

September 2007

## The FrontLine Supervisor

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

**Resource Management Services, Inc. 1-800-333-2095  
Your EAP Provider**

Q. My employee was hospitalized after causing an accident while driving drunk. I have learned from his family members that his doctor has not confronted him about his drinking problem or about alcoholism. Should I mention it to his doctor?

A. Speaking with your employee's doctor about your diagnosis of his drinking practices could lead to a serious complaint against you. In other words, he has the right to be left alone and be treated by his doctor without your interference. That said, it would be a good thing if doctors played a greater role in referring patients to alcoholism treatment. Many hospitals and physician associations are pushing for greater physician involvement in substance abuse intervention in medical settings, so things are changing for the better. Unfortunately, doctors in a hospital may see 20 to 30 patients in a given day and have limited time for each patient. This is a roadblock to efficiency in confronting patients—as is a patient's tendency to deny having a problem. Some doctors don't have a good command of resources and treatment options, and others may be hesitant to follow up with difficult behavioral issues not directly associated with the primary injury or disease, despite the fact that these issues contribute to the problem.

Q. I do not like to micromanage my employees, but at least two of them won't finish their work in a timely manner unless I am directly involved in what they do. I could refer them to the EAP, but frankly I think things will get worse before they get better. So now what?

A. Rather than refer your employees to the EAP now, consider visiting the EAP yourself. The employee assistance professional can help you find a way to make the changes you seek and can coach you in how to detach from these employees. Although supervisors frequently get the blame for micromanaging, some employees invite this type of relationship because they prefer it. Micromanaging forces employees to become dependent on the supervisor. In turn, the supervisor feels secure that the work is getting done the way he or she would do it. Many employees dislike being micromanaged, of course, and it is a key complaint identified in surveys and research on employee morale. Still, not all employees hate being micromanaged. Some prefer assurance that the supervisor is getting what he or she wants over having to be independent and in control of their work. These employees may feel anxious when they are not closely supervised, and they may avoid promotional opportunities that require them to be independent.

Q. I have an employee who takes notes on my mistakes and records incidents when I get angry in the office. My relationship with her is a game that includes her resistance to or refusal of my requests. I am ready to let her go. She only laughed when I referred her to the EAP. Now what?

A. Make an appointment to speak with the employee assistance professional. When supervisors reach the point of almost complete dysfunction in a relationship with a subordinate, anger, resentment, fear, and distrust can rule. This is a recipe for disaster. A tinderbox relationship with your employee puts you and your company at risk for severe problems, including violence, legal challenges or law suits, theft, injuries and benefits abuse, and even time theft (not working while being paid). Acting to suddenly discipline your employee may precipitate a larger crisis after such a long bout of unresolved conflict. So before going the discipline route, work with the EAP to see if improving the relationship is worth a try.

Q. Evaluators or supervisors are often advised not to be their employees' friends. Does this mean we can't go to dinner, to a baseball game, or to holiday parties at one another's homes?

A. Avoiding close friendships with those you supervise refers to the conflict of interests that will naturally arise when loyalties are divided between two opposing positions. Your friend requires loyalty, and so does your employer. So when your employer's needs conflict with those of your employee, who are you to support? Avoiding friendship does not necessarily mean that you cannot socialize, but you should consider the circumstances of your work culture and the implications of not conforming to the boundaries that naturally exist between you and your subordinates (e.g., military officers do not socialize with enlisted personnel). Some even argue that employers have a right to demand loyalty or fidelity to their organizations, since they are paying their supervisors for it. Regardless, maintaining boundaries helps preserve both relationships—the one with your employer and the one with your employee.

Q. I have never had an employee who needed a supervisor referral to the EAP, but I am sure many of them have personal issues in their lives and could benefit from the program. When is a good time to remind people to use the program if they need it?

A. A busy, functional office can easily forget that an EAP is available. There is one great time and place to mention the EAP to every employee individually and on a regular basis, simply to remind them that the program exists: at the annual performance evaluation or review. Make it a habit to mention the EAP to every employee as a reminder—even if an employee is a top performer with outstanding marks. Some employees just don't think about the EAP, and your reminder may prompt them after leaving your office to make the call about a nagging personal problem. Also remind employees about the confidential nature of the EAP, and remember to note that it is free of charge.