## May 2016 Employees-Your Most Valuable Resource

- I want to help my staff to think and act independently, but I am often a "mother hen" to them. How can I best identify employees who are too dependent, and how can I more effectively encourage independence and refrain from caretaking?
- Let your employees know that you want them to think and work creatively and independently. Clearly explain their assignments and ask them to bring their ideas and solutions to you prior to asking your opinion. This will encourage independent thinking, improve efficiency, and reduce your stress. You can identify employees who need help by their inability to anticipate and think through problems, their fear of making decisions, their inability to find appropriate solutions, as well as their lack of initiative. If you're still struggling with being able to let go of caretaking your employees, look to your EAO for more help.
- I have two employees with a personality clash. Periodically I succeed in getting them to cooperate, but it doesn't "stick." Soon they are back at each other's throats. What is the preferred method for referring them to the EAO?
- The best method is for you to meet with an EAO consultant to offer background information and plan the referral. Be careful not to see conflict as "the problem." This view of conflict can cause you to ignore the root reasons for conflict. Conflicts between employees are usually symptoms of other issues requiring intervention or personal change. If you decide to refer employees individually, you may discover that venting and sharing each one's individual stories in private with the EAO may produce an almost immediate cessation of tension. Be assured that it can be temporary. The next step may involve facilitated meetings between the two to jointly determine effective ways to move forward.
- How can supervisors intervene with attitude problems, bickering, and morale problems among a large group of employees? Should I have a large group meeting to air out the issues?
- Remember this rule: If employees are bringing their concerns and complaints to you, they are less likely to bring the same complaints and concerns to their peers. Try to appreciate this dynamic because it can help you develop effective relationships with employees. Avoid large group meetings because you may never uncover the nature of squabbles that commonly develop among subgroups. Instead, reach out to employees individually to gain clarity about the problems they are experiencing. Establish a feedback process to identify possible solutions for improvement. Consult with the EAO to identify next steps if needed.

- Should a supervisor always seek to motivate an employee to self-refer to the EAO before making a formal referral?
- Supervisor referrals are based on performance, conduct, attendance, attitude, or related behavior issues. In the course of supervision, a performance problem might be identified, and typically the supervisor offers guidance to correct it. If change isn't forthcoming, the supervisor's suggestion to use the EAO may come next. This, in turn, may lead to a formal referral if performance issues remain or become chronically unsatisfactory. Supervisors should focus on helping employees make changes early and in an expedient manner to prevent unmanageable performance issues.
- I promised confidentiality to one of my employees in exchange for her telling me about her troubles at home. I now realize I should have referred her to the EAO because of the knowledge that I have about her life at home.

  What should I do?

Talk to the EAO about your difficult situation. Depending on the type of information that has been shared, the EAO will advise you on what to do. Some things learned in discourse with others should not be kept secret. For example, you should not promise to keep secret information you have about an intended suicide or a child being abused. Another example is when health issues are mentioned and, in that case, they would be referred to human resources. Remember to remain in the role of supervisor versus counselor. The EAO is better equipped with its experience and skills and the confidentiality laws that govern it—just as you are better equipped to correct performance.

**NOTES**