

Frontline Supervisor



■ **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 services. When is a good time to remind people to use the office if they need it?**

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 program exists: 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 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 remember to mention that it is free of charge.

■ **I read that rude behavior at work is getting worse. Is this overblown? Haven't employees always shown a bit of rudeness periodically? What can supervisors do, and is there a role for the EAO to help overcome this sort of problem?**

Rude behavior is incivility at work, a topic that has received increased attention because surveys show it has grown worse. Approximately twice as many employees complain about rudeness today than they did 20 years ago. One poll showed that nearly half of employees decreased their work effort in response to rudeness, decreased time spent at work, intentionally decreased quality of work, lost time worrying about and stewing over incidents, avoided the rude person, and admitted declines in commitment to the organization. Twenty-five percent said they took out their frustrations on customers! Obviously, rudeness takes a toll on the bottom line. A positive workplace that reduces rudeness is not an accident. A strategic approach that includes education, awareness, and proactive and supportive policies, like those that address other organizational risks, is worth considering. And, of course, making an EAO referral when needed is appropriate. Start by meeting with the EAO to discuss a customized approach that fits with your work culture. Learn more here: <https://hbr.org/2013/01/the-price-of-incivility>.

■ **I think of the EAO as a productivity program rather than a counseling service, and I convey this**

Your view of EAO is consistent with the business rationale for such services and with that usually mentioned in policies that establish them. Such a viewpoint may increase the number of employees seen for personal problems, especially among troubled workers, some of whom

viewpoint to employees. It distinguishes the program from a mental health service, which most people are familiar with. Can this view reduce stigma?

pose greater risk to the organization. Direct appeal to reduce the stigma of seeking help for personal problems is also part of the solution to maximize utilization and impact, so a balance of viewpoints is ideal. If employees only view the EAO as a “counseling office” for “personal problems,” the stigma of seeking help can reduce motivation to participate. However, if the added focus on productivity improvement and work quality is well-promoted, these factors will work synergistically for the benefit of all.

■ My employee tends to be stubborn and unable to see others’ points of view. She is too blunt; for example, she’ll say “You’re wrong!” rather than “I believe that...” She talks down to others. I correct her, but changes don’t last. Would counseling help?

Your employee has a habit of communicating with others that is difficult to change, but it’s doable. There could be many reasons for her communication style, but your focus should be on correcting it, not guessing its cause. Consider holding her accountable by incorporating change in her performance reviews. Meet several times during the year to reinforce progress. Using this planned approach is important. Other leverage may include a corrective letter to create an impression and provide motivation for change. A referral to the EAO is also appropriate; EAO sessions would help her improve faster, reinforce progress, and make those changes last.

■ I should be more decisive, but I like to seek the opinions of my team. Secretly, I fear being wrong, so gathering opinions is a way to procrastinate with some of these tougher calls. How can I develop better, faster, and more confident decision-making skills?

There are many reasons people hesitate to make decisions. Fear of being wrong is one, but what drives this fear? This question is one the EAO can help you understand more clearly. You must make decisions, of course, so your anxiety translates into stalling techniques with the information-seeking, which is a legitimate and responsible step that covers for your hesitancy. You are using it as a crutch. The rest of the problem about making decisions—the mechanics of the process—can be found in hundreds of resources. In your journey of discovery, examine whether any of these decision-killers affect you: 1) perfectionism (it slows progress), 2) fear of disapproval, and 3) over-analyzing. Great decision makers have a history of overcoming mistakes. It is these mistakes that turn them into leaders who can trust their gut—an art that gets better over time. This is your goal: to be a great gut-level decision maker who is often right, but not perfect.

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