

THE CONTINUUM **EDGE**

INFORMATION FOR LEADERS



- **I've referred the same employee to the EAP twice in six months with no lasting improvement. At what point do repeated referrals become a substitute for the disciplinary action I should be taking?**

A: Your question raises an important issue that supervisors often need help understanding more fully. Continuum EAP is not a substitute for disciplinary action. A supervisor may recommend or make a formal referral to the EAP based on job-related concerns, but there does not need to be any delay in addressing conduct, attendance or performance issues. Managers sometimes accommodate

struggling employees by holding disciplinary action in abeyance while they participate in the EAP to get the help they need, but agreed-upon improvement goals and workplace expectations should solely drive the process and management's decisions about next steps. Supervisors remain responsible for monitoring work outcomes and making employment decisions based on observable results.

The EAP is never a roadblock, a "safe harbor," or an impediment to taking the actions needed to manage employees effectively. The EAP works alongside you to help the employee make the necessary changes. The Continuum coach will keep you informed of the employee's progress in coaching sessions and will also want your input regarding their workplace performance.



I made an EAP referral and the employee went. Now she's back and performing better. However, I heard she's telling co-workers that the EAP "fixed" her supervisor's unfair criticism of her and that the EAP said I was the one with the issues, not her.



A: If your employee's performance is satisfactory, the EAP was successful. She made the changes needed. What she tells others and what you heard secondhand are not necessarily concerning, and likely less accurate than what was originally said or overheard, so ignore it. Be assured, the EAP will not tell your employee that you are the problem and align itself with the worker in this way. Likewise, there is no need to comment or change the narrative through other employees. Doing so risks greater conflict, improper disclosures, and greater disruption. Your documentation of the original performance issues speaks for itself. If she is representing her own interpretation to peers, there's no need to involve yourself in managing these discussions. Just stay focused on the working relationship going forward.



Can I make an EAP referral for an employee whose only problem seems to be that he cannot get along with one specific co-worker?

A: How severe is the conflict, and how much is it disrupting the work unit? The answers to these questions should govern your response. In most cases, you can involve Continuum EAP, but first make a reasonable effort to address the issue directly by meeting with both employees and helping them work toward a practical solution. The EAP is not a substitute for core supervisory responsibilities. Helping employees resolve conflict is

part of a supervisor's role. That said, the EAP can be a valuable consultation resource, offering guidance on how to approach the situation effectively. Consulting with the EAP may help you better understand the scope of the problem, how it developed, contributing factors, and practical strategies for resolution. In some situations, using Continuum's conflict resolution services may be the most appropriate next step.



My employee grieved her termination, claiming she was never clearly warned. My documentation shows multiple meetings, but I now realize my language was a bit vague and noncommittal. What can I learn from this?

A: Most documentation that's deemed inadequate is missing specifics, objectivity or enough details regarding an incident to support a job action. The following six-item checklist covers the bases. *Keep this list handy!*

- Detail what happened, but just the facts. Include whatever is observable and measurable. Avoid intangibles like judgments, your feelings, speculations and intent.
- Document when and where the problem occurred. This includes dates, times, frequency, etc.
- Specify what policy, expectation or performance standard was affected. Here, you are connecting the issue to job requirements.
- Discuss the impact on productivity, morale, customers, safety, etc. You're showing the consequences of the behavior or performance issue on key business operations.
- Include past corrective actions taken, including verbal and/or written warnings, and provide better instructions and expectations.
- Also include the results of the past actions taken and document the employee's response, any improvements, how long they lasted, repeating concerns, and any return of problems.

Never vent, moralize, label the employee, diagnose, sound angry or show frustration in documentation. If you could use additional assistance or clarification, reach out to Continuum EAP for help.

