

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



■ **Is it helpful for a supervisor to disclose that he or she is a client of the EAO, and to offer an encouraging stand-up testimonial at a group orientation to support the EAO and encourage its use by employees?**

There is no need to disclose your participation with the EAO as a way of encouraging employees to use the program. Some leaders have made such announcements in larger public forums like EAO orientations, and it may be more impactful the higher up the manager is in the organization. However, there is no research that demonstrates such announcements improve utilization. More helpful to employees' likelihood of using the EAO is speaking positively about the office regularly and reminding employees about its confidentiality provisions. This word-of-mouth promotion works with any service. Frequently repeating a positive message about the EAO produces more results than a single, major announcement of acceptance by a key director.

■ **I have several employees in my office struggling with eldercare issues that sometimes get in the way of work. Everyone knows about the EAO, but I don't think any have called. Maybe they don't know everything that the EAO can do for them. Can you elaborate?**

The scope of help the EAO can offer may include arranging a workshop to discuss and discover answers to tough eldercare issues. The EAO could also review home and work problems to find ways of providing eldercare without these responsibilities interfering with work. Sometimes employees need some coaching in how to share the difficulties they are facing at home, and also requesting reasonable adjustments or allowances in their schedules so they can perform satisfactorily and meet the needs of home and work. This lack of assertiveness creates many large problems for employees, and sometimes it is the key roadblock to resolving tough problems employees face. Also, believing that one's problem or concern is fundamentally different from others who struggle with the same issue is a common reason people avoid asking for help. They can't imagine someone offering a solution that has not yet been considered.

■ **How do supervisors and employees interfere with the perception that the EAO is confidential?**

The familiar saying "Perception is reality" applies well to the EAO.

The level of confidentiality perceived by employees corresponds to the credibility of the EAO. Supervisors can damage the EAO's credibility by what they say or do. For example, do not discuss employee referrals with those who do not have a right or need to know about them, and resist asking employees about what happened in the EAO meetings. The EAO can provide supervisors with dos and don'ts that help preserve and protect the confidentiality of the office.

■ **I know supervisors should play a role in reducing stress, but my big fear is that the penalty for helping employees reduce stress is lower productivity. Isn't it a catch-22?**

Many supervisors fear that if they are proactive in helping employees deal with stress, everyone in the workplace will slow down, thereby harming productivity. According to the 2016 Work and Well-Being Survey released in June by the American Psychological Association, the five most stressful problems facing employees are long hours, low pay, lack of opportunity for growth and advancement, too heavy a workload, and unrealistic job expectations. The survey shows that at least 40%-50% of employees report either “very significant stress” or “somewhat significant stress” associated with these factors. Supervisors obviously have varying degrees of control, but simply by talking with your employees, you will discover ways to reduce their stress but not their productivity. In fact, reducing employee stress is more likely to *increase* productivity!

Source: <http://www.apaexcellence.org> [Search: “2016 work life study”]

■ **My boss wants me to deal with my “anger issues” and suggested anger management classes. I admit that under pressure I sometimes act like a hothead, but isn't my boss being an “armchair diagnostician” by saying that I have anger issues?**

Your boss can see and experience your anger. This makes it an observable and legitimate problem for him or her to address. As with absenteeism and disorganization, angry behavior that is disruptive can be quantified by the number of incidents and its effect on others. So your boss is not acting as an armchair diagnostician with such a statement. However, deciding on the cause of your anger, suggesting the type of counseling needed, or making a decision that you don't need the EAO but anger management classes would all be examples of acting as an armchair diagnostician. Anger management counseling helps a person gain control over his or her reaction to feeling irritated and annoyed. Many people referred for anger management are really struggling with rage, which is a very intense and violent (or bordering on violent) response. Often an event or incident can trigger rage. You should self-refer to the EAO to discuss the anger issue first. The EAO will lead to the right form of help.

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