

*SUPERVISORS'  
GUIDE TO THE*

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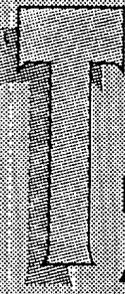
**EMPLOYEE  
ASSISTANCE  
PROGRAM**

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**EAP**



# THE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

*A SUPERVISOR'S GUIDE*

*TO . . .*

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MANAGING EMPLOYEES:  
Troubled or otherwise

THE EAP: Where it is,  
and what it does

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OUTCOME: How and when  
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## **M**ANAGING PEOPLE: TROUBLED AND OTHERWISE

People are our most important asset. The phrase has become a cliché, but only because its truth ensures its frequent — perhaps too frequent — repetition. Managing people is often satisfying, but rarely simple. Keeping your employees informed, motivated, focused and productive is a constant challenge. In good circumstances the challenge can be exciting and exhilarating. In bad circumstances, it can seem like an insurmountable task.

Few circumstances can be as difficult as those created by a troubled employee. When an employee's personal problems make it difficult for him or her to function productively, the entire Office is affected including his or her co-workers and the unit's mission. And you, charged with keeping up morale and productivity while managing wisely and well, bear a disproportionate share of the load.

It's a tough situation. That's why the Agency created an Employee Assistance Program located in the Office of Medical Services. The EAP provides professional help to employees and to the supervisors who refer them to EAP because of performance problems. This guide tells you what help is available, how and when to use EAP, and what you can expect from it. Identifying the problem and making the decision to use an Agency resource is up to you. Making the resource work well for you and your employees is our concern.

## **T**HE EAP: WHAT IT DOES AND WHERE IT IS

Even the best employees occasionally have problems or go through a slump when their work just isn't up to its usual standard.

If the situation persists, your responsibility as a supervisor is to call attention to it. Your employee's responsibility is to remedy it. When the problems are minor, that's usually all that's required to right the situation.

But there are a variety of serious personal problems that make it difficult for a worried and preoccupied employee to focus enough to perform well. These problems include family disruptions, emotional problems, financial worries, and substance abuse. Helping employees with those problems is why EAP was created.

EAP's staff of clinical social workers, psychologists, substance abuse counselors, and financial counselors provides professional assistance to both supervisors and employees. The EAP staff helps supervisors by assessing whether the employee's performance deficiencies are rooted in personal difficulties, and the staff helps employees with those problems to deal with them.

EAP services are available to employees who often self-refer to the program, to family members, and to supervisors who refer employees to EAP. Management referrals to EAP by supervisors are based on problematic performance which has been previously identified to the employee but which has remained unacceptable. There's another way, short of making a referral, that supervisors can use EAP. By making your employees aware of the program's existence and encouraging them to self-refer for personal, job, and/or family problems, you may prevent the development of a full-scale problem for them...and for you.

The critical question in making a management referral is *when* to do it. An EAP referral is *not* a first step in dealing with performance problems. It's only *after* the normal supervisory counseling process hasn't worked that you should consider a referral to EAP. When the performance issues that you've discussed with the employee haven't

improved at all, or as is more often the case, when the performance has improved for a short time and then reverted back to an unacceptable level, it's time to refer. EAP was designed to handle a very specific category of performance problems: those that persist or recur intermittently and which are not remedied by normal supervisory counselling sessions.

## REFERRAL: WHAT TO DO AND WHEN TO DO IT

When performance problems become the rule rather than the exception, a referral to EAP can provide the professional help you need to make a critical distinction: either to rule out personal problems as the explanation for performance difficulties, or to get a troubled employee the help he or she needs. The course of action outlined below should help you reach that point. While this plan works best in most cases, there will always be situations where the need for immediate help makes preparation impossible. EAP is available to help in any circumstance.

### DOCUMENT

Keep a private record of the performance problems, including dates, specifics of each deficiency, and your directions to the employee about needed improvement.

### DISCUSS

Documented deficiencies must be discussed with the employee. To emphasize the seriousness of the issue as well as the planned nature of the intervention and its followup, make an appointment with the employee. Rather than an impromptu discussion of "impressions" or "feelings" that the employee's work is somehow "slipping," your planned meeting should be a factual description of specific performance issues based on the documentation you have gathered. The absence of specific and factual data is unfair to the employee and may be self-damaging.

# EAP

## **PLAN**

You must be as specific about the solution as you are about the problem. What must the employee do to bring his/her performance up to an acceptable level and by when must he/she have demonstrated the improvement? Be prepared to discuss specifics of performance and select a deadline for the improvement to be apparent. Without concrete standards and a timetable, the employee is left without recourse. Conclude your interview by setting an appointment for the next discussion in which you'll assess progress. The employee must know that just as the initial discussion was a planned event, so is the followup.

## **DECIDE**

Before your scheduled follow-up, decide if you're satisfied with the improvement. If you are, congratulations! If you're not, this is the time to consult with EAP. The contact should take place prior to your next scheduled appointment with the employee. You can alert EAP that you'll be making a referral, and provide some specifics of the case. It's important that EAP is aware of an impending referral to ensure that the referring supervisor gets the necessary feedback. The initial conversation is also a good opportunity to get some case-specific advice about making the actual referral...which is the next step.

## **REFER**

Your concern about the employee is based on performance issues. It is in the best interest of everyone concerned — the employee, the Agency and yourself — that you remain clear on your role in the process: You're a supervisor. Be one. Your responsibility is not to diagnose the employee's problem or to solve it. Stay focused on performance deficiencies both as the cause for the EAP referral and as the indicator you'll continue watching. Be clear with the employee that the "problem" for which he/she is being referred to EAP is his/her performance. Let the employee know that EAP is expecting him/her, and that he/she will be asked to sign a consent form that will allow the EAP counselor to provide you with very general feedback about his/her willingness to work with EAP. The single best guideline to follow throughout the process is:

Be a good supervisor. Stay focused on your professional responsibilities. EAP will focus on its role.

## **EXPLAIN EMPLOYEE OPTIONS**

Referrals to EAP are NOT adverse actions. Employees should know that. They should also understand that the decision to consult with EAP is their's and they may choose not to do so. What if an employee says no? The supervisor may decide to give the employee a specific amount of time to reconsider the referral, or may choose to initiate an adverse action. The initial conversation with EAP may have provided another alternative specific to the case. Doing nothing is always an option, but at this juncture it would signal your approval of a continued performance level that you've already labeled as unacceptable.

## **UNDERSTAND YOUR OPTIONS**

Referring an employee to the EAP is NOT your last decision about the employee. A referral does not preclude your taking alternative action later on, including initiating an adverse action if the referral is not solving your concerns about performance. While an EAP referral doesn't foreclose future action, it does mean that you're doing what you can to help solve the problem and following a logical course of administrative action by selecting the least serious option first.

## **MONITOR**

When you've kept your focus consistently where it belongs — on the employee's performance — you'll be able to complete the loop by continuing to monitor the performance. Daily contact and observation will help you to assess the employee's progress, and to provide relevant feedback to the EAP counselor. If the performance continues to improve with time, the process has worked. If it doesn't, you've ~~done~~ your best to help, have used the right Agency resources and are free to pursue other actions.



## C OOPERATION: WHAT IF THE EMPLOYEE REFUSES

It's up to the employee to follow-up on your referral to EAP. You should emphasize the employee's right to make that decision when you first make the referral. The employee should also understand that his/her refusal means that you will pursue alternate administrative actions, including adverse actions. If an employee refuses an EAP referral and you are interested in alternative actions, that is the right time to contact the Office of Personnel's [REDACTED]

Personal information such as that regarding marital or family issues, will not be discussed with the supervisor without the employee's written consent. However, if the employee acts on the management referral, but refuses to give the EAP counselor such written consent, the EAP counselor will be able to release work-related information (e.g., prognosis for performance improvement) to the supervisor. Continued supervisory involvement is encouraged. If the employee's performance improves rapidly, all is well. If it takes longer — as it often does — the supervisor's involvement and cooperation is necessary so that alternative actions can be reviewed.

## C ONCERNS: WHY SUPERVISORS WORRY ABOUT REFERRING

Supervisors have a number of concerns about referring an employee to EAP. Supervisors worry that an EAP referral implies a negative judgment about an employee, even though their judgment is about performance and is required of them. They're often afraid of hurting an employee, even though an EAP referral may be the only chance an employee has of getting the help they need. Supervisors frequently feel that referring a problem means they're not doing their job, even though a big

part of their job is knowing Agency resources and exercising good judgment about how and when to use them.

Often, supervisors are concerned about relinquishing control of a responsibility they rightfully see as belonging to them. Referring an employee to EAP does NOT end your involvement with the case or your responsibility as a supervisor. The ultimate goal of an EAP referral is to correct performance deficiencies. Your continuing involvement is critical to monitor and evaluate the employee's performance.

Because supervisors are so concerned about the harm an EAP referral may cause an employee, they often overlook the harm that *not referring* causes. In trying to "protect" employees, supervisors sometimes become overly and inappropriately involved with an employee's personal problems. When that happens, no one benefits. EAP is staffed with objective, trained professionals. When supervisors try to become professional counselors to their employees, they are assuming a role they are not trained for and depriving their employees of the professional help they deserve. Meanwhile, supervisors become diverted from their primary responsibility.

The effectiveness of the EAP depends on how much it is trusted by employees and supervisors alike. Because the confidentiality between the employee and counselor must be maintained, you may never know the exact nature of the underlying personal problem(s) and you won't be aware of specific details, unless the employee chooses to let you know. EAP records are confidential under the provisions of the Privacy Act. They do not become part of an employee's security or personnel file.

## F EEDBACK: GETTING AND GIVING

What can you expect? If you've alerted the EAP before referring an employee and the

referred employee signs a "Release of Information" form, you'll receive a follow-up call from EAP immediately after the first visit. The EAP counselor will provide answers to generic questions.

*Did the employee keep the appointment(s)?*

*Will additional sessions be necessary?*

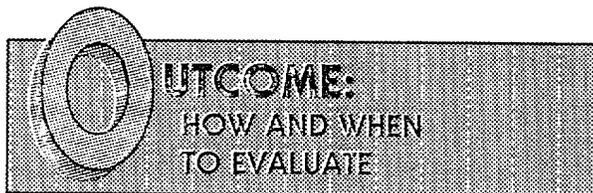
*Is the employee cooperating?*

*Will the employee be out of the office to keep appointments, see an outside source of help, or receive other health services?*

*What are the prospects for improvement?*

If the employee continues to see an EAP counselor, you'll receive periodic reports. You should also expect to be asked by the counselor about the kind of progress/improvement you observe in the employee. Supervisors, by virtue of their daily contact with employees, are in the best position to evaluate the kind of slow and steady progress that are the hoped-for outcome of any EAP referral. Remember that the information exchange is a two-way street with both counselor and supervisor working together and sharing information to achieve the same goal: improved performance.

Employees must be able to trust EAP to keep their personal problems personal. Supervisors must be able to trust EAP to provide them with the information they need to do their job.



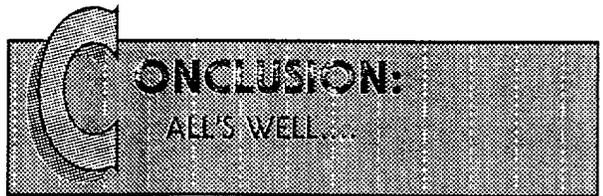
Problems serious enough to affect performance usually take some time to develop. They generally can't be solved overnight.

Decide, after some consultation with the EAP counselor, when you'll have a reliable

sense of how the case is going. Then give yourself — and your employee — that much time before considering alternative action.

The EAP has been a part of the Agency for almost a decade. Thousands of people have been helped and careers salvaged. But outcomes aren't always positive. If a referral doesn't result in improved performance after a reasonable amount of time, you'll know two things as you prepare to take other administrative action: Organizationally, you chose the least serious option first and you may now proceed to the next level. Personally, you tried to get someone assistance in solving their personal and performance problems.

More frequently, it does work out. Supervisors who have been involved in positive EAP interventions often consider that experience among the most satisfying of their careers, both personally and professionally.



We hope this guide proves useful. Call EAP — sooner rather than later — to discuss any case that may be causing you concern. You needn't identify the employee — or even yourself — until you're certain about your course of action. The EAP staff can help you think about the case, consider your alternatives and weigh the pros and cons of each. A successful outcome is most likely when the supervisor and counselor work together toward a mutual goal: restoring a good employee to full productivity.

Call EAP on [REDACTED] or, on a secure line, [REDACTED]

