PATHWAYS
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The Newsletter of the BOCES Employee Assistance Program Supervisors

- **My employee has a tardiness problem. The issue was verbally addressed in a casual setting during their lunch hour. The tardiness has continued, requiring me to give a written warning. They are claiming our discussion was a chat, not a verbal warning. They are protesting my disciplinary letter. What should I do now?**

**The initial discussion** does not appear to have been an official verbal warning because you did not declare it as such. The fact it was during their lunch break supports this view since such discussion should be in private. They likely felt it was also intrusive, which supports the idea of the discussion being "off the record." Check your organization's policy. It likely says all disciplinary actions should be documented. Be explicit when a conversation constitutes a formal step in progressive discipline, such as saying, "This is a verbal warning about your tardiness." If the verbal warning wasn't affirmed following the discussion, for example, by saying this in an email, then no record exists to demonstrate it occurred. Focus on resolving the employee's problem at this stage, refer to the EAP, avoid allowing a larger issue to develop over this disagreement.

- **One of our seasoned leaders once said the best way to treat employees is to always assume they have the best intentions, no matter what. This stuck with me as an interesting piece of advice. What does it mean?**

**Always treating** employees as though they have good intentions is a strategy for managing workers producing many payoffs for you and the organization. If you always assume your employees have good intentions, it will be reflected in the tone of your voice, your attitude, and how you interact with them. It builds trust, makes it easier for employees to come to you with their concerns and it lets them feel valued and respected. In turn, this enables them to have higher morale, making them more motivated and engaged with the organization. Your employees will view you as a supervisor who seeks to discover the root causes of problems rather than assigning blame. They will be more receptive to feedback as a result, and you will witness fewer conflicts among them. Best of all, those you supervise will adopt this orientation towards other employees.

- **My employee has a child with behavioral issues in preschool and I encouraged them to contact the EAP. We're both wondering whether the EAP could visit the school or conduct a classroom observation, if deemed appropriate. Is this sort of activity beyond the scope of the program?**

**EAPs address a wide** range of issues and do not exclude problems that might initially seem unrelated to the program. Limiting access based on specific concerns could discourage employees from seeking help, even when those concerns may actually be symptoms of underlying issues the EAP is equipped to address. This is what makes assessments important. EAPs encourage employees to contact the program to discuss any concerns. From there, the right resource and plan can be considered. Regarding your employee's preschooler having behavioral issues and the possibility of the EAP conducting an on-site visit, the employee should contact the EAP and provide additional details about the situation. The EAP will then assist in resolving the identified concerns in the most appropriate manner.

■ **What is considered "standard practice" in communicating with a supervisor when a release is signed by a difficult employee following a formal referral to the EAP?**

**Communication practices** are typically tailored to the host organization or sponsoring employer's needs. EAPs recognize referring supervisors need certain information to help them manage an employee's performance after referral. Types of communication typically include 1) the employee made it to the program and the status of their enrollment; 2) the employee is participating in the recommendations of the EAP to address their issue, with no mention of details or diagnosis; and 3) what accommodations by the work unit or employer are requested to allow the employee to successfully participate in the program (i.e., time, attendance, scheduling). These elements support good communication and help protect privacy and the perception of confidentiality, which are critical to the integrity of the program. Note historically, EAP standards, including communication with supervisors, emerged from the occupational alcoholism program movement in the late 1960s and EAPs in corporate America in the mid-1970s. These include program mechanics, training of supervisors and orientation of employees, policy provisions, referral processes, confidentiality assurances and limits on confidentiality, and communication with referring supervisors.

■ **Our EAP allows immediate family members to use its services at no cost. Isn't this exceeding the organization's responsibility since these individuals aren't employees?**

**Allowing household family members** to access the EAP is a common practice and offers significant benefits for both employees and the organization. Family issues often affect an employee's job performance, attendance, or behavior. By addressing these challenges through the EAP, organizations help employees maintain focus and productivity. While EAPs are typically presented as an employee benefit, management also recognizes their cost-avoidance and loss-prevention value. Allowing family members to reach out fits this model. Family members may seek EAP support for personal issues, in turn, help resolve serious challenges affecting the employee—challenges the employee may not acknowledge on their own. Providing this access creates a win-win situation, enhancing employee well-being and workplace stability.