

November 2019

How can the EAP help me as a supervisor cope with significant organizational change that is causing great stress among employees right now? We may be losing staff, and the change we are experiencing is taking everyone by surprise.

Which is the proper way to view an EAP from the supervisor's perspective: (a) as a counseling program to help employees resolve personal problems or (b) as a performance improvement program?

If my employee exhibits persistent attendance and conduct issues at work, should I document my observations and then attempt a formal referral, or is it better to speak with the EAP to prep myself a little better?

Change isn't easy, especially if it takes you by surprise, but the EAP can help you take change in stride, stay positive, see the benefits of change, and preserve a sense of teamwork among your staff. Change typically involves stages of resolution like denial, resistance, acceptance, and finally, commitment. Anticipate the EAP helping you answer the question "How do I keep a positive outlook in the face of change?" This can be tough, but your organization relies on you to accomplish this. In this regard, never condemn organizational change outright to your staff. Do solicit your staff's input and feelings and make time for venting. Most organizational change is about cost savings and efficiency. This comes with pain for some, but the upside is security in the long run for the organization and positives that flow to employees generally.

Both "a" & "b" you are correct. A supervisor's main responsibility is to monitor job performance and the EAP is a valuable resource to help address any noticeable issues. The supervisor, with the help of their human resource representative, can make a formal supervisory referral to the EAP. The EAP can then help the employee to explore what might be contributing to their work performance issues and what can be done to address it. It may or may not be related to personal problems in the employee's life, but that is the role of the EAP professional to make that determination. Regardless of their EAP involvement, the supervisor will continue to monitor the employee's work performance and provide them with necessary feedback to reinforce change. The EAP can also provide employees with the appropriate services to address personal issues that may not be affecting work performance. This is where an informal referral by the employer can be appropriate. Remind employees when making an informal referral, that the program is confidential and the EAP will not provide any information back to the employer unless the employee wants and gives written authorization to do so. Supervisors can consult with the EAP on when either type of referral might be appropriate.

Although employee assistance programs educate supervisors to make formal referrals, phoning the EAP to consult prior to the constructive confrontation is a good idea. EAPs welcome phone calls or meetings to discuss management and referral of troubled employees. This can help ensure a more successful outcome. The EAP can consult with you on effective language for your documentation, role-play the meeting with your employee, help you avoid overlooking less-obvious but important performance issues, and assist the EAP in preparing for a more effective motivational interview when the employee arrives at the EAP. Remember, such meetings with you are confidential, just as they are with employees. Effective communication is always the key to EAP success and the increased likelihood of helping employees and reestablishing the value they originally held in their position prior to their performance difficulties.