



QUANTUM

Frontline Supervisor

■ **Can the employee assistance program (EAP) draft corrective letters and referral letters for supervisors so they can be more effective in motivating employees to visit the EAP when performance problems indicate a formal referral is needed?**

The EAP cannot draft disciplinary or corrective documentation on a supervisor's behalf. Writing performance documentation is a core supervisory responsibility, sometimes completed in consultation with human resources. However, the EAP can still play a valuable consultative role. It can offer general tips for effective documentation—such as clarity, structure, behavioral specificity, and completeness—that may strengthen your writing to make it more understandable and helpful to employees. By limiting its role to consultation rather than authorship, the EAP preserves its credibility with employees and avoids being viewed as adversarial. This balanced approach increases the likelihood that employees will accept referrals, engage with the EAP, and make meaningful use of the support it offers.

■ **I don't want my employees to be overly stressed, but I don't have much control over current workplace demands. I know workplace stress is nothing new, but is there something new about the nature of stress and the risk of complaints against employers these days?**

Workplace literature shows that stress is no longer just a personal concern but a serious organizational problem with legal risks. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) these types of cases are on the rise. (Source: embroker.com/blog/workplace-harassment-claims-data) Much discussion focuses on workplace cultures failing to adapt to massive changes in the world of work. Obviously, the roles of the supervisor and the EAP have never been more important. Early, subtle signs of increasing stress can be identified long before complaints start—including yawning, irritability, skipping breaks, eating at one's desk, working late or on weekends, headache complaints, and tardiness. Be proactive with individual workers. Encourage five-minute breaks and model them yourself. Huddle your team regularly in 10-to-15-minute meetings to share wins, pass on information, and bond. This strategy has proven value in reducing stress. Try “stress temperature checks” by asking employees as a group how they are doing and what would help. Encourage use of the EAP, and underscore its confidentiality. Above all, don't be a supervisor who fails to provide reasonable support, ignores warning signs, allows excessive workloads, or engages in high-pressure tactics.

■ **I am frequently accused of being a micromanager. I might check in frequently with a team to which I have delegated work, but I don't see this as micromanaging.**

Micromanaging comes in many forms. A common perception of this practice is continually inserting oneself into a work project and not understanding how the authority of a supervisor influences group dynamics and productivity. Delegation is more difficult than it first appears. The goal is to allow a work team, as in your case, to be completely independent of your influence and direction, with the quality of the work product

What am I not understanding?

(whatever it might be) speaking for itself. If the final product is not acceptable, the team learns from the experience. This can create a lot of anxiety for supervisors, and constant checking is a compensatory behavior to relieve fear that mistakes will reflect poorly on their leadership or result in loss of control. Keep practicing delegation, and rely on the EAP to help you overcome the missteps in your supervision. Higher levels of workplace productivity await!

■ **I learned the hard way that I must follow up after referring an employee to the EAP. I assumed all was well because the employee's attitude was positive. Problems later began and worsened, until a crisis eventually occurred unexpectedly. What makes follow-up so important?**

Your experience is not uncommon for supervisors who see referral to the EAP as “one and done.” Checking in with your employee helps reinforce accountability and helps ensure workplace expectations are still being met. A critical part of the EAP helping process is supervisors following up after the initial referral. Talk to the EAP about performance, and develop a plan for how to monitor and support your employee after treatment or referral. Employee assistance programs often lead to tremendous success, but that success depends on a supervisor's “paired managerial oversight.” This means the manager remains visibly engaged after the referral, reinforcing expectations, tracking improvement, and signaling to the worker that performance change still matters. Without this ongoing presence, urgency fades, follow-through weakens, and employees may drift from both EAP recommendations and employer expectations.

■ **My employee came back from a lengthy absence after treatment for alcohol use disorder (AUD). A group of peers then invited him out to a bar after work, acting as if he was cured. Should I tell the employees that this was inappropriate and educate them as to why?**

A key part of recovery from alcohol use disorder is patients learning to tackle these types of situations with assertiveness skills that are learned in treatment. Declining an invitation to a bar and explaining why or simply suggesting an alternative activity is what will be expected from your employee. You or others were within earshot or learned of the bar invitation, but many other risky interactions will happen in the future that you will not be privy to. Was this a sincere invite, a form of harassment to undermine the employee's recovery, or coworkers simply being naïve about AUD recovery, which is based on abstinence? Context makes a difference. If you are a small group, speaking quietly with the coworkers may be appropriate. Ultimately, your responsibility as a manager is to ensure the employee has a supportive, non-discriminatory work environment and that his return goes smoothly. If the employee has complaints related to these matters then you do have a solid reason to act.

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