

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource--Employees

May 2005

Q. We had an employee who was a compulsive gambler and, unfortunately, he lost his job because of absenteeism. When confronted, he always appeared in control. However, he was only in control of his excuses. What more could I have done to help him?

A. Although you can't diagnose a compulsive gambler, being aware of signs and symptoms of performance problems can help you determine whether referral to the EAP is necessary. Symptoms of compulsive gambling may include:

- being chronically late for work,
 - unexplained absences or disappearances from work,
 - abusing sick leave,
 - taking long lunch or phone breaks,
 - leaving work early to gamble or meet a bookie,
 - taking vacations at gambling destinations,
 - borrowing money from coworkers and having conflicts with them about money owed to them,
 - requesting salary advances,
 - family members calling to inquire about the salary of the employee,
 - using petty cash to float a loan,
 - requesting pay instead of vacation time,
 - stealing company-owned merchandise or property; and
 - falsifying expense accounts.
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Q. Some of my employees have not had performance evaluations in several years. Some are my most difficult workers with attitude problems. I'm sure some connection exists between lack of an evaluation and their

behavior, but shouldn't self-control reign in mature workers?

A. Without an effective performance appraisal process, some employees will gradually demonstrate problematic workplace behaviors that otherwise would not appear. The performance evaluation influences a constructive sense of urgency that contributes to productivity and positive workplace behaviors. Even the best, most self-disciplined employees benefit from performance appraisals, not only because of the recognition that comes from a job well done, but also because of the certainty of an adverse response from an unsatisfactory evaluation. Other important benefits of performance appraisals are their contribution to boundaries and the promotion of an influential relationship between the supervisor and the employee. A meaningful performance evaluation is an important management tool that keeps these boundaries from becoming obscure, the result being diminished authority crucial to the supervisor's role.

Q. I think I am a good manager, but I know there is a lot more to learn to move up the corporate ladder. I have heard of "coaching." What is it, and does the EAP provide this service?

A. Coaching may be an option for you, and the EAP may offer help, or know of resources in the community where you can turn. The EAP may have additional suggestions for you, depending on your discussion. Coaching has become popular in the past several years, but it is not a regulated or licensed profession. It entails working with a trained and qualified person under a formal agreement. The coach will

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discuss performance outcomes, expectations, and commitment within the coaching relationship. Coaching can be done over the phone or in person. The coach will ask you an extensive series of questions, develop a plan, and guide you step-by-step to help you achieve your desired goal. As the coaching relationship ends, you will review your goals, progress, and the effectiveness of the coaching experience. By the time you're done, you should have a support system and a plan of action to maintain the behaviors and relationships you achieved during the coaching period.

Q. My employee appears arrogant when confronted about performance problems. Although her work issues are obvious, I feel like I am the bad guy when I confront her. I don't think this describes someone who would ever go to the EAP, correct?

A. Your employee's response to your confrontation does not reflect her interest in correcting her performance or taking responsibility for her problems. It is natural to assume that your employee would dismiss any attempt to refer her to the EAP. However, EA professionals have consistently observed that most employees such as the one you describe will eventually come to the EAP if a progressive disciplinary process is used. In fact, the defensiveness you witness may ironically be a clue to her amenability to a referral. She also may feel guilty about her poor performance. You can't tell from her reaction. Her difficulty in accepting your confrontation may be attributed to the work environment, the nature of a personal problem if one exists, her personality, or other unknown factors. Below the surface of her defensiveness she could be hurting and wanting help for an unmanageable personal problem.

Q. I understand that for a year the EAP follows up on employees who have been clients. Should I refer again if performance problems return within that time frame? Does

this mean I can't take disciplinary action, or should I do both?

A. After you refer your employee to the EAP, you should monitor your employee's performance in a way that helps you determine whether the issues that led to referral are resolved. During this time, you may wish to consult with the EAP if performance problems emerge, and you may make another supervisor referral. Whether you take a disciplinary action is a decision that only you can make. The EAP cannot advise or impede your decision. The EAP is always willing to help employees, even if referred more than once.

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