

# THE CONTINUUM **EDGE**

## INFORMATION FOR LEADERS



**I'm a senior manager but also a recovering drug user who's been totally sober for over 22 years. I can spot subtle cues of those using drugs because of my past. It's not my job to point out these subtle cues, but how can my experience be useful in my current role?**

**A:** You're right, you can't diagnose and confront employees, but you do have insights that give you a level of empathy other managers may lack. However, we're not talking about addiction necessarily, but instead the acute stress, the personal struggles, and a host of consequential problems common to a life affected by drug addiction. As a person in recovery, you can create a team environment or workplace that feels safe and supportive. When an employee's performance problems appear, you can document and discuss these. Inquiring about the cause of them (which is manager-appropriate and not a diagnostic inquiry) may elicit the nature of a personal problem that you can refer to the EAP. It is more likely that an assessment will then identify the substance use disorder.

**NOTE:** It is not unusual for those in recovery to share their stories with others in social or informal gatherings. However, be self-aware about maintaining professional boundaries by focusing only on observable behaviors and work issues in your supervisory role.



**Can you explain the feedback model referred to as Situation-Behavior-Impact (SBI)?**

The Situation-Behavior-Impact (SBI) feedback model, developed by the Center for Creative Leadership, is a straightforward tool supervisors can easily apply. It helps ensure that when you give feedback to an employee, it is done in a clear, respectful and effective way regardless of whether the feedback is positive or negative.

*Here's how the SBI model works:*

**Situation** – Be specific and give your employee the when and where a certain behavior occurred so they can recall what you are referring to. For example, "Jane, this morning at the 11 a.m. meeting...."

**Behavior** – Describe the observable action, not your interpretation. For example, "You interrupted me while I was telling the team about the monthly budget."

**Impact** – "I felt frustrated when you interrupted me because it broke my train of thought." The feedback ends there without judgment or assumptions.

Its goal is impartiality and accuracy, but it's been proven to have a significant impact on facilitating change or reinforcing desirable behaviors.





**My employee exhibits troubling behaviors. For example, she's ignoring deadlines, forgetting what I asked her to do, and not responding to emails. She's a strong worker, so this is difficult situation. It's some sort of defiance, but how can I manage it? Should I just demand change?**

**A:** Continuum EAP can discuss with you the difficulties associated with managing this employee. Most defiance of supervisors is not overt. It is passive-aggressive — for example, her not responding to your emails or claiming forgetfulness regarding your requests. The EAP can help you try to identify the underlying cause of this defiance. You'll discover it probably stems from

stress, miscommunication or some perceived unfairness. Generally, it's not useful to demand change with a heavy-handed, drill-sergeant approach. It's smarter to use effective communication and empathy to address these behaviors constructively. Your goal is to build trust and encourage the employee to engage with you more positively and meet expectations. This

is a balanced approach, but it does not dismiss the fact that ultimately your role is to ensure accountability. Practice constructive confrontation through role-playing with the EAP professional. Role-playing is highly effective for cases like yours. Based on the outcome of your meeting with the employee, consider suggesting she reach out to the EAP if appropriate.



**How can supervisors support employees who may be struggling with anxiety, especially since we aren't in a position to diagnose mental health conditions?**

*I've heard anxiety has now surpassed depression as a key struggle for many workers.*

**A:** Some surveys report that up to 30 percent of employees believe anxiety interferes with their productivity to some degree. Although supervisors can't diagnose anxiety, they can play a supportive role and make it easier to get help and overcome resistance toward professional counseling. If an employee seems overwhelmed, inquire about it by saying something like, "Jim, you seem overwhelmed with all these new changes. Can I help in some way?" Also, never dismiss or discount the value of mental health services.

Employees should know where you stand on the importance of support services, including Continuum's. Never joke about counseling or use language like "the in-house shrink" or other terms that imply bias or stigma. **THE BEST ADVICE:** Don't think "anxiety." Think performance, conduct, attitude, quality of work, quantity of work, attendance and availability of the worker.

By using this list, you will discover far more employees with personal issues that are interfering with work, including anxiety. *Learn more at [yec.co/blog/helping-employees-deal-with-workplace-anxiety](https://yec.co/blog/helping-employees-deal-with-workplace-anxiety).*

