

THE

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SUPERVISOR

Coastline EAP

401-732-9444 • 800-445-1195 • 800-833-0453 • www.coastlineeap.com

Check out our new webinars on Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response and Suicide Prevention at www.coastlineeap.com.

I have an employee who gets into fights with customers. He's had run-ins with coworkers, DUIs, and scrapes with the law. He's a classic hothead. I want to fire him, but I fear violent retaliation. Can the EAP help or tell me what to do?

A management referral to the EAP is appropriate based on the severe conduct problems. Postponing dismissal is a decision for you and your organization's leadership, including HR. If you feel for your safety, it is urgent to inform your HR and manager. Some organization will use a last chance agreement, specifying what behavior needs to change immediately and include an EAP referral to help the employee by assessing what personal issues exist and link the employee with treatment accordingly. Do share any warning or last chance agreement with the EAP so that everyone is aware of the behaviors that have been addressed. The EAP will then request a release to provide follow-up to you. Note that it is best to refer employees to an EAP at the earliest sign of conduct. This increases the chance that the employee can correct the problem behaviors that will most likely increase without intervention.

My employee's work is good, and frankly, he is my best mechanic. There is nothing to document regarding performance, but he has a bad attitude with his lack of humor, gruff style, isolation, and cynicism; he does not mesh well with us. Can the EAP help?

Yes, the EAP can help. You do have job performance issues that you can document and upon which you can base a referral. It's attitude at work. Attitude can be described in a way that makes it measurable. Your HR and EAP can consult with you on useful language for documentation which may be needed in the future to support management decisions. The task is to describe the manner in which your employee conducts himself, and most important, the impact on others. This is key to effective documentation—describing the harm or cost to the organization in lost productivity, lower morale, conflict, lost team cohesion, etc.

I recently read that anxiety is common among workers of all ages, especially younger workers. What performance or workplace symptoms would indicate an employee suffers with an anxiety disorder?

Looking for mental health symptoms is not an efficient way of identifying troubled employees. Focusing on performance standards you want improved and then considering a referral to the EAP when they do not get better is the way to go. Are you puzzled by an employee who turned down a promotion for the third time? What about an employee who needs constant affirmation of their work? These employees may be exhibiting symptoms of two quite different forms of anxiety—or they may not be symptoms of anxiety at all. There is a wide spectrum of anxiety disorders. Everyone experiences some anxiety from time to time, but many with severe forms of anxiety may perform in a superior fashion.

We are pushing this year to hire more veterans. It's the right thing to do, and we believe it will be a win-win. What are some of the key issues we should keep in mind after we begin hiring?

Be proactive and communicate effectively with veterans. Surveys of vets who are employed in the civilian workforce find that most think their unique skills—ones that would directly help the employer—aren't fully or effectively used. So, when supervising vets, dialogue with them about their ideas, skills, and potential. Put them to the test. Vets are trained in taking or giving directions and then performing to their maximum ability. They are not necessarily used to playing the devil's advocate, questioning authority, brainstorming, or discussing interpersonal team issues. These participatory workplace behaviors of the modern era may require more prompting to pull vets into them. If you are hiring vets, consider the special report released last year: "Mission Critical: Unlocking the Value of Veterans in the Workforce." Find it at online bookstores. Don't forget to make the EAP available and have its message communicated to family members and spouses.

After making a formal supervisor referral to the EAP, why is further communication about participation and cooperation necessary from the EAP? My concern is change or improved job performance. I either see it or I don't.

Communicating with the supervisor following a formal referral for performance problems represents best practice for EAPs in managing troubled workers. It recognizes that employees are motivated, in part, to follow through because of concern over their job security. Eliminating this dynamic reduces accountability and invites a loss of urgency on the part of the EAP client. An EAP does not equate to a counseling service. It is a programmatic approach to managing troubled workers whose performance issues may be caused by personal problems. An EAP, on the other hand, exists because of its primary business purpose, which is helping the workforce remain happy, healthy, and productive. Part of this is linking self-referred employees to resources and the other is motivating the most difficult and troubled worker to follow through on a change process.

