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ERC came to our office to provide a refresher orientation and offer stress management tips. I encouraged employees to use the program, of course. However, what two or three things should supervisors generally say about the EAP to encourage its use?

Emphasizing the confidential nature of an EAP is the most important thing supervisors can say. Employees worry about coworkers and managers discovering the nature of their personal problem or about effects on their job security, reputation, or promotional opportunities if they use the program. Offer reassurance by saying that the EAP cannot share information that identifies who has used the program or the nature of an employee's personal problems or concerns. Also emphasize that no problem is off-limits. EAPs have no "problem exclusions." Sometimes, an employee will dismiss the EAP as a resource because they believe their problem is too unique. The EAP can direct employees to appropriate resources in the community when short term counseling is not appropriate.

Is there a limit to the number of times a supervisor can refer an employee to the EAP for the same performance issues? And at what point would repeatedly sending an employee to the EAP be considered enabling?

ERC does not place a limit on the number of times a supervisor can refer an employee to the program either for the same reason or an entirely different one. Ultimately, the manager or the manager in consultation with his or her advisors must determine what value is forthcoming from referring an employee to the EAP. If referring to the EAP reestablishes the productivity of the worker, make your decision based upon this desired outcome. If inconvenience, loss of productivity, and sacrifice of management time are judged to be too burdensome, then repeatedly referring the same employee to the EAP as a way of managing performance problems needs to be examined. By one definition, sacrificing the well-being of the organization for the sake of the worker without seeing change would be a form of enabling.

We just referred an employee to the EAP for performance issues related to alcohol use, and he went into treatment. I'm thankful, but his history is one of being a real manipulator. I fear nothing will change. With this history, do you think I will be proven right?

Nearly all EAPs can recount incidents of recalcitrant employees who achieved long-term sobriety and became advocates for the EAP, the company, and recovery from addiction. So, it is impossible to say how well your employee will do. Why do some employees succeed and others don't? Certainly a part of the answer lies in effective treatment, which includes working with family members, who without help can unwittingly undermine treatment. Most success stories seem to include a dramatic shift to understanding addiction as a chronic disease process that requires rigorous self-management using a program of recovery. This includes unyielding avoidance of activities that will sabotage it. Lacking these things, relapse is more predictable. When relapse occurs, it nearly always involves neglect of elements of successful recovery.