

I plan to make a supervisor referral to the EAP of an employee who chronically comes to work late. Should I also probe the reasons why?

Yes, ask your employee why he or she is coming to work late. The reason for asking is to rule out any issue that could be work-related over which you have control or influence to change. Remember, coming to work on time is a requirement for most jobs, and it is a measurable performance issue. So you have a right to ask why he or she is not reporting on time. If your employee discloses a work-centered reason for tardiness, try to address it. If your employee mentions a personal problem, accept the answer, but recommend the EAP as a resource for proper help. Talk to ERC beforehand or provide documentation to the EA professional so proper assessment can be conducted.

My employee has been visiting the EAP once per week for about a month. I am not seeing changes in his attitude or attendance. Should I phone the EAP to let them know, take the administrative action I promised, or give the situation more time?

The answer depends on what you are willing to tolerate. Speaking with the EAP and giving feedback is a smart move because the EA professional can interview the employee and, relying on your feedback, make adjustments to EAP recommendations, the treatment plan, or instructions given to the employee. Supervisors often observe behavior changes that the EAP may not. They should communicate their observations to the EAP without delay. It is important to note however that the EA professional cannot discuss any employee involvement with the program unless the employee has given written authorization for such discussion. EAPs can't tell managers how to respond administratively in "fail to thrive situations," but with a more complete picture made possible by communication, they will usually know what's best.

Many supervisors find conflicts with employees uncomfortable, which is why it is often difficult to hold them accountable, but this avoidance of conflict does not resolve the issue.

Seeking to reduce conflicts is a worthy pursuit, but this is different from being "conflict avoidant." Conflict avoidance is a dysfunctional approach to conflict management that seeks to steer clear of disagreements and the work needed to resolve them. Problems therefore grow worse, rather than being transformed into opportunities that can lead to more efficient work systems and higher productivity. Conflict avoidance requires a decision by the supervisor to abdicate responsibility for resolving conflicts. Supervisors who avoid conflict are typically unaware that systematic steps and procedures for resolving conflicts exist, and that conflicts can ultimately become success stories, not bad memories. ERC offers tremendous experience in conflict resolution and can often play a consultative role to supervisors.