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# FrontLine Leader

*Employees — Your most valuable asset*

**Can supervisors consult with the EAP about things related to our role as a leader, even if the subject has nothing to do with managing a struggling employee?**



**A:** Like for any other employee, the EAP is available to discuss and resolve problems you experience. This includes issues of supervision, your role, management principles, etc. If the EAP can't assist you because of a lack of its direct experience with the issue you bring to the program, it can still research and examine what resources can assist you.

Note that all of us have manifest problems that appear in our lives. These roadblocks to other goals may be difficult to surmount because of our psychological issues, scripts, self-esteem problems, etc. These are the less visible but latent issues the EAP may help you spot and troubleshoot in your pursuit of the ultimate goal.



**I have two very smart employees who are constantly in conflict with each other. I hesitate to refer them to Continuum to resolve their issues because I think they will try and manipulate the EAP professional. Should I refer anyway?**

**A:** Your employees may not be motivated to resolve their differences, at least not yet. Their sense of urgency to deal with the issues between them will not be greater than a consequence for remaining in conflict and interfering with workplace productivity. Like many supervisors, you hold significant leverage and the ability to influence them toward the goal

all three of you share. The question is, how long will you continue to tolerate the problems between them? It is easy to unwittingly reinforce this sort of dysfunction between workers by asking for change, pleading, coaxing, and meeting in private to “get serious” but without truly holding workers to account.

So without taking a stand and deciding on an effective consequence, you can expect the problems they are experiencing to continue indefinitely. Start by consulting with a Continuum workplace consultant alone to create a conflict resolution plan, then meet with your employees to discuss expectations of their participation.



**If a referral to the EAP for work performance improvement coaching is not a disciplinary measure, why do employees become resistant to a formal referral for help with job performance issues?**

**A:** Although education and awareness about the EAP reduces the stigma associated with seeking help, understanding how employees react to constructive conversations and referrals can help supervisors better manage resistance. When you confront an employee about job performance issues, a natural reaction is to deny or minimize the validity of your complaint. The complaint is viewed as criticism, and defensiveness is the response. Accepting the EAP referral is equivalent to agreeing with your complaint. Hence, the resistance.

Employees may be defensive for other reasons, of course. These include fear that the program won't be confidential, fear of a permanent record of their participation, stigma, and experiencing anxiety over anticipated disclosure of a personal problem that the employee feels he or she can still resolve (alcoholism, etc.) To reduce defensiveness, discuss potential concerns early in your meeting. Like a salesperson, address the resistance issues up front in order to make the "sale."



**Employees can self-refer to Continuum for all types of personal concerns. If the problem is primarily about their supervisor, will the EAP professional urge the employee to sign a release so the other side of the story can be obtained from the supervisor?**

**A:** Continuum EAP professionals work with the information provided by employees to guide them toward a workable solution. Complaints about supervisors are common, but EAPs don't typically need "the other side of the story" from the supervisor to help employees navigate their way to a better working relationship.

You may feel uncomfortable imagining your employees talking about you, but you should know that Continuum strives to help people and companies reach their goals. This means your EAP seeks healthful and productive resolutions that benefit employees in their roles as workers without dismissing the primacy of the organization or undermining your role or position.