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# FrontLine Leader

*Employees — Your most valuable asset*

**My employee is a hothead, but most of us are used to it. When does anger become a performance issue?**



**A:** Consider whether your employee's anger management problem is a serious performance issue right now. Don't reinforce toxic behavior by adapting to it or encouraging others to do the same. Coping with inappropriate displays of anger enables the employee and may encourage his or her bad behavior to grow worse. You can bet that not all employees feel this behavior is benign or that it should not be addressed by management.

Anger is associated with violence in the workplace. So, the behavior is a risk issue. Could an explosive incident in the future lead to some tragedy? If the behavior creates an offensive and hostile work environment, which it does by virtue of the need to adapt to it, take steps to have the employee correct the behavior or address the underlining cause by referring him or her to the EAP.



**EAPs help resolve personal problems such as stress, depression, workplace conflicts and substance abuse. But what about the EAP's ability to teach critical skills, like listening? That's what my boss recently said I should consider improving.**

**A:** The history of employee assistance programs has caused them to naturally be associated with resolving personal problems, but EAPs can offer other types of help as well. Some EAP professionals have expertise in organizational development, while others are seasoned pros at addressing policy violations, imparting supervisory skills, conflict resolution and more.

Therefore, you should schedule a time to talk with a Continuum work performance improvement coach. To prepare for that meeting, zero in on the aspect of the skill you are trying to improve. For example, regarding listening skills, key aspects include active listening, summarizing, using empathy, following up, running meetings, listening to learn, listening to

evaluate and analyze, listening to understand feelings and emotions, etc. What about your listening skills are you trying to improve? Are you a good listener but experiencing problems that interfere with listening? Meeting with the EAP can help you explore these questions, too. It might lead you to a different approach or solution for improving listening skills.



**I have an employee who does not measure up to the performance standards of others on our team. Can you suggest ways to facilitate improvements that I may not have considered before I recommend the EAP? Note, that we are very stressed and under-resourced.**

**A:** Your team gives you an advantage for helping your employee improve performance. First review the workload. Some employees in resource-stressed organizations often fool themselves into thinking they can manage heavy workloads and take whatever is thrown their way without asking for help. Make sure the workload is balanced among team members. Are you rotating assignments among them? If not, cross-train, and then swap duties and gauge what happens. Some employees excel at one type of work more than another. This employee may surprise you by demonstrating a range of skills.

Don't pigeonhole the employee because you assume he or she has just one narrow area of expertise. Also, try pairing up teammates. Ask an outstanding team member to mentor a poor performer for a few weeks. This is a practical way to evaluate skill deficits and problems. Even though you are not ready to refer, still consult with Continuum EAP during this evaluation period. You'll gain insight and be better prepared to refer the employee to the EAP if that becomes necessary.



**Complaints and problems that employees seem to “drop on my desk” are the part of my job that I like least of all. Sometimes I snap at employees when they walk in and “deliver” me problems. How do I better manage this process for less stress and so I feel like the boss, not a support desk?**

**A:** Show supervisees how to implement a process for bringing problems to you that maximizes their opportunity to solve problems on their own and properly conveys only the problems needing your attention.

Here is a possible start to a dialog, *“When bringing concerns to me, please...”*

1. Share the impact the problem is having on your work situation or work unit.
2. Share with me what you've done or tried to do in order to solve the problem. If it did not work, let me know why.

3. Give me a recommendation.
4. If there are options, share them, but be specific so I do not try a solution that won't work.
5. Let me know which solution you think is the best one and why.
6. Offer ideas for how to go about implementing the solution.

This approach can help you and your team solve more problems faster, and help you avoid being so strict that employees don't come to you at all.