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Frontline Supervisor Newsletter

Employee Assistance Services--UW-Madison Employee Assistance Office and LifeMatters

Q. How can Employee Assistance Services (EAO and LifeMatters) help me as a supervisor cope with significant organizational change that is causing great stress among employees right now? We may be losing staff, and the change we are experiencing is taking everyone by surprise.

A. Change isn't easy. Remember what it was like to learn to swim, especially that moment of pushing off the edge free from the teacher's support and striking off on your own? Whoever taught you said, "I won't let you sink," and it was trust that made it possible. It's much the same with managing transition and change. When people trust a manager they are likely to undertake a change even if it scares them. When they don't feel that trust, progress isn't likely to occur. The good news is that you can build that trust: Do what you say you will do. Listen to people carefully; people trust others whom they believe understand them. Understand what matters to people and work hard to protect whatever is related to that. Try extending your own trust of others a little further. Being trusted makes one more trustworthy, and trustworthy people are more trusting. If all this seems too complicated, simply remind yourself, "Tell the truth." Consulting with Employee Assistance Services will provide strategies customized to your workplace. Some general ways to help others adapt to rapid change include:

- Remind people what ISN'T changing
- Increase opportunities for social connection
- Share communication about upcoming challenges
- Listen to anxieties and fears; shift complaining toward problem solving and solutions
- Acknowledge employees' losses
- Engage your staff in developing a shared vision of a realistically optimistic future

Q. I'm concerned about an employee who recently shared with me that there are financial problems at home following a divorce and now, concerns about possible eviction. Throughout all this stress, the employee has maintained their great level of performance but I can see this is weighing on them. What can I offer this employee?

Referring an employee to Employee Assistance is appropriate when someone has shared personal concerns with you. It is not your role to solve the problems, but you can remind your employee about the availability of Employee Assistance, which are confidential and free of charge. Letting them know how to connect with Employee Assistance would be helpful. Employees are allowed to use the campus EAO on work time, and all it takes is an initial email or phone call to start the process. When calling LifeMatters, a master's level employee assistance professional will do a thorough phone assessment of the situation and offer support, solutions and may coordinate future individual counseling sessions to address the employee's concerns – all while protecting their privacy.

Q. My manager recommended that I contact Employee Assistance Services after our last one-on-one meeting. They thought I might gain some insight into employee issues on my team, but I thought Employee Assistance was just for counseling.

A. Employee Assistance includes confidential support, coaching and consultation for anyone in a management or leadership role. Some examples include:

- Education about addiction/alcoholism dynamics to help the manager address a problem and not enable the situation
- Offering assistance to a manager about how to support a team after the death of an employee
- Handling a situation where an employee threatens suicide
- Providing constructive feedback to a manager about the impact of his or her leadership style on others
- Recommending an effective approach for addressing a performance problem
- Helping develop strategies to improve morale and communication

These are just a few areas where Employee Assistance can support organizational supervisors, managers and leaders. Isn't it time you gave EA a try?

Q. We are a busy workplace and as the holidays approach, I wonder what I can do to reduce employees' stress during this time. We need to meet important deadlines and get things done, while many people are taking personal time to spend time with their loved ones.

A. You are wise to be thinking of this in advance. A recent article reported that 39% of human resource professionals remind their employees of their Employee Assistance Program to relieve holiday-related stress. [Tips to Reduce Employee Holiday Stress](#) Holidays are celebratory for many and challenging for others – due to difficult family relationships, having lost a loved one during that time of year, or feeling increased pressure to add activities to an already full calendar. Extreme winter weather, travel, additional spending for food and entertainment can also take its toll on personal finances and employee energy levels. Surveying your employees about their ideas for navigating this time of the year, and checking in regarding workloads and stress levels, can go a long way. Keeping workplace celebrations voluntary and simple, inviting personal traditions and healthy potluck meals are just a few ways you can increase social connection and de-stress the holidays at work.

Q. I am excited about an employee's upbeat attitude, positive outlook, and engaging communication style since being referred to employee assistance for consultation around substance abuse. How will I know whether they have relapsed?

A. Depending on the drug of abuse, relapse profiles can vary a great deal. For example, a heroin user may simply not show up to work or perhaps disappear for days at a time because of a relapse. An alcoholic employee may participate in behavior that leads to eventual relapse, which includes experimenting with controlled drinking for weeks or months. A sudden, out-of-control drinking bout then may precede phoning in sick. You may have no indication

whatsoever that alcohol use is the cause of the absence. These behavioral patterns can be confusing to supervisors. To gain clarity, establish good communication with the employee assistance office. This communication may not prevent relapse, but it typically prolongs the period of time after last use. This stretch increases the likelihood that relapse will not occur or, if it does, that it is brief and easily reestablished.