Beyond respect and tolerance, how can I help employees see the value of diversity and use it as a resource to support work goals and the organization’s mission?

In a few cases when I have referred employees to the EAP, they’ve refused to go after I’ve mentioned that I need them to sign a release of information. It’s a catch-22. I need to know if they actually go, but asking for a release loses the referral. What’s the fix?

I am a new manager and in my first job as a supervisor. What problems might I encounter early that I can prepare for now? If I feel overwhelmed, can the EAP help me?

Although an employee must sign a release of information if you are to learn of his or her participation in the EAP, you admittedly are not equipped to explain confidentiality laws, the purpose of a release, its restrictions, and why it is a good idea. Any of these concerns may surface at its mention. Unless you are authoring a last-chance agreement where obligations are spelled out, the solution is to say, “Can you please give permission to the EAP to let me know that you kept the appointment and are following their recommendations?” This approach is less threatening. It also better protects the perception of EAP confidentiality. EA professionals are experienced at explaining the purpose of a release so employees see its value as a way for the EAP to effectively communicate appropriate information to the supervisor. This reduces anxiety, which keeps clients focused on getting help.

Becoming a manager can be exciting, but be sure you understand your role and responsibilities. Have this discussion and nail down the details early. This will prevent many problems you would otherwise face from overlooking important aspects of your job. Be prepared for difficult challenges that lead you to question your ability to do the job. This is normal. If your employees are performing well, do not see this as a signal to ignore them until they need you. Be proactive and engage with them regularly. The supervisory role includes influence projected by your knowledge and abilities, and leverage naturally linked to your authority. Both dynamics influence employee productivity. The EAP can help you with time and stress management; tips on organizing work; consulting on how to manage difficult employees and how to coach; education on conflict resolution and managing teams; support when faced with tough decisions like terminating an employee; and counseling to help you avoid burnout.
Many employees are taking care of elderly parents while managing their households and parenting their own children. I think some of these workers are at risk for burnout, or at least for being unproductive at some point. How can managers play a role in helping these workers?

Compassion fatigue describes the type of burnout often experienced by caregivers. Additionally, the “Sandwich Generation” describes those adults faced with responsibilities for their children while also ministering to the needs of elderly parents or loved ones. Like nurses who may experience burnout that contributes to less-effective patient care, absenteeism, and employee turnover, these employees may pose similar risks to employers. Realize that caregivers may not notice the level of stress they are truly under until symptoms like health problems appear. For burnout, these could include dozens of maladies and complaints—headaches, lowered resiliency, interpersonal conflicts, cynicism, irritability, low energy, more frequent colds, or blaming the employer for not appreciating his or her contributions. It can be a highly mixed bag of issues. When you witness productivity drop-offs among employees, refer early to the EAP. Scheduling flexibility may offer valuable help for employee caregivers, so long as it is feasible for the employer and does not disrupt work flow.

My employee fell off the loading dock and was injured while involved in horseplay. A gesture from a coworker indicated he had been smoking pot on lunch break. I have no evidence, but how can I make an EAP referral to evaluate whether a drug use issue exists?

There may be occasions when a supervisor would like to refer an employee to the EAP for a personal problem based on a hunch or unverified tip. Without clear documentation of a performance issue or a clear rationale for the referral, however, such action would only hurt the EAP by decreasing its value as a program of attraction and undermining employee trust of its helpfulness and effectiveness. Some employers refer employees to the EAP for help with coming back to work after an injury, or when a conduct problem has repeated itself too often. A workers’ compensation doctor might spot a drug use issue in the course of treatment and refer to the EAP. However, beyond these few paths of discovery, the ability to refer is limited. Note that EAPs always keep in mind the possibility that an alcohol or drug problem exists within the context of any type of initial complaint. The EAP field’s beginning is rooted in this underlying principle.

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