

My employee has been absent for three weeks since the death of his mother. He phones to say he is dealing with estate issues. He is far past the five days of funeral leave we offer. I think an abuse of leave issue may exist, but should I refer him to the EAP?

First I would suggest having a conversation with the employee about their plans to return to work or apply for an extended leave. Employees responsible for managing the affairs of the deceased may experience additional distress. They may be dealing with grief that affects them later because they postponed their own self-care while attending to the needs of the estate. Dozens of things could explain the absence and suggesting the EAP is always a good idea. You can refer your employee to the EAP based on a finding of funeral leave abuse. Often, problems like this are multi-faceted. This is why EAPs exist—to help sort out the issues and help organizations retain valuable workers. If you still feel suspect abuse of an existing bereavement policy, consult with your HR advisor.

I would like to identify employees who appear to have the most creativity and drive. Is there a way to easily spot these employees in a work environment that does not allow for much of either?

Employees with creativity and drive tend to have skills often associated with entrepreneurial thinking. Meet with your employees regularly, and talk to them about what makes them excited and what makes them feel engaged. Keep the following in mind: Are any employees naturally prone to spotting new business opportunities? Do you have employees who take initiative on the job to undertake something new without being asked? Evidence of these behaviors can often be spotted even in the most controlled, uninspiring, and limited work settings. Employees who are courageous and unafraid to think outside the box will find a way to get their needs met, even if it is not in your company. Working with your managers to create opportunities is one key strategy for retaining them and reaping the benefits of their talent.

My employee came to my office the other day to say he was being followed by agents of a foreign country and he hears them talking about him. He acts sincere, but I know this is mental illness—schizophrenia, right? How do I get the EAP involved?

It is not your job to diagnose. Your employee's behaviors could be explained by mental illness, such as a type of schizophrenia, but an evaluation would be needed to learn more. Those affected by schizophrenia (about 1 percent of the population) may have their first overt episode of the illness in young adulthood or later. It can be alarming to managers and co-workers if delusions or hallucinations are shared. The risk that an employee with mental illness will become violent can be overblown, but a referral to the EAP is appropriate if behavior interferes with or is disruptive to the work environment. You can start by suggesting the employee visit the EAP, or consult with the EAP about appropriate steps to intervene.