



# The Frontline Supervisor

April 2021

**Q. Our management team had a private meeting to discuss an employee's absenteeism problem. The EAP phoned during the meeting, saying (with permission) that the employee just became a client. We are taking a wait-and-see**

A. Although it may not look this way, your employee assistance program worked effectively in this situation. Here is why: When the organization demonstrated it was firm about taking action, this employee accessed the EAP, having recognized your obvious resolve. Employees with difficult personal problems characterized by denial and the inability to control symptoms will almost never enter counseling or treatment until they experience duress. Your meeting to discuss this situation triggered the constructive behavior. The "reality check" motivated the worker to seek professional counseling immediately. The motivating factor is fear of job loss. Should you be skeptical or feel manipulated? Is this sincere? No one can say yet. However, consistent with many employees in the same situation who suddenly head for counseling or treatment, this worker probably feels urgency and is frightened, and therefore is sincere and motivated, at least for now. Beyond effective treatment, the employee remaining motivated and involved in counseling or treatment will be greatly influenced by well-organized, follow-up communication involving the EAP, you, and the employee.

**Q. I understand that presenteeism is the practice of employees coming to work while sick or adversely affected by emotional distress. What about employees who work remotely? What can supervisors do to help them, and do they have the same issues?**

A. When applied to remote workers, presenteeism is sometimes referred to as "e-presenteeism." With any type of presenteeism, employees are "there without really being there." They are working while sick or emotionally stressed or with distracting concerns that diminish their ability to be fully effective. E-presenteeism is a more recent concern among human resource professionals; it appeared in the literature coinciding with the coronavirus pandemic. Most people have been affected by the pandemic. Employees experiencing anxiety, burnout, isolation, and loneliness may wander into their home office, log long hours, do so sick or not, and not perform to their fullest capacity. One survey found 80% of human resource managers fear a subculture of this low-level productivity could slowly dominate the remote worker environment. Ultimately, loss of workers is the risk if employees burn out and quit. Awareness of e-presenteeism is important. As a supervisor, be a good listener, delegate assignments with awareness, and do not hesitate to recommend the EAP for life stressors employees disclose. Learn more at [www.theundercoverrecruiter.com/epresenteeism-burnout/](http://www.theundercoverrecruiter.com/epresenteeism-burnout/).

**Q. No supervisor wants to shortchange an employee who divulges a serious personal problem by not offering some advice. I think most supervisors are good listeners and problem solvers; otherwise, we would not be leading others. Still, how can we show support but still refer [an employee] to the EAP?**

A. To show your support, be available, interested, and empathic when an employee shares something personal. Doing this much will help prepare your employee to take the next step toward accepting an EAP referral. To be empathic, acknowledge the stress or anxiety shared by the employee. Tell the employee you are glad he or she felt comfortable enough to share the information with you. Do not rush to get the employee off to the EAP, but instead share how offering your own tips and advice would deprive the employee of a more complete answer and assessment provided by the EAP. Keep a supply of EAP business cards, or least a phone number, handy. Invite the employee, based on the urgency of any emergent issues, to phone from your office to make the appointment. Use this approach for problems associated with health and safety risks such as depression, domestic violence, or other safety-related concerns (if it is not an emergency.)

**Q. I need to be more self-confident. I don't know if it is a learned trait or a natural part of one's temperament, but can the EAP help? Also, how does acting and feeling confident influence the work unit?**

A. Confident supervisors have more resilience when the going gets tough. Confidence is also an attractive feature of a leader because it in turn inspires employee confidence as it is modeled by subordinates. Confident supervisors who communicate and are empathic are less likely to have high turnover in their work units. Ask the EAP how it can coach you or identify resources to speed you toward your goal of being more confident. The following are habits of confident supervisors: 1) viewing yourself as confident; 2) fending off self-doubt; 3) making decisions with higher risk-reward outcomes; 4) visualizing goals and behaving as though success is certain; and 5) viewing setbacks as opportunities for correction and greater achievement.

**Q. I recommended my employee visit the EAP to resolve problems with a roommate whose partying and disruptive behavior are causing the worker to come in late nearly every day. This was not a formal referral, but how long should I wait to see changes in the [employee's] attendance?**

A. Expect changes the next day. You made a suggestion to visit the EAP as a normal part of the corrective interview with this employee. It is his or her job to make the change; it is not the EAP's job to fix the employee so you get the results you need at some point in the future. Expect results immediately unless some accommodation officially required by a counseling or health care provider is requested and considered in consultation with your HR or management adviser. Many supervisors have the mistaken belief that their hands are tied for an uncertain time period after a referral to the EAP or that they must accept unsatisfactory performance until the employee can "get up to speed" or until counseling can have its desired effect. A troubled employee may attempt to convince you to accept this sort of faulty thinking. If change is not forthcoming, make a formal referral.