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Can you discuss what supervisors accidentally or unwittingly do when referring employees to the EAP that can undermine employee participation, or inhibits employees from actually going to or taking advantage of the program?

There are many common mistakes supervisors can make when referring employees to the EAP that may undermine the EAP's ability to help employees. When referring an employee to the EAP, either formally or informally, it is important to remember the following: 1) Emphasize that the EAP is confidential and that the supervisor is not going to receive personal information about the employee from the EAP. 2) Display a positive attitude about the EAP and its capabilities that "market" its benefits. 3) When making a formal referral, provide information to the EAP about the reason for the referral, focusing on the job performance issues discussed with the employee. These will help your employee feel more at ease when contacting the EAP and help the EAP professional focus on the issues most pressing to the supervisor which is likely to return the employee to an acceptable level of performance.

Lately, we have been discussing the different stressors that can impact police officers in our organization. I would like to see more officers self-refer and take advantage of the EAP for personal problems, but they resist. Do officers avoid self-referral because of fear that it will make them appear weak?

It is a myth that police officers do not visit EAPs via self-referral. Many journal articles discuss police stress and avoidance of asking for help over concern for how this is perceived by others. However, experience shows that a decision to self-refer is more closely aligned with safety and willingness to be vulnerable. This can be influenced by perceived competence of the EA professional, program capability, confidentiality, and convenience. Motivation to use an EAP depends on assurances of confidentiality, of course; but, this must be communicated strategically in numerous ways that create a sense of reassurance. Word-of-mouth promotion is essential, but this can only be influenced and aided by factors such as clearly written and frequently promoted assurances of confidentiality. Other factors include visibility, tenure of the benefit, and familiarity with the employee assistance professional(s), physical location, and session times. Critical for management is strict adherence to the nondisclosure of information associated with a signed release. The above are interlocking pieces. When effectively promoted, can help an EAP maximize utilization and reduce skepticism.

This coming year, I am on a mission to get my employees more engaged. If I do this right, what are the top benefits I am likely to see?

You can anticipate that the most significant return on your investment of energy with this project will be that employees are more engaged, more productive, and get along better with each other. You may also see improved attendance, fewer sick days, and higher morale. Hint: Research shows that you will make a big impact by listening to their opinions, being clear in what you ask and expect from them, and recognizing their contributions.