



PATHWAYS

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The Newsletter of the BOCES Employee Assistance Program Supervisors

■ Every employee in our work unit knows about the Employee Assistance Program. EAP staff visited our office to provide an orientation and overview of the program about five years ago. Is there any value in having a second visit or a refresher about the program?

Having staff from the EAP provide another overview and refresher on their services is invaluable. While many employees may be familiar with the EAP, a visit can reignite awareness and encourage greater utilization of its resources, especially during challenging times at home or work. In today's fast-paced environment where numerous distractions vie for our attention, a proactive approach to promoting the EAP is essential. This is a basic marketing principle. By inviting EAP staff to your office or showing the online orientation video during a staff meeting, you help reinforce the importance of mental health services, you also allow employees to see the staff, ask questions, and discuss myths and misconceptions that naturally arise in any organization. These misconceptions often center on issues of confidentiality. Providing clarification can help employees feel more comfortable reaching out for support to address problems they are facing right now.

■ If I refer an employee to the Employee Assistance Program and performance issues persist, I struggle to take disciplinary action. This is particularly challenging when the employee claims to be actively working with the EAP and their outside counselor. What causes this mental roadblock?

The EAP cannot be used as an excuse for ongoing job performance issues. As a concerned supervisor, you may feel tempted to delay reasonable disciplinary action when an employee claims they are working on personal problems. To navigate this situation effectively, consider obtaining a consent form from the employee allowing you to seek guidance from the EAP counselor regarding reasonable accommodations. However, it is crucial to remember persistent performance issues must not be overlooked. While some employees may struggle despite utilizing the EAP, many find success with its support. Importantly, EAP's are designed to function alongside proper disciplinary and administrative procedures, not to hinder them. Be aware an employee who is resistant to help might try to manipulate your feelings of guilt or hesitation about taking necessary disciplinary actions. If they convince you the EAP serves as a "safe harbor," it could undermine your confidence in the program's ability to support both you and the organization effectively.

■ My formally referred employee signed a "consent for the release of confidential information" allowing the EAP to inform me of program participation. Can I disclose my employee's EAP participation to my supervisor?

It's appropriate to inform your supervisor about the employee's participation in the EAP when making a formal referral. The consent form governs the EAP's external communication with you, some forms address re-disclosure of information. Since information from the EAP typically only includes status of attendance, participation, and information regarding any needed accommodations for the employee, other information might be of limited use to the next-level supervisor. It is best to consult with the EAP on information sharing and issues of redisclosure. Ethical considerations govern information disclosed to others, and it is crucial to handle sensitive information with care to ensure any disclosures are made only to those who are legally permitted to receive it.

■ **When my employee was offered the choice to visit the EAP or accept a disciplinary action, they chose to quit the organization. We were shocked! This decision resolved the ongoing issues related to their attendance and behavior having persisted for years. Was this a successful use of the EAP?**

Not all employees take advantage of the help offered to treat a problem or condition and get well. In this respect, the loss is unfortunate. When considering the business case for an EAP, the program worked well—just not in the usual way. The EAP made it possible to leverage disciplinary action as a motivator to seek help. Although help was rejected, the saga concluded, thereby ending years of wasted effort, time, resources, risk, and exposures. EAP's are not simply company-sponsored helping programs; they also are cost-avoidance mechanisms. This refers to the savings realized by preventing potential costs which would have been incurred without a specific intervention or preventive measure. In this limited sense, the EAP is a management tool benefiting employees and organizations alike. No other workplace program replicates this dynamic. This is what makes EAP's uniquely valuable: they not only address immediate employee needs but also strategically protect organizations from future liabilities while enhancing workplace productivity.

■ **What skill do top leaders across industries value most in supervisors?**

Nothing will impress leaders more than your ability to effectively communicate. Leadership skills, emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills are also important. But, being a good communicator is a foundational skill of good supervision. While you may never be praised for being a good communicator, problems with communication will be quickly noticed. The management's concern about supervisors with problematic communication is its effect on employees. Examples include failure to communicate changes stressing employees; dumping work on employees at the last minute, which shows poor planning; ambiguous instructions; lack of information employees need to do the best job possible; lack of feedback; and employees being unsure of what they are supposed to be doing. All these issues stress employees, and the effect on morale does not escape the notice of those in upper management. Be a communication champ by understanding and avoiding these 21 common communication problems. See them at www.niagrainstitute.com/blog/signs-of-poor-communication



BOCES Employee Assistance Program
1741D North Ocean Avenue, Medford, NY 11763 (631) 289-0480
154 Commack Road, Suite 210 Commack, NY 11725 (631) 218-5445
188 W. Montauk Hwy, Ste. E1, Hampton Bays, NY 11946 (631) 728-2008

