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QUANTUM Frontline Supervisor

■ **I often hold back dealing with personnel problems and confronting troubled employees because I feel burned out. These days it seems I can't make a difference, that procrastination is a coping strategy, and coming to work and going through the motions is all I can handle. What can the EAP do?**

What you're describing is more common than you might think. Many supervisors feel worn down and fall into avoidance as a coping strategy, which only builds a crisis. When you're emotionally exhausted, it can feel impossible to stay proactive and engaged. The EAP can help in several ways. A confidential assessment can clarify whether burnout or even major depression is present. Just talking in a private setting often brings relief, helps you feel understood, and restores perspective. The EAP can also help you sort through employee issues, decide which to handle yourself, and figure out when to involve HR. Together, you'll work step by step to address your employees' issues. The goal is for you to feel supported and confident intervening. Finally, the EAP will help you develop strategies to prevent sliding back into this rut. The goal is to help you feel empowered and reengaged. Call today to schedule an EAP appointment. Experience shows that you will feel some of the burden lift immediately when you take this first step, because you will know you're acting to resolve these issues.

■ **We have many supervisors. All of them have been trained in the alcohol and drug policy. Sadly, I know a few who are very heavy drinkers. How will these supervisors respond to their responsibility to enforce the alcohol and drug policy?**

It is not unusual for supervisors with potential alcohol use disorders to respond differently to their company's alcohol and drug policy. Awareness of problematic drinking and beliefs about addiction vary, shaping how supervisors enforce the rules. Some may avoid enforcement, fearing hypocrisy if they confront an employee while drinking heavily themselves. Others, who never drink at work, may view substance use as a willpower issue and apply the policy in an overzealous manner. Some appear uncomfortable discussing the topic or downplay its importance, saying, "Everyone has a few drinks to relax." Unfortunately, this can lead to avoiding EAP referrals, even for unrelated personal issues. By contrast, supervisors in recovery from a substance use disorder often become strong advocates for the policy, providing support and actively making EAP referrals. Ongoing education about substance use and addictive disease helps all supervisors understand the issues, understand and enforce the policies' mandates, and fosters a workplace where both supervisors and employees are encouraged to seek help if needed.

■ **I have an employee who shows amazing effort and progress on tasks, and then suddenly without warning there is a huge slump, with**

It appears your employee has what is known as a spasmodic work pace. Many factors can cause this pattern, but a proper EAP assessment is the best way to identify its true nature. You are generally satisfied with the employee's performance, but the complaint about inconsistency is legitimate and should be addressed. Both the employee's well-being and the

minimal productivity. This irregularity is frustrating. He has accomplished so much that I tend to ignore it, but should I put more focus on the problem?

company's bottom line may be at stake. Inconsistency also affects coworkers and carries hidden costs. Address the problem by observing and documenting specific patterns — missed deadlines, fluctuating quality, or unpredictable output — and then have a private, fact-based conversation with the employee. Clarify expectations for steady, reliable work. Thorough documentation is important, because the EAP will use it to conduct an adequate assessment. Performance patterns can vary greatly, whether they stem from depression, drinking episodes, or simply poor time management. Set clear goals, hold regular check-ins, and offer constructive feedback. If problems persist, make a formal referral to the EAP.

■ **I think fear of retaliation holds me back when confronting employees. Once you know employees well, they know a lot about you — and some may spread rumors, gossip, or share personal information they've picked up during a conversation. How can I manage this fear more effectively?**

Seek coaching or support from the EAP to build confidence, and practice a few difficult conversations so you feel more prepared. Role-playing scenarios can reduce anxiety and help you respond calmly, even if emotions run high. Also, discuss communication styles and how they can affect employees. No doubt, certain supervisor behaviors can unintentionally escalate tension and increase the risk of retaliation. Here are a few common communication missteps that may lead to trouble: 1) Using a harsh or condescending tone. 2) Giving public criticism or reprimanding employees in front of peers. 3) Enacting an inconsistent enforcement of the rules. For example, you decide to confront an employee for being late, but you've ignored similar lateness in others. 4) Making it personal. For example, you focus on personality traits (e.g., saying someone is lazy). 5) Ignoring positive contributions. For example, only pointing out what's wrong, never what's right. Ultimately, you can't eliminate every risk of retaliation, but you can reduce it by being fair, consistent, and respectful.

■ **Employee engagement has been a problem in the world of work for a while, but I hear it has reached a crisis level of concern for employers. What can supervisors do and what can the EAP do to make an impact?**

The employee engagement crisis reflects the growing problem of workers becoming disengaged at their jobs. Disengaged employees are less emotionally invested, may do only the minimum, and often do not see their work as meaningful. This can lead to lower productivity, higher turnover, more absenteeism, poorer customer service, reduced work quality, morale issues, and less innovation. Supervisors play a critical role in addressing disengagement. Key actions include clarifying expectations so employees know what success looks like; recognizing effort and achievements both formally and informally; providing consistent, fair feedback; enforcing rules equally; discussing career goals and offering development opportunities; being open, approachable, and honest about priorities and changes; checking in on workload and well-being; and removing obstacles that prevent employees from performing at their best. The EAP can assist by consulting with supervisors on strategies to work effectively with individuals or teams, offering guidance for implementing engagement solutions, and providing resources that support motivation, performance, and overall workplace satisfaction.

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