

FrontLine Leader

Employees — Your most valuable asset

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Q. Does an employee assistance program exist as a benefit for the employee, employer or both? A day-care center, credit union, on-site gym, and the like, are for employees, so is an EAP on par with these types of benefits?

A. EAPs, similar to the other services you mention, are good for business because they benefit the workforce by helping employees to be happier, healthier and more productive. The workforce is any organization's most valuable asset, so in many respects there is not distinction between an employee benefit and an employer benefit that helps employees with personal problems that may (or may not) affect their job performance. Continuum EAP offers its member companies and their leaders a wide range of services, in addition to those targeting the individual employee, such as training, consulting and wellness-related initiatives.

Q: Can you provide me with a checklist of points for meeting with an employee to discuss a performance issue, motivate them to correct it, and encourage them to use the EAP?

Start by reaching out to your HR dept. to see if your organization has recommended steps to follow in situations like this. Continuum EAP can always be used as a resource to consult with you on creating a plan of action, but the following these steps should be helpful:

- Focus on job performance.
- Be specific.
- Ask the employee if he/she understands the situation clearly.
- Ask the employee to paraphrase what you have said.
- Ask the employee for a commitment to change.
- Set a specific time to follow up and review.
- Clearly explain Continuum EAP's services, how it works, and discuss confidentiality.

This information is provided by Continuum EAP. If you would like more information on these or other topics, please don't hesitate to contact us.

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Q: What is the most difficult roadblock to supervisors using the EAP to manage troubled employees?

The most difficult roadblock supervisors face in using the EAP to manage troubled employees is making the switch from doing it all themselves, to using a systematic approach to assess, refer, treat and follow up with the employee. The old approach may even include ignoring problems until they cause a crisis. Although an employee may sign a release providing limited feedback about EAP participation, a supervisor is, by design, removed from involvement in the employee's personal concerns that may have spurred the referral. This shift can be difficult because the supervisor must give up the ability to control the helping process and its outcome. Turning these roles over to the EAP frees the supervisor from the burden of being an amateur diagnostician, motivational counselor and caseworker. But this freedom does not take away the supervisor's responsibility to discuss employee job performance concerns and to give feedback related to both positive improvements and ongoing concerns.

Q: I referred an employee to Continuum for attendance issues. He went, signed a release and the attendance problem has since been resolved. I was told I would receive regular feedback, but I only heard from the counselor once. Is that standard practice?

Firstly, if you have questions about a management referral you can always reach out to Continuum and inquire about the status. However, the important goal of having the attendance problem corrected means your use of the EAP was a success. If you are left wondering if the communication process is complete, don't wait. Instead, reach out and inquire about how much longer you should anticipate the feedback continuing. If a release is no longer valid, which could be the reason communication has stopped, then the EAP can let you know. Sometimes employees fail to follow through with EAP recommendations, and they may decide to cancel a release at the same time. This could happen regardless of whether problems like absenteeism are continuing.

GAIL SUTTER, CONTINUUM EAP

As Continuum EAP's executive director, Gail has dedicated her professional career to helping organizations and employees address issues that get in the way of them being their best.

Interested in learning more? Read this entire Continuum EAP blog feature at 4continuum.com — Search: "Gail Sutter blog."

