

Frontline Supervisor



Resource Management Services 800-333-2095

■ **One of our employees finally got caught stealing money to support a gambling habit. He says he is sorry and fears losing his job, and that is probably going to happen. My question is this, “Is he sorry, or just sorry he got caught?”**

Your employee can easily be both sorry he got caught and remorseful for the behavior that perpetrated a crime causing harm to others. Compulsive behaviors are confusing to those who have never experienced one like drug addiction, alcoholism, gambling, eating disorders, etc. These addictions almost always include numerous, frustrating attempts by the addict to stop and control the behavior. These ultimately fail. Getting caught fulfills this goal of stopping in the short term, but it won't last without treatment that promotes cessation of gambling, a recovery program to maintain it, and avoidance of triggers that incite relapse. The current crisis creates amenability to change afforded by threat of job loss, but if the company decides to accommodate the employee as an ill worker, it must include rigorous long-term follow-up using the support of the EAP and its recommendations.

■ **Can I learn the details of an employee's personal problems if a release is signed by the employee that allows me to have this information?**

An EAP would not have a release with the provisions you mention. Although an employee could sign such a release, it would be discouraged and considered inconsistent with EAP policy and purpose. It could undermine support for the program in general, distract from your role in focusing only on performance, complicate your relationship with the employee, and even jeopardize the program's being perceived as offering safe and ensured confidentiality, which is its most precious asset. Nothing prohibits an employee from sharing information voluntarily with others, including supervisors, of course.

■ **Can supervisors use the EAP to role-play different situations in confronting and correcting employee performance, even if not making a supervisor referral? What's the value in doing it, especially if the supervisor has decades of experience and has “seen it all”?**

A key provision of the EAP core technology that defines the scope of EAP functions and practice is management consultation regarding productivity issues and troubled employees. In fact, this element is listed as #1 before employee assessment and referral functions. A strong relationship with managers being engaged with EAPs is essential to any program maximizing its value to the work organization. Role-play consultation is therefore an opportunity EAPs offer supervisors. It can help reduce manager stress when conducting corrective interviews, encourage supervisors' assertiveness with their subordinates, increase the likelihood of earlier EAP referrals, help managers encounter difficult employees more successfully, and in a global sense, reduce risk to the organization.

■ **Everyone's heard the adage that employees don't leave companies, they leave bad bosses. Isn't this just a management training cry to impress supervisors?**

More than 57% of workers in a recent survey conducted by Developmental Dimensions International quit a job because of a "bad boss." Of those who stayed, a third gave quitting serious consideration. Here's the bottom line, according to analysis of data and experiences of managers: How managers handle their emotions and how they make other people feel are the strongest drivers of employee retention. More specifically, for many managers, their promotion or selection to lead others is often unexpected, and a third of managers don't like being the boss. With a growing millennial work population who place a high value on work-life balance, making a difference, and positive workplaces, the belief that these young professionals will respond even more negatively to a bad boss is a trend that is expected to continue. So, what makes a bad boss? According to the research, it's bosses who are overwhelmed, unfair, poor listeners, impersonal or disorganized, don't solicit feedback, and withhold responsibility from line workers. They can help supervisors overcome most, if not all of these limitations.

■ **A common complaint of management advisers is that supervisor documentation is not descriptive, factual, or measurable enough, or it is filled with emotional and subjective language. What other complaints or problems often interfere with effective supervisor documentation?**

Another issue interfering with documentation's usefulness is its being created too late or too long after problems are first noticed. It's rare for performance to be an even downward line of deterioration. Rather, deterioration may waver between problematic performance and surprising levels of high achievement despite the downward trend. This choppiness is often graded by supervisors on the high side, creating delays in administrative or corrective actions. This is coupled with employees bringing attention to their achievements or requesting recognition for satisfactory performance. Both tend to drive the curve up as supervisors delay and give troubled employees the benefit of the doubt. Another observation, particularly among alcoholic or drug-addicted employees, is high levels of performance in earlier years of addiction, when hard-driving work ethic and social skills produce a strong following of admirers, most of whom will enable the addict as time goes by. When substance use finally does affect performance negatively, denial or wait-and-see approaches ensue. Supervisors that engage the EAP early-on in their attempts to manage troubled workers risk fewer problems associated with delay and other forms of enabling.

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