



## The Frontline Supervisor

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*Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource – Employees*  
**Solutions Employee Assistance Program 1-800-526-3485**

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**Q- EA**  
*professionals obviously have relationships with people in the community, and some of them may be friends, relatives, or family members of employees. How can EAP clients be assured that their confidentiality won't be breached?*

**A -** State and federal laws, professional licensing rules, and the work organization's EAP policy govern confidentiality. Penalties can be severe if confidentiality is violated. Employees can be assured that their confidentiality is protected to the extent allowed by law, and that the EAP will not release information to anyone in the workplace without the employee's written consent. A few narrow exceptions may apply, such as if employees in the EAP pose imminent danger to themselves or others. As a manager, explain that when you refer employees to the EAP, the only follow-up information you receive is whether individuals kept their appointment. Speak positively about the EAP and confidentiality. This more than any other factor helps improve utilization.

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**Q -** *I get visibly irritated when employees say one thing and do another. I'm not rude, but I make my feelings clear and I'm not very forgiving. I'm apparently disliked for being "mean." But how else am I supposed to handle substandard behavior?*

**A -** You may have heard the saying, "The meaning of your communication is the response you get." You may not think you are rude, but what matters is what others think. If you frequently seem irritated with your staff, you make it tougher to build trust with them. The next time you get angry, experiment with a different response. For example, you can summarize the situation in a pleasant but perplexed tone and ask, "Can you help me understand how this happened?" Another approach: Define what constitutes substandard performance and then ask, "Based on that definition, do you think what happened here qualifies as substandard?" The more you invite employees to take responsibility for their actions, the more you will invite them to take charge of personal change. And by speaking in a calm, non-accusatory voice, you avoid appearing mean.

**Call Solutions EAP for free, confidential consultation regarding an employee you may want to refer to the EAP: 1-800-526-3485.**  
**Look for Solutions on-line: [www.solutions-eap.com](http://www.solutions-eap.com)**

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**Q** - *I'm convinced that my employee is a hypochondriac. He misses a few hours each week for doctors' appointments, even though he appears to be in good health. He says his allergies, backaches, or other ailments require medical care, but I'm skeptical. Can the EAP help?*

**A** - You have taken a misstep by trying to “diagnose” your employee. This may have delayed making a supervisor referral because you question whether a referral is appropriate for the personal problem you have identified. The jumble of symptoms your employee complains about could be related to many different types of disorders, or it could be that your employee reports a host of medical problems to elicit sympathy and avoid being confronted about performance and attendance issues. Make an EAP referral based upon your employee’s performance and attendance issues, without concluding that you know the nature of his personal problems. If a medical assessment of your employee is necessary to arrive at a proper diagnosis, the EAP will make sure this happens. What’s relevant is that your employee regularly misses work due to doctors’ appointments, and his frequent absences affect his job.

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**Q** - *A few of my employees have family members stationed overseas in the military. They are worried, but they do their best. How can I help them? Should I refer them to the EAP?*

**A** - The EAP can provide support for your employees and help them with their anxieties. EA professionals will not only listen and offer support, but may also recognize sleeping, eating, or work-related problems that are by-products of your employees' frequent worrying. As their supervisor, you should understand that your employees might behave uncharacteristically during this difficult time. If they're unusually angry, irritable, or absentminded, it may be because of their anxiety. Your patience and compassion can help everyone cope. Be willing to listen intently if they open up. Above all, don't tell them not to worry so much or insist that everything will be fine. Your well-meaning attempt to reassure them can backfire because they know their loved ones are at risk and you cannot protect them.

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**Q** - *I recently replaced a well-liked supervisor who died suddenly. I feel like I'll never come out from behind my predecessor's shadow. Can the EAP help?*

**A** - The EAP can help you grapple with the inevitable discomfort that you face in this unusual situation. It's often hard to fill the shoes of a well-regarded supervisor. But the challenge is far greater and more complex when the person has died. Others—from employees to peers to bosses—will automatically compare you to your predecessor. They may try outwardly to accept you on your own terms, but subconsciously they feel negativity towards you or display awkwardness when relating to you. That's all beyond your control. But you can control your behavior. With the help of the EAP, you can discuss steps you can take to respect the person's memory while gradually carving out your own professional identity. For example, you can work with colleagues to organize an annual fund-raiser as a tribute to your predecessor.