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Frontline Supervisor Newsletter

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Q. One of our employee assistance consultants came to our office to provide a refresher orientation and offer stress management tips. I encouraged employees to use the office, of course. However, what should supervisors generally say about the EAO to encourage its use?

A. Emphasizing the confidential nature of the EAO is the most important thing supervisors can say. Don't get bogged down in the nuances of confidentiality laws or try to offer explanations about the few extraordinary legal exceptions all confidentiality laws share. Employees worry about coworkers and managers discovering the nature of their personal problem or about effects on their job security, reputation, or promotional opportunities if they use the EAO. Offer reassurance and say the EAO will not be phoning you to ever share the nature of an employee's personal problems or concerns. Sometimes an employee will dismiss the EAO as a resource because they believe their unique problem is not appropriate to bring to the office. Emphasize that no problem is off-limits.

Q. What is "purposeful leadership" and is it something that can help me in my job?

A. "Purposeful leadership" is a model of supervisor/management behavior that has gained traction in literature and research. Its focus is on manager behaviors that help lower turnover, permit more job satisfaction, and produce a more engaged workforce. Research shows that supervisors personally grow to influence these outcomes by becoming leaders who employees want to follow. This goal is accomplished by examining personal ethics, being a role model, communicating well, being dedicated to self-growth, and learning to genuinely inspire employees with a unifying goal for the work unit. The EAO can help you get there. Do an honest self-assessment and work with the EAO to see how you can elevate and improve upon skills you'll discover in this landmark contribution to management science.

For more information: *Purposeful Leadership for a Total Engagement Culture: Master the Six Most Important Leadership Habits in Six Months*, by Michael J Pearsall.

Q. The EAO provides short-term problem solving and counseling, but it refers people to psychotherapy. What's the difference between the two?

A. Counseling is distinctly different from psychotherapy, which is why mental health licensure and appropriate certification is required to practice psychotherapy in virtually every state. Counseling is problem solving; it is often a discussion between a counselor and a client that addresses an individual's concerns or struggles associated with life's problems or issues. Psychotherapy is treatment for emotional problems, where the relationship with the psychotherapist is a means (a tool) to help the client make difficult changes in behavior, beliefs and habits of thinking to improve their life functioning. Most people who go to therapy do so after experiencing personal distress because the way they have always coped with or responded to life's problems is no longer working.

Q. Is there a limit to the number of times a supervisor can refer an employee to the EAO for the same performance problems that may be affected by the employee's personal problems? And at what point would repeatedly sending an employee to the EAO be considered enabling?

A. While the Employee Assistance Office does not place a limit on the number of times a supervisor can refer an employee, either for the same reason or an entirely different one, multiple referrals could be suggestive of other issues. Some things to consider; is there something getting in the way of addressing the employee's performance? In some cases managers may be able to relate to the personal problems the employee is going through, for example relationship issues, separation, or divorce. Additionally, a manager may fear the impact on the relationship if they hold the employee accountable. There are many other factors which could affect the manager's ability to address performance. If you can relate to these circumstances, consider scheduling a management consultation to explore what may be getting in your way and to assist you in being more effective in managing performance.

Q. We just referred an employee to the EAO for performance issues related to alcohol use, and they went into treatment. I'm thankful, but their history is one of being a real manipulator. I fear nothing will change. With this history, do you think I will be proven right?

A. It is impossible to say how well your employee will do. Why do some employees succeed and others don't? Certainly a part of the answer lies in effective treatment, which includes working with family members, who without help can unwittingly undermine treatment. Most success stories seem to include

a dramatic shift to understanding addiction as a chronic disease process that requires rigorous self-management using a program of recovery. This includes unyielding avoidance of activities that will sabotage it. Lacking these things, relapse is more predictable. When relapse occurs, it nearly always involves neglect of elements of successful recovery. An advantage of the employee starting with the EAO is that the employee assistance consultant can provide case management to ensure compliance.