

# THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

January 2007

*Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource--Employees*

***Q. In supervisor training, we are strongly warned not to ask employees personal questions or to discuss employees' personal problems. I find this a difficult task because it makes me appear cold. Can you discuss this a little more?***

**A.** Discussing an employee's personal problems usually results in a temporary cessation of job performance problems that may be caused by the employee's personal issues. After such discussions, there is often mutual satisfaction between the supervisor and the employee. The employee feels gratified and re-energized to exercise greater control of his or her personal problem and its symptoms, and the supervisor feels he or she successfully counseled the employee to change his or her behavior. However, these discussions may be hazardous because they protract the performance problems, may lead to crisis, and may serve to perpetuate underlying chronic disease. Often these discussions are motivated by the supervisor's natural desire to avoid disciplining an employee or participating in constructive confrontation. Consider consulting with the EAP to better understand your supervisory role and effective integration of the EAP in supervision.

***Q. An employee seems unusually tired lately. She says she has trouble sleeping. Can an EAP referral help her, or are sleeping problems more of a medical issue? I could simply recommend she speak with her doctor. There's nothing wrong with that, right?***

**A.** Your employee says she is not sleeping, but to say it is a "sleeping problem" with a medical solution is a diagnostic conclusion better left to the EAP, following an interview with your employee. Sleeping problems could be caused by many things—even drug or alcohol use. Telling someone to see a doctor for a healthcare problem sounds like a no-brainer. However, in the workplace you must consider other factors and your role. This makes the EAP your best bet. From this gateway, the employee can access all options. For a simple case of insomnia, the EAP might probe to determine the cause, and suggest practical steps that promote deep sleep. For more complex sleep problems—from anxiety disorders to nagging physical pain to disrupted circadian rhythm patterns—the EAP can provide a referral to the appropriate health expert. The EAP will also distinguish between physiological and psychological factors that disturb sleep.

***Q. I'm impressed by the improvement in a worker's personality since he started going to the EAP. His peers marvel at how he's changed, too. I'd like to tell them it's due to the EAP. Should I ask for his permission to disclose that?***

**A.** No. There is no need for you to seek testimonials to convince people to use the EAP. If your worker is pleased with his progress, he may choose to tell others about his positive EAP experience. Even if he doesn't, there are better ways to introduce your staff to the benefits of the EAP, than by advertising the success stories of satisfied

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employees. The very act of asking for his permission to disclose his EAP involvement can create tension, in light of the need for confidentiality. He may readily agree to your request. However, others who are considering contacting the EAP may hesitate, if they worry that you will later expect them to publicly share their experience. Therefore, your well-intentioned action can have the unintended consequence of dissuading people who need the EAP from using it. Moreover, that can exacerbate problems in your department as employees' serious issues go untreated.

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**Q.** *I want employees to see the EAP as an ongoing resource even if they don't have serious problems. What's the best way to pitch it to them as a sounding board that everyone can use?*

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**A.** At every opportunity, present the EAP as a valuable benefit for all employees. Emphasize the positive role it plays in helping people enhance their lives—from gaining a better work-life balance, to improving personal efficiency, to assisting with career advancement. When employees view the EAP as a source of information, insight, and support, they will use it even if they never need to fight battles that threaten their well-being. Given the growing interest in health and wellness, you can present the EAP as a partner in helping people reduce stress and make smart personal care choices. To persuade employees to seek out the EAP, ask questions that guide their decision-making such as, “Do you think you’d find it beneficial to get input from a caring, knowledgeable source?” That’s better than making “should” statements such as, “I think you should use the EAP.”

*Information contained in **The Frontline Supervisor** is for general information purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or HR management concern. For specific guidance call AWP.*

### ***AWP Training Opportunities***

AWP is a proven entity known for its training and curriculum development. AWP trainers are among the best training professionals in the business. We use PowerPoint and participant manuals/handouts supported by instructor manuals for each training topic. To provide training is a great way to promote the EAP to employees. For scheduling, contact your local HR coordinator or AWP account manager.

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### ***Featured Training***



#### ***Program Orientation for Supervisors***

Supervisory personnel play an integral role in the employee assistance program. They have close routine contact with employees and thus are in an excellent position to monitor individual behavior and job performance. Program orientation for supervisors is designed to prepare management in making supervisory referrals to the employee assistance program. When performance problems persist over time, management needs a process that results in the referral of the troubled employee to the proper resource for help—the EAP. AWP’s Five-Step Formula offers management an effective way of helping someone without getting involved in the details of their life or attempting to be a counselor to them. Each of the five steps is defined with real-life examples and easy-to-use procedures sure to empower any supervisor needing to make a referral to the EAP. **Testimonial:** *“Excellent discussion on employee issues.”*



***(AWP) offers supervisors confidential, unlimited consultation with experienced EAP professionals.***

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