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I recently read that anxiety is common among workers of all ages, especially younger workers. What performance or workplace symptoms would indicate an employee suffers with an anxiety disorder?

It is not efficient to look for mental health symptoms to identify troubled employees. Stay focused on performance standards you want improved and then consider a referral to the EAP if they do not get better with coaching. You may be puzzled by an employee who turned down a promotion for the third time, or wonder why an employee always avoids the annual holiday party. These employees may be exhibiting symptoms of two quite different forms of anxiety—or they may not be symptoms of anxiety at all. There is a wide spectrum of anxiety disorders. Everyone experiences some anxiety from time to time, but many with severe forms of anxiety may perform in a superior fashion.

I have an employee who gets into fights with customers. He's had run-ins with coworkers, DUIs, and scrapes with the law. He's a classic hothead. I want to fire him, but I fear violent retaliation. Can the EAP help or tell me what to do?

Your employee has persistent and severe conduct problems. Therefore, a management referral to the EAP is appropriate. You could wait and see whether the EAP can help the employee change his behavior, but you should discuss the postponement of dismissal with your management advisers. Always consult with management resources and advisers when you fear for your safety. If you refer him to the EAP, you may wish to view it as an accommodation to help the employee deal with his problems. The EAP will assess anger issues, use of alcohol, and other risk issues; but the EAP can't participate in administrative decisions. A release will keep you apprised of participation and cooperation with program recommendations.

After making a formal supervisor referral to the EAP, why is further communication about participation and cooperation necessary from the EAP? My concern is change or improved job performance. I either see it or I don't.

Communication following a formal referral for performance problems represents best practice for EAPs. It recognizes that employees are motivated, in part, to follow through because of concern over their job security. Eliminating this dynamic reduces accountability and invites a loss of urgency on the part of the EAP client. One of the goals of offering an EAP is helping your workforce remain happy, healthy, and productive. Part of this must be motivating the most difficult and troubled workers to follow through with its recommendations.