him drinking, and past confrontations. How do I proceed?**

**The short answer** is stay steady, neutral, and focused on workplace impact. Given your knowledge of the relapse and your history with this employee, it's critical to take a professional approach with boundaries in mind. Even if your instincts are correct, focus only on what is verifiable. Do not confront the employee about the relapse directly unless it has impacted performance or behavior, or violated a workplace policy. Instead, contact your EAP and explain the situation. Even without an active release form, the EA professional can advise you in general terms about how to proceed. If the relapse has affected workplace conduct or performance, document those changes and address them. Discuss your observations. The EA professional will help you articulate what is quantifiable for documentation. Avoid personal commentary or raising past grievances with your employee. Let the EAP and company policies guide your next steps.

■ **I have an employee who is reportedly sabotaging others—like withholding key info, giving vague instructions, or taking credit for others' work. I haven't seen these behaviors personally, so how can I say something**

**When you haven't** personally observed the behavior, the key is to address the impact without framing it as an accusation. Focus on what you *do* know—specific outcomes or disruptions. Use neutral, factual language to open the conversation. For example: "I've heard of a few situations where teammates weren't given complete information, and it created delays. Can you help me understand what happened?" Notice how this approach keeps your tone professional and curious rather than confrontational. Your goal is to raise awareness and give the employee a chance to

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**and get the benefits of confrontation without being accusatory?**

explain, correct, or clarify. At the same time, take the opportunity to reinforce clear expectations around communication, collaboration, and accountability with the entire team. This is important. If the pattern continues, escalate appropriately by involving HR in guiding your next steps or initiating a performance improvement process. This early intervention approach with its focus on outcomes, not accusations, involves communicating in a concerned tone that may prevent the behavior from continuing.

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■ **I am concerned about two people in our office distracting others and interfering with productivity because of their romantic relationship. How do I handle this with tact?**

**Handling this matter** is important, and as you indicate, it must be done with respect and sensitivity. Your goal is to protect workplace productivity while maintaining the dignity of the couple and gaining their cooperation. Stay professional. Begin by meeting with the two employees and reminding them how important it is to maintain a professional environment—this means keeping their personal relationship separate from work. This is not something you need to negotiate, but your approach should still foster cooperation and align with the needs of the office. You're still the supervisor, and while the issue is sensitive, it's ultimately about behavior and conduct. Be clear in communicating boundaries and defining what you consider acceptable workplace behavior. Talk with them about ways to reduce the impact of their relationship on others in the office. After the meeting, continue to monitor their behavior, simply noting whether it stays appropriate and in line with your expectations.

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■ **My employee asked to borrow \$500. I did not embarrass him or act shocked, but I was. I referred him to the EAP, but I also felt fearful about whatever the crisis was that would lead him to ask me for money. Knowing he was facing something horrendous almost made me give it to him.**

**You made the right** decision. Unfortunately, when an employee turns to their supervisor for a loan, it often means they've run out of others to turn to—family, friends, or even payday lenders. Merely asking signals a serious financial issue and is almost always related to another problem that is worse. This could be a substance use disorder, gambling, or threats from another lender to whom the employee owes money. The \$500 is also likely only a part of what the employee needs, and others may still be sought to help with the larger sum actually needed. A referral to the EAP, who knows how to properly assess and discover the latent problems your employee faces, is the right support that is needed in this situation. Apart from these problems, lending money risks blurring professional boundaries, complicates your leadership role, and, at worst, could pull you into the employee's serious personal struggles in other ways.

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## NOTES