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# QUANTUM
## Frontline Supervisor

**I suspect my employee may be drinking during lunch breaks. His performance hasn't slipped yet, but his breath sometimes smells of alcohol. Do I need to wait for a performance problem before referring him to the EAP?**

**The answer depends** on your company's policy regarding alcohol and drug use in the workplace. For example, is any use of alcohol on duty a violation of the policy if no other signs, symptoms, or noticeable behavioral effects exist? Get clarification from your human resources advisor. You do not need to wait for a decline in performance to act. You can confront the behavior of an employee having alcohol on their breath, which is considered sound workplace management practice, but this is addressed as a conduct issue. Why? The smell of alcohol can create discomfort, erode trust, and lead to tension among coworkers—even if the employee's output remains acceptable. Most workplace policies consider this a disruption of professional standards. Always remind employees of the availability of EAP services for any problem or concern that may be associated with conduct or performance. Remember, smelling alcohol is a concrete, defensible observation. It allows you to address the situation without speculating about causes or labeling the employee.

**I am a dedicated and very approachable supervisor. The proof is my door is always open to any employee. However, my manager thinks I am not an approachable person. He believes employees hesitate to come see me or share information. What does she mean? How do I use this feedback?**

**You need to know** more about your manager's observations. Keeping an open door is commendable, and it shows you want to be accessible. Your manager likely is referring to your approachability as an interpersonal experience. Employees can walk through your door, but how do they feel about it? What is their experience? Are employees reading your tone, your facial expressions, your body language, or your communication style as unwelcoming, impatient, or even intimidating? When this happens, employees will shy away. Many risks then follow. For example, they'll bring you problems late instead of early, if at all. Your team may work around you rather than with you. Talk to the EAP; you will learn much from a discussion with the EA professional. The skills of approachability—empathy, active listening, emotional awareness, and warmth in communication—can be learned or strengthened. The bottom line: Even the most dedicated leaders sometimes need to bridge the gap between how they see themselves and how others experience them.

**My employee is telling me she is unhappy with her career and wants to go back to school to become a teacher. Ultimately, I wish her the**

**It's often the case** that a top performer who feels unfulfilled is struggling in ways that go deeper than career dissatisfaction. Recommend the EAP based on the employee's expressed concerns about dissatisfaction and life direction rather than assuming a hidden issue exists. Frame the referral as a supportive opportunity to explore goals, values, and next steps with a

**best in whatever she pursues, but I don't want to lose her. Can the EAP help an employee like this one? I wonder if something else is going on.**

professional. Depression, anxiety, chronic stress, and other health conditions can profoundly distort how a person views life, choices, and the future. What feels like career regret may reflect something clinical that is influencing overall perception. This does not mean the feelings are not real or valid. It means they deserve a proper, professional look before any major life decisions are made. Try this approach: "I've noticed something may be weighing on you lately, and I want you to know the EAP is a completely confidential resource that has helped many people work through situations like this." That is enough. Plant the seed with warmth and without pressure.

■ **Due to his argumentative demeanor, I recommended my employee visit the EAP. I'm tired of the bickering. He claimed the counselor agreed that I'm the problem. I'm ignoring this and still expect him to change. Is this the right approach?**

**Remain focused on** the goal of helping the employee improve his performance despite what was allegedly said by the EAP. The EAP exists to help the employee return to a satisfactory level of performance. It won't referee who is right in the workplace disagreement. That said, maintain documentation of the employee's conduct, attendance, and quality of work or whatever else applies, along with the employee's response to constructive confrontations. Follow your organization's performance improvement plan template, as needed. Of course, you have not made a formal referral to the EAP yet based on performance issues. This would entail a release of information to improve communication and provide the employee, you, and the EAP with the same performance information. The result would be less confusion created by secondhand claims and keep the focus on expectations and outcomes.

■ **I promoted one of my best performers, and within weeks she was struggling badly. I assume it's a skill gap, not a personal problem, so why would I involve the EAP?**

**The assumption that** a sudden performance decline in a newly promoted employee must be a skill gap is understandable—but it's still an assumption. You should ask your employee how she is adapting to the position, especially regarding any job struggles she's experiencing. Suggest she contact the EAP if she believes something personal is affecting her work. You could also make a formal referral if the job issues are urgent. The moment you conclude that this is a skill issue, not a personal one, you've made a diagnostic determination that could potentially lead to years of struggle between the two of you as you attempt to improve work performance. New promotions involve new pressures, new expectations, a different peer group, and maybe a new identity while giving up the old one. Any of these stressors could exacerbate a personal problem that until now was previously manageable—anxiety, relationship stress, alcohol use, or depression among them. Obviously, there is no way of knowing for sure without EAP assistance.

**NOTES**

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