

FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



My employees want to conduct an intervention with their coworker who is a meth addict. I support the idea, but they want to do it at work when the employee arrives. I declined to participate because I am not a peer, but I am also feeling a little nervous about this happening at work



None of my employees has indicated that they are having financial problems. Still, I know some of them must struggle with finances. How are money problems among employees different than other personal problems?

Answers



Workplace activities that you endorse, especially with regard to personnel matters, should be related to your organization's mission and functions; thus, there are many potential problems, legal and otherwise, associated with having an intervention at work conducted by employees. Despite perceived urgency and the well-meaning intent of coworkers, you should recommend they meet with the EAP and consider a better plan or approach. Do not put yourself in the position of having approved this activity. Interventions work, and they have received enormous attention in the media by way of books, fee-based services, and even TV shows. However, managers should not approve them as acceptable workplace activities for employees suspected of substance abuse problems, despite what they might see in the movies.



Typically, money is equated with power and status. Thus, for a person with financial problems, particularly overwhelming credit card debt, a terrible feeling of dread can drive a belief in personal failure. This can easily transfer into fear that one's job or reputation at work would be seriously affected if the extent of one's financial problems were known. Remarkably, research reported by the Personal Finance Employee Education Foundation shows that overall stress of the average employee could be reduced by 50% simply by resolving issues associated with financial stress. When you talk about the EAP to your employees, mention financial help. You may not see much of a reaction, but ears will perk up. Specifically, mention the EAP's ability to identify financial help resources.

Source: www.personalfinancefoundation.org.

Frontline Supervisor

Questions



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



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?



Our workforce includes many licensed mental health professionals, almost all of whom have significant experience in private practice, clinical settings, and delivering psychotherapy services. Doesn't this mean that there is little need for an EAP?

Answers



Differences of opinion are not necessarily a bad thing, but the frequency and intensity of these interactions interfere with productivity and the quality relationship you need with your employee. A larger problem exists, therefore, and an EAP 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 doesn't preclude the need for some intervention. There's 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 deep-rooted 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.



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're not necessarily useless. If you're concerned about the contents of an anonymous note, then processing it with your manager 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 and should be handled on a case-by-case basis and scrutinized as to their underlying purpose.



Mental health professionals do not experience fewer personal problems than the rest of the general population, so they can benefit from the direct services that EAPs offer. Likewise, mental health professionals aren't categorically inclined to engage earlier and more effectively in successful self-treatment making EAPs redundant. The nature of many psychological and personal problems in general is their initial subtle beginnings, insidious nature, and tendency to grow worse. Along with a chronic path, the use of defense mechanisms such as denial adds to treatment delays. The symptoms of problems getting worse often include job performance issues and related problems, so arguably an EAP is just as important in your work setting as any other. Remember, EAPs don't provide just assessments and referral functions: they also participate in a broad range of activities to help work organizations enhance workforce productivity.