



# PATHWAYS

June 2025

## The Newsletter of the BOCES Employee Assistance Program Supervisors

■ **My employee exhibits troubling behaviors. For example, they are ignoring deadlines, forgetting what I asked them to do, and not responding to emails. They are a strong worker. This is a difficult situation. It may be some sort of defiance. How can the EAP help me manage it? Should I just demand change?**

The EAP can discuss with you the difficulties associated with managing this employee. Most defiance of supervisors is not overt. It is passive-aggressive—for example, them not responding to your emails or claiming forgetfulness regarding your requests. The EAP will help you identify the underlying cause of this defiance. You'll discover it probably stems from stress, miscommunication, or some perceived unfairness. Generally, it's not useful to demand change with a heavy-handed, drill-sergeant approach. It's smarter to use effective communication and empathy to address these behaviors constructively. Your goal is to build trust and encourage the employee to engage with you more positively and meet expectations. This is a balanced approach, it does not dismiss the fact ultimately your role is to ensure accountability. Practice constructive confrontation through role-playing with the EAP. Role-playing is highly effective for cases like yours. Based on the outcome of your meeting with the employee, consider referring them to the EAP if appropriate.

■ **I'm a senior leader and also a recovering drug user who's been totally abstinent and sober for over 22 years. I am not fooled easily. I can spot subtle cues of those using drugs because of my past experiences. It's not my job to point out what I notice but how can my experience be useful in my role?**

You are correct, you can't diagnose and confront employees in your role as a leader. You do have insights giving you a level of empathy other managers may lack. However, we're not talking about addiction necessarily, instead the acute stress, the personal struggles, and a host of consequential problems common to a life affected by drug addiction. As a person in recovery, you can create a team environment or workplace feeling of safety and supportiveness. When an employee's performance problems first appear, you can document and discuss these. Inquiring about the cause of them (which is manager-appropriate and not a diagnostic inquiry) may elicit the nature of a personal problem you can refer to the EAP. It is more likely an assessment will then identify the substance use disorder. Note it is not unusual for those in recovery to share their stories with others in social or informal gatherings. However, be self-aware about maintaining professional boundaries by focusing only on observable behaviors and work issues in your supervisory role.

■ **How can supervisors help employees deal with anxiety, and how would managers notice this condition since we can't diagnose mental health problems? I hear this problem has surpassed even depression as a key struggle for many workers.**

Some surveys report up to 30% of employees believe anxiety interferes with their productivity. Although supervisors can't diagnose anxiety, they can play a supportive role and make it easier to get help and overcome resistance toward professional counseling. If an employee seems overwhelmed, inquire about it by saying something like, "you seem overwhelmed with all these new changes. Can I help in some way?" Also, never dismiss or discount the value of mental health services. Employees should know where you stand on the importance of support services, including the EAP. Never joke about counseling or use language like "the

in-house shrink” or other terms implying bias or stigma. Your EAP offers a valuable list of performance and behavioral indicators, which may also reflect symptoms of anxiety. The best advice: Don’t think “anxiety” think performance, conduct, attitude, quality of work, quantity of work, attendance, and availability of the worker. By using this list, you will discover far more employees with personal issues are interfering with work, including anxiety.

Learn more: [yec.co/blog/helping-employees-deal-with-workplace-anxiety](http://yec.co/blog/helping-employees-deal-with-workplace-anxiety)

■ **My employee tested positive for illicit drug use and subsequently was referred for treatment. They obviously were cooperative, but from hearsay I heard they had no intention of quitting drugs and were going to “play along to get along” to keep their job. What should I make of these statements?**

**The referral for** treatment was successful. This is all that can be measured at this time. Initial statements and apparent lack of motivation aren’t predictive of whether they will be successful in treatment. More relevant will be evidence during treatment demonstrating they are discarding mistaken beliefs, myths, and misconceptions about addictive disease in favor of accepting accurate information about the illness grounding the chronic disease model of addiction. Treatment staff will also look for true self-diagnosis and the realization sustained recovery depends on abstinence and ongoing personal accountability. This shift in understanding enables individuals to self-diagnose, build authentic motivation, and fully engage in the recovery process. Interestingly, many individuals who initially resist treatment or over intellectualize their struggles often become the strongest advocates for recovery-and go on to become exceptional employees.

■ **Can you explain the feedback model referred to as Situation-Behavior-Impact (SBI)?**

**SBI is an easy to** understand and apply feedback model for supervisors developed by the Center for Creative Leadership, a global provider of leadership development and research. SBI helps ensure when you give feedback to an employee, it is done in a clear, respectful, and effective way regardless of whether it is positive or negative. Here is the model: Situation – Be specific and give your employee the when and where a certain behavior occurred this way they can recall what you are referring to. For example, “yesterday when you presented your project....” Behavior – Describe the observable action, not your interpretation. For example, “Your audiovisual projector wouldn’t function correctly.” Impact – “This created a delay in the program, causing other speakers to cut their presentations short.” The feedback ends there without judgment or assumptions. Its goal is impartiality and accuracy, it’s been proven to have a significant impact on facilitating change or reinforcing desirable behaviors.



**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

