

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor



■ **I received an anonymous note stating that my employee was once again drinking after a referral to a treatment program. The employee is performing satisfactorily. Should I throw the note away as “unread”? Should anonymous notes be discarded?**

**Getting an anonymous note** is a frustrating experience because you are usually stuck with information you can't act on. The subjects of anonymous notes often deal with coworkers, management practices, and safety issues. These secretly passed messages often are attempts to manipulate the supervisor. Although taking formal action with anonymous notes is ill advised, they are not necessarily useless. If you're concerned about the contents of an anonymous note, then processing it with your advisors is a smart move. You can also discuss its contents with the EAP. There are no absolute answers on what to do with anonymous notes. They are simply a reality of managing employees in the workplace. They should be handled on a case-by-case basis and scrutinized as to their underlying purpose.

■ **Preserving “top talent” in our organization is very important. Management expects supervisors to take the lead in keeping our best and brightest happy and productive. What are the fundamentals of doing this, and how can the EAP help?**

**Meeting the needs** of talented employees is a popular management topic of study. Talented employees have a need to be in a work environment that supports their continued growth. Beyond pay, much of this support boils down to frequent feedback, good communication, clear expectations, and opportunities for training and skill development. There is nothing new about these desires, but talented employees today have higher expectations for getting this support faster than in decades past. With no guarantee of long-term employment or a hefty retirement, talented employees (and most employees in general) feel more pressure to ascend rapidly in their career. Sometimes talented employees are unhappy because of other issues and problems that do not come to management's attention. This is where EAPs can help. Well used EAPs spot workforce trends and learn about concerns not brought to management's attention. This makes employee assistance professionals particularly valuable as internal consultants in advising management on the broader needs (not personal issues) of the workforce, as well as catalysts for encouraging employee clients to bring their important concerns to management so they can be addressed more quickly.

■ **Can I refer my employee to the EAP for being argumentative? No matter**

**An argument** is not necessarily a bad thing, but the frequency of these interactions interferes with productivity and the quality relationship you need with your employee. A larger problem exists, therefore, and an EAP

**what my suggestion, some nuance, problem, issue, objection, reason to hesitate, or correction is raised by this employee. What causes this behavior? Is it simply a bad habit?**

referral is appropriate, particularly if you have requested that this behavior stop. Even if your employee is accurately spotting problems and shortcomings in your every request, this does not preclude the need for some intervention. There is a way to communicate more effectively that will enhance your relationship and productivity and not position every request as a battleground. Many explanations could exist for this behavior. It could be a symptom of other conflicts or something more psychological that compels your employee to demonstrate obsessive control and responsibility for your requests or decisions. Keep notes on the next few interchanges and share them with the EAP at the time you make the referral.

**I left my employees alone to participate in an educational project. Later, I heard about improper behaviors and goofing off that occurred. Supervisors can't be room monitors or babysitters. Why do grown employees act this way? Can the EAP help?**

**There's an old** saying, "Are you growing up or just growing old?" The lack of professional conduct that you describe appears to be immaturity, but an even better word is "dependent." Employees with immature behaviors are more dependent on authority or their peers to help them conform to the expectations of the larger group or situation. Even bright and talented employees can be immature. With these substitute "parents," they are able to engage in social controls. Immature employees may be easily influenced by peers to participate in inappropriate behaviors. Hence, when you leave the room, the immaturity shows itself. Immaturity is frustrating for responsible adults to witness, especially those adults who have spent their professional lives pursuing maturity rather than avoiding it. You can't know if employees you hire won't be prone to behave immaturely. The EAP can help, but don't shy away from other administrative or disciplinary measures provided or approved by your organization.

**Most employees are stressed, but some are stressed much more—distressed employees. I would like to know what they might sound like or look like so I could recommend the EAP. Can a seriously *distressed* employee still perform satisfactorily?**

**Distressed employees** experience great pain, anxiety, or sorrow, and they may be faced with acute physical or mental suffering. It is possible that distressed employees could mask their symptoms and perform satisfactorily, yet still be at risk for greater mental or physical problems. Distressed employees spend about \$1,700 more on healthcare per year than other employees spend, have more ER visits, and use more home health care services.<sup>1</sup> It is not possible or advisable to give supervisors a list of signs and symptoms to help them diagnose distress, but as general rule, encourage your employees to take advantage of the EAP when you witness talk of hopelessness and worthlessness, the inability to be cheerful or carry a smile, or always appearing tired and worn out. In short, you can usually see evidence of an employee's pain. Encourage these employees to get help. Source [tiny.cc/work-distress](http://tiny.cc/work-distress)

## NOTES