



Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

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Frontline Supervisor

Kentucky Employee Assistance Program

(502) 564-5788 or (800) 445-5327

■ **Many employees are taking care of elderly parents while managing their households and parenting their own children. I think some of these workers are at risk for burnout, or at least for having an impact on their productivity at some point. How can managers play a role in helping these workers?**

Compassion fatigue describes the type of burnout often experienced by caregivers. Additionally, the “Sandwich Generation” describes those adults faced with responsibilities for their children while also ministering to the needs of elderly parent(s). Like nurses who may experience burnout that contributes to less-effective patient care, absenteeism, and employee turnover, these employees may pose similar risks to employers. Realize that caregivers may not notice the level of stress they are truly under until symptoms like health problems appear. For burnout, these could include dozens of maladies and complaints—headaches, lowered resiliency, interpersonal conflicts, cynicism, irritability, low energy, more frequent colds, or blaming the employer for not appreciating his or her contributions. It can be a highly mixed bag of issues. When you witness productivity drop-offs among employees, refer early to the EAP. Scheduling flexibility may offer valuable help for employee caregivers, but a lot of accommodating can be difficult for employers. It’s important for supervisors to approach this with care and concern while still balancing the needs of the agency.

■ **In a few cases when I have referred employees to the EAP, I have been concerned about not receiving feedback about their participation. Why aren’t supervisors given this information?**

Although an employee may sign a release of information in order to provide feedback to a supervisor, in most cases it is not requisite. As a supervisor you are looking for improvements in job performance and or behavior, regardless of their participation with the EAP. It is very important that an employee feel confident that the EAP is keeping their information confidential so they can feel free to share information about the concerns that are troubling them. Making the decision to sign a release of information is completely up to the employee as seeking EAP services is voluntary. There are ways that you can maximize the leverage of a referral to increase the rate of success. Contact the EAP for a supervisory consultation to discuss your specific situation.

■ **My employee fell off the loading dock and was injured while involved in horseplay. A later gesture**

There may be occasions when a substance abuse problem is suspected, but no direct evidence is apparent. An employee should be referred based on the on-the-job-behaviors, in this instance, the horseplay and subsequent injury. You do not have to be certain a substance abuse

from a coworker suggested he had been smoking pot on lunch break. I have no evidence, but how can I make an EAP referral to evaluate whether a drug use issue exists?

problem exists to make a referral. You may simply refer based on behavioral or job performance concerns. When you complete a supervisory referral form be careful to objectively describe the behaviors or performance problems. Note that EAPs always keep in mind the possibility that an alcohol or drug problem exists within the context of any type of initial complaint.

■ Beyond respect and tolerance, how can I help employees see the value of diversity and use it as a resource to support work goals and the organization's mission?

Your question relates to the business case for diversity. Modeling the behaviors you want employees to follow is the way to accomplish your goal. Demonstrate inclusiveness when formulating teams and delegating assignments to communicate that everyone within the work unit has value. Believe that a diverse group of workers has the potential to find better solutions to problems to show how diversity can be a tool for increased productivity. When someone not of the dominant group expresses an idea, ask lots of questions to show how learning and discovery are enabled by diversity. Spot ways in which diversity is not yet fully utilized in your work unit and seek ways to make it happen. Don't be a bystander to inappropriate comments associated with diversity. Challenge statements that undermine inclusiveness and respect. Be mindful of your own biases, and avoid statements that generalize characteristics to specific groups of employees.

■ I am a new manager and in my first job as a supervisor. What problems might I encounter early that I can prepare for now? If I feel overwhelmed, can the EAP help me?

Becoming a manager can be exciting, but be sure you understand your role and responsibilities. Have this discussion and nail down the details early. This will prevent many problems you would otherwise face from overlooking important aspects of your job. Be prepared for difficult challenges that lead you to question your ability to do the job. This is normal. If your employees are performing well, do not see this as a signal to ignore them until they need you. Be proactive and engage with them regularly. The supervisory role includes influence projected by your knowledge and abilities, and leverage naturally linked to your authority. Both dynamics influence employee productivity. The EAP can help you with time and stress management; tips on organizing work; consulting on how to manage difficult employees and how to coach; education on conflict resolution and managing teams; support when faced with tough decisions like terminating an employee; and, counseling to help you avoid burnout.

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