

# THE CONTINUUM **EDGE**

## INFORMATION FOR LEADERS



**Due to his argumentative demeanor, I recommended my employee visit the EAP. I'm tired of the bickering. He claimed the counselor agreed that I'm the problem. I'm ignoring this and still expect him to change. Is this the right approach?**

**A:** Remain focused on the goal of helping the employee improve his performance despite what was allegedly said by the EAP. Continuum EAP exists to help the employee return to a satisfactory level of performance. It won't referee who is right in the workplace disagreement. That said, maintain documentation of the employee's conduct, attendance and quality of work or whatever else applies, along with the employee's response to constructive confrontations. Follow your organization's performance improvement plan template, as needed. Of course, you have not made a formal referral to the EAP yet based on

performance issues. This would entail a release of information to improve communication and provide the employee, you and Continuum EAP with the same performance information. The result would be less confusion created by secondhand claims and keep the focus on expectations and outcomes.



**My employee told me she is unhappy with her career and wants to go back to school to become a teacher. Ultimately, I wish her the best in whatever she pursues, but I don't want to lose her. Can the EAP help in a situation like this? I wonder if something else is going on.**

**A:** It's often the case that a top performer who feels unfulfilled is struggling in ways that go deeper than career dissatisfaction. Recommend the EAP based on the employee's expressed concerns about dissatisfaction and life direction rather than assuming a hidden issue exists. Frame the referral as a supportive opportunity to explore goals, values and

next steps with a professional. Depression, anxiety, chronic stress and other health conditions can profoundly distort how a person views life, choices and the future. What feels like career regret may reflect something clinical that is influencing overall perception. This does not mean the feelings are not real or valid. It means they deserve a proper,

professional look before any major life decisions are made. *Try this approach:* "I've noticed something may be weighing on you lately, and I want you to know that Continuum EAP is a completely confidential resource that has helped many people work through situations like this." That is enough. Plant the seed with warmth and without pressure.



**I try to be a dedicated and approachable supervisor, and my door is always open to any employee. However, my manager says I am not an approachable person. She believes employees hesitate to come see me or share information. What does she mean? How do I use this feedback?**

**A:** You need to know more about your manager's observations. Keeping an open door is commendable, and it shows you want to be accessible. Your manager likely is referring to your approachability as an interpersonal experience. Employees can walk through your door, but how do they feel about it? What is their experience? Are employees reading your tone, your facial

expressions, your body language or your communication style as unwelcoming, impatient or even intimidating? When this happens, employees will shy away. Many risks then follow. For example, they'll bring you problems late instead of early, if at all. Your team may work around you rather than with you. Reach out to Continuum EAP; you will learn much from a discussion with the

EAP professional. The skills of approachability — empathy, active listening, emotional awareness and warmth in communication — can be learned or strengthened.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** Even the most dedicated leaders sometimes need to bridge the gap between how they see themselves and how others experience them.

**In a recent conversation with an employee, he casually mentioned that he seriously thought about ending his life several weeks ago over his spouse leaving. He denies any feelings like that now. I suggested the EAP, but he says he is past the crisis. Should I still consult with Continuum EAP?**



**A:** Yes. Your communication with the EAP is confidential, and its consultative role is essential here. You cannot diagnose an employee's mental health state, and what you heard — recent suicidal thinking — warrants professional guidance. Employees may minimize or deny ongoing risk, so a consultation helps determine actual risk and next steps the EAP might recommend. For many, suicidal ideation can be revisited as a means of dealing with a crisis. The EAP can coach you on how to encourage him to phone the program or at least make doing so more likely.

Consulting with Continuum EAP also demonstrates your understanding of duty-of-care obligations and how to respond if risk escalates. In addition, consulting protects the organization, reduces liability, and ensures a consistent, policy-aligned response. Finally, calling the EAP supports you as a supervisor, helps you worry less, and gives you a clear action plan instead of leaving you ruminating over what, if anything, you should do next to properly support your employee.