



Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor

April 2018

Kentucky Employee Assistance Program

(502) 564-5788 or (800) 445-5327

■ **My employee let me know that he self-referred to the EAP. I am glad he self-referred because I was considering a formal, written referral for attendance issues. Should I still make one?**

You could still make a formal supervisor referral, but you can also wait to see if the attendance issues clear up. Continue monitoring attendance to see if there is improvement. If attendance issues continue, you may decide to initiate a formal supervisor referral. This would provide the EAP staff member, who is working with the employee, information about the attendance concerns from your vantage point. It also gives you a chance to have another coaching session about attendance expectations when you review the written Supervisory Referral Form with your employee.

■ **I read that rude behavior at work is getting worse. Is this overblown? Haven't employees always shown a bit of rudeness periodically? What can supervisors do, and is there a role for the EAP helping overcome this sort of problem?**

Rude behavior is incivility at work, a topic that has received increased attention because surveys show it has grown worse. Approximately twice as many employees complain about rudeness today than they did 20 years ago. One poll showed that nearly half of employees intentionally decreased their work effort in response to rudeness, intentionally decreased time spent at work, intentionally decreased quality of work, lost time worrying about and stewing over incidents, avoided the rude person, and admitted declines in commitment to the organization. Twenty-five percent said they took out their frustrations on customers! Obviously, rudeness takes a toll on the bottom line. A positive workplace that reduces rudeness is not an accident. A strategic approach that includes education, awareness, and proactive and supportive policies, like those that address other organizational risks, is worth considering. And, of course, EAP referral when needed is appropriate. Use the EAP for training and awareness campaigns in your agency. Learn more about the price of incivility: <https://hbr.org/2013/01/the-price-of-incivility>.

■ **I think of the EAP as a productivity program rather than a mental health office, and I**

Your view of EAP is consistent with the business rationale for such programs and with that usually mentioned in policies that establish them. Such a viewpoint may increase the number of employees seen for personal problems, especially among troubled workers, some of whom

convey this viewpoint to employees. It distinguishes the program from a mental health service, which most people are familiar with. Can this view reduce stigma?

pose greater risk to the organization. Direct appeal to reduce the stigma of seeking help for personal problems, however, is also part of the solution to maximize utilization and impact. So, a balance of viewpoints is ideal. If employees only view the EAP as a “mental health office,” the stigma of seeking help can reduce motivation to participate. However, if the added focus on productivity improvement and work quality is well promoted, these factors will work synergistically for the benefit of all.

I recently stopped paying attention to my phone in meetings with employees, after one of them called me on the carpet for checking it while in meetings. It’s a bad habit, I know! I actually experience significant anxiety when not checking it. I’m amazed. Can the EAP help?

Behavior you are describing is referred to as “boss phone snubbing” in one research study, and it is also known as “phubbing” (phone + snubbing). Anyone can be guilty of this off-putting behavior and earn the ire of meeting participants, but when bosses do it, their status and authority, and the power of being a role model others want to admire, can have an especially negative impact on subordinates. Research on this topic discovered that supervisors who cannot resist looking repeatedly at their smartphones while meeting with employees risk losing their employees’ trust. The productivity cost is loss of engagement. Smartphone addiction is not a recognized disorder, at least not yet, but the problem can create distress. Consider whether your use of a smartphone causes problems but, despite your best efforts, you can’t stop. If that is true, contact the EAP. Check out this less-than-scientific, but humorous quiz on smartphone addiction: <http://www.quizony.com> (search “smartphone”). It is at least a good awareness builder. Also, see the study: www.baylor.edu (search “boss phone snub”).

I should be more decisive as a supervisor, but I like to seek the opinions of my team. Secretly, I fear being wrong, so gathering opinions is a way to procrastinate with some of these tougher calls. How can I develop better, faster, and more confident decisions-making skills?

There are many reasons people hesitate to make decisions. Fear of being wrong is one, but what drives this fear? This may be something you want to explore and your EAP may be a place for you to do that. You must make decisions, of course, so your anxiety translates into stalling techniques with the information seeking, which is a legitimate and responsible step that covers for your hesitancy. You are using it as a crutch. The rest of the problem about making decisions--the mechanics of the process--can be found in hundreds of resources. In your journey of discovery, examine whether any of these decision-killers affect you: 1) perfectionism (it slows progress), 2) fear of disapproval, and 3) over-analyzing. Great decision makers have a history of overcoming mistakes. It is these mistakes that turn them into leaders who can trust their gut—an art that gets better over time. This is your goal: to be a great decision maker who is often right, but not perfect.

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