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My employee told me, in a private conversation, that she visited the EAP regarding some problems at home with her spouse. Am I obligated to keep this information about her visit to the EAP confidential?

Yes. Periodically, managers learn personal information about their employees through private conversations, employment records, and hearsay. Sometimes employees disclose personal information under emotional stress. Your possession of this information carries with it significant responsibility, and the appropriate care of it is a matter that shouldn't be taken lightly. Here are some rules to follow: Consider all personal information about employees as private and never disclose it unless compelled to do so. In all cases, talk to your HR manager or legal advisor and don't act alone without such advice. Also, it may be tempting to share personal information about an employee in confidence with another manager/colleague and ask him or her to not re-share it. Don't do this.

My employee suffers from chronic pain. He is a good performer. He has more difficulty on some days than others, and this causes him to move more slowly, but it is acceptable. How can I be more supportive?

The strongest recommendation regarding supporting employees with disabilities, including chronic pain, is for managers to remain approachable and welcoming so employees with special needs feel willing to request accommodations. This means periodically touching base with these workers and asking how things are going. It also includes modeling inclusiveness to coworkers. Failure to do so may contribute to unnecessary employee turnover. Offering disability awareness to the work organization or work unit is also a plus. The EAP can discuss with you what options for this sort of education might be available. Research shows that stress, anxiety, and workplace conflict can exacerbate chronic pain. This is an added reason to maintain good communication in the workplace, recommend EAP assistance for those who need it, and help employees maintain job satisfaction.

We have an older employee whom some people call "Pops," as in "Hey Pops!" I am a bit nervous that the term is age discriminatory. It rubs me the wrong way at least and a couple of others as well. Still, the employee doesn't seem to mind. What's the recommendation?

The term "pops" is being viewed by at least a couple of employees as discriminatory. Insist that employees stop using this term because people find it offensive. That's the justification. Perhaps this tag may have been fitting for a chuck wagon cook in an old Western movie, but it's problematic in the modern era. It does not matter that your employee is not offended. The term denotes an age stereotype. Even if your employee is fond of the term, others may label it as offensive. There are many terms commonly used in the workplace that may feel benign. Unfortunately, many of these terms have shown up in discrimination court cases. Terms like "having a senior moment," "looking for new blood," "our new and seasoned supervisors," and "old school" may also be problematic with regard to ageism in the workplace.