September 2025

UTEAP

FrontLine Supervisor

UT Employee Assistance Program • (800) 346-3549

■ **I've been documenting performance issues with my employee, but it appears my notes are not detailed enough or quantifiable. For example, I wrote: "The employee has created poor accounting records." I did not go further to explain how. Can I still use the documentation to make an EAP referral?**

Yes, you can still use your documentation to make an EAP referral even though it lacks specifics. The purpose of documentation is not simply to outline performance issues for the employee, but also to make it useful in the event your organization must rely on it to justify administrative actions, particularly those of a disciplinary nature. So, vague documentation like "poor accounting records" may not stand up well if such actions are challenged later. Supervisory referrals do not require perfectly worded documentation; what matters most is that you have identified ongoing performance issues and attempted to address them. Going forward, improve your documentation by being specific. For example, write: "Robert failed to reconcile three monthly accounting reports on time. Errors were noted in 15% of the entries, and this caused lost time, disruption at the headquarters office, and the expense of other corporate accountants having to fix the problems." Note that the impact or cost of the performance problem is included, which makes the documentation more compelling.

■ **Half my employees have eldercare-related stress issues. EAP seminars we hosted were helpful, but unfortunately some of my employees did not attend. Some of these same employees are now having work issues. Would it be helpful to have a trained employee coach those who missed the EAP training?**

It would be better to work with each of these employees separately, with the goal of correcting their performance or attendance issues, just like you would with any employee experiencing such problems regardless of their eldercare responsibilities. Here's why: You don't really know why these employees are having performance problems despite their explanations of burdens associated with eldercare responsibilities. The EAP, on the other hand, has the ability to listen carefully, assess each employee, and, if needed, provide them with the right resources capable of helping them. To intervene and provide support in the way initially described would require your making a determination that no other personal problems or influences exist that contribute to the performance problems. This is tantamount to a diagnostic assessment or "armchair diagnosis."

■ **I need to confront an employee about ongoing attendance problems, but I keep procrastinating. I feel pretty insecure about the process and fear I will not look like a leader or will be easily intimidated. I hear the**

Role-playing is an effective tool for building supervisor confidence before meeting with employees for difficult conversations. Role-playing works because it affords safe practice with different possible scenarios. It also allows you to respond quicker and avoid the "Wow, how do I respond?" anxiety when confronted by an employee who is older, is more knowledgeable about the organization, and appears more confident than you. After role-playing, you will have more clarity on how to approach the corrective interview with your employee. You'll come across as more

EA professional can role-play with me? But, will it help?

professional. Reaching out to the EAP is a wise move, and as you seem to be aware, waiting too long only makes these situations harder to resolve.

■ **I know a few fellow supervisors who think mistakenly that the EAP is only for serious mental health problems, substance use disorders, and the like. What is the hazard of believing or acting as if this is the case?**

The hazard in thinking the EAP is only for "serious" issues like mental health or substance use is that supervisors overlook the program as a resource for many types of other problems and challenges in the workplace. When you don't encourage use of the EAP for any concern or difficulty, you'll naturally spend more time engaging with employees regarding stressful issues, financial worries, caregiving struggles, and family conflicts. Every employee has some personal concerns, and periodically the effects of these problems spill into the workplace. This makes the EAP a key resource for workers. Another risk is that your own attitude will creep out and be perceived by employees. They will pick up on whether a supervisor is pro-EAP or skeptical about its use, and they will respond accordingly. If you appear dismissive of the EAP, employees are less likely to use it, leaving you more involved in their personal problems and draining energy that should go toward managing performance. Over time, this creates a strain on the supervisor and missed opportunities for employees to get timely help.

■ **I know clinical depression is a serious problem nationwide. I read millions suffer from it. This must affect some employees in my work unit from time to time, but I have never seen a depressed employee in 20 years. What's the explanation?**

You're right: Depression affects over 21 million employees according the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), but it often goes unnoticed. Some employees mask symptoms by displaying an engaging, positive attitude on the job. They appear upbeat or cheerful. Internally, however, they are struggling. Many people expect to see textbook-like sadness and withdrawal, but in reality, the depression symptoms dominating an individual profile may include irritability, less creativity, not completing tasks rapidly, or a lack of enthusiasm. Without classic symptoms, it's easy to assume such employees are stressed out or disengaged because they are overworked. In fact, both could be true! Clinical experience shows some people are depressed but they are barely aware of a condition that's lasted so long. Their baseline of low energy or pessimism seems normal to them and others. Some may accept these behaviors as personality traits (thinking, e.g., "Oh, that's just John being John."). Watching for changes in performance is still the best way to identify troubled employees who need help, but accept that you will never know about or spot every employee suffering with depression.

NOTES

FrontLine Supervisor is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. For specific guidance on handling individual employee problems, consult with your EA professional. ©2025 DFA Publishing & Consulting, LLC. Gender use in Frontline Supervisor content is strictly random.