

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE OFFICE (EAO) – 608/263-2987 – www.wisc.edu/eao

■ **Is it appropriate to ask the EAO's opinion as to whether we should issue a disciplinary action (in this case, termination) while an employee is in a treatment facility or after discharge from treatment?**

The decision about the time and place of issuing a disciplinary action should not rely upon the opinion of your Employee Assistance Office. The EAO does not participate in administrative or disciplinary decisions. These decisions are outside of EAO practice. Presumably you are concerned about the employee's psychological state of mind and the impact of the termination on his or her condition. The employee owns these decisions and outcomes. You should rely upon your HR Rep and what they think is best or customary for the work organization. It is appropriate to discuss concerns associated with this type of situation with the EAO, but the final decision will need to be yours after consulting with Human Resources.

■ **I am sure there are employees in our work organization using illicit substances. I understand enabling, but what causes people to enable when they absolutely know how bad they'd feel if a terrible drug/alcohol-related crisis resulted or someone got killed?**

Most people understand enabling as protecting, covering up, and making excuses for a co-worker or friend with an addiction problem; however, stopping enabling is not always as easy as it sounds. To stop enabling a friend or coworker with a severe personal problem requires making choices that may create significant stress, guilt, and feelings of loss. To no longer enable is not a simple decision. The enabler usually manages this choice with procrastination, denial, minimization ("It's bad but not that bad," "She's a functional alcoholic," etc.), and projection ("It's not my job to deal with it"). The result is cover-up and protection of the substance abuser. If this is an issue you struggle with, you can contact the EAO for guidance.

■ **I have never had an employee who needed a supervisor referral to the EAO, but I am sure many of them have personal issues in their lives and could benefit from the**

A busy, functional office can easily forget that the EAO is available. There is one great time and place to mention the EAO to every employee individually and on a regular basis, simply to remind them that the services exist: at the annual performance evaluation or review. Make it a habit to mention the EAO to every employee as a reminder – even if an employee is a top performer with outstanding marks. Some employees

EAO services. When is a good time to remind people that the EAO is available for them if they need it?

just don't think about the EAO, and your reminder may prompt them after leaving your office to make the call about a nagging personal problem. Also, remind employees about the confidential nature of the EAO, and to note that the service is free of charge.

■ I have an ambitious employee who produces great work, but collaborating with others is a problem for him. He experiences too many power struggles, and before long he starts managing others on the team rather than collaborating with them. Any tips on managing or referring to the EAO?

It sounds like your employee enjoys being with co-workers, but prefers the leadership role over collaboration. It is equally important to learn both roles; otherwise increased alienation of co-workers can result. Meet in private with the employee, and describe the issue as you see it. Your employee's ability to receive and act on feedback may be an indicator that change will be forthcoming. If issues continue, arrange a referral to the EAO, who will work with your employee to help them understand how their desire to control interferes with productivity. The EAO can also help your employee understand how powerful collaboration can be for work teams. Your employee undoubtedly has leadership strengths, so the goal should be to help him apply these skills appropriately.

■ One of my employees is a very grumpy person. I believe his irritating behavior has been tolerated by co-workers because they think it is just a personality style. I have never made this issue a performance matter, but I have thought about it. Is it too late?

It is not too late to get started, but there are steps to consider in helping your employee. You must document clearly what you and others witness so it can be used effectively when bringing your concerns to the employee's attention. This is not as easy as it sounds. Many supervisors struggle with how to describe behaviors that adversely affect performance, such as verbal tone, attitude, and nonverbal communication. A consult with your EAO can help immensely. Discuss your goal, take notes during your meeting, and be clear on how you will communicate to the employee what you would like changed. A role-play with the EAO can help you. Chances are, you will see short-term improvement after the first meeting with your employee, but sustained improvement may not be forthcoming until underlying issues are addressed.

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