

Must everything we do as supervisors fall under the heading of “being a role model?” Personally, I think it is good to loosen up every once in a while so that employees see us as real people who can have a good time.

I sometimes wonder if employees have personality problems when they exhibit difficult behavior. For example, I think one of my employees might be a narcissist. Isn't it a good idea for the EAP to offer advice on how to communicate with these different types of personalities?

I am unsure how to respond to some problems raised by employees to explain their performance issues. For example, one employee with a tardiness problem blames the traffic. I spend precious time advising on these issues, but to no avail. Does an EAP referral really make sense?

It may not seem fair, but your employees are continuously judging you by your behaviors. By virtue of your position, every behavior you exhibit to employees is viewed in the context of you as a role model. This is an inescapable dynamic of workplace authority and supervision. But there is more to it. All behaviors of supervisors make an impression on employees because their behaviors are symbolic. They tell your employees what you value, what you support, and what you stand for. This is a powerful tool in leadership. Not understanding this dynamic can cause you to lose their respect, along with harming your ability to influence and shape a team

Many people have elements of their personality that fall within descriptions of personality disorders. However, there is longstanding EAP guidance on avoiding diagnostic thinking on the part of supervisors. Not participating in this type of behavior has wide-ranging importance in the management of employee performance. Anything that impedes the process of referring an employee to the EAP increases risk to the organization. Engaging with difficult personalities with the goal of overcoming their personality traits or “out-psychoing” them contributes to this delay. There is no “science” involving the mastery of engaging with personality disorders. A better way to go is to consult with the EAP about individual employees and your concerns about their work, behavior, attitude, or attendance. Then follow an effective approach for helping them become the best workers they can be. That might include help from ERC.

It is easy to get bogged down in helping an employee problem solve issues like traffic or babysitting quandaries in an effort to have them perform. This is natural and quite expected in close working relationships. However, if you have spent a large amount of time troubleshooting a problem like traffic, you may not realize it, but there may be other problems contributing to the tardiness like discord in the household. These other problems may actually even be the primary cause. While you may still believe the EAP can't help, because this is about traffic; EAP support may be exactly the type of help the employee does need.