



# FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2019

**Q.** *My employee has mood swings that range from pleasant to very grumpy and argumentative. Everyone complains about it, but I have not gotten to the point of taking some job action. After all, we all have some personality quirks. How do I decide that it is time to make a referral?*

**A.** *Although no one's perfect, be cautious about slowly adapting to dysfunctional communication and thereby promoting a poor work climate that interferes with productivity, adversely affects morale, causes turnover, and enables this behavior to grow worse. You aren't ready for a formal referral to EAC until you sit down with this person to give feedback, ask for changes, describe those changes clearly, and get a commitment from the employee. You should meet with EAC and formulate an approach to this issue. Are you afraid of confronting this employee? Discuss that possibility with the EAC counselor because it could serve as a roadblock to what appears to be necessary change that would benefit everyone.*

**Q.** *My employee has a hard time paying attention and listening. He loses things, is easily distracted and restless, and worst of all, he interrupts people when they are talking. I am referring him to EAC, but will they be able to diagnose this behavior? Maybe it is ADHD.*

**A.** *Make a formal/mandatory referral to EAC based on the work performance. EAC may not be the final point of contact that identifies the nature of the problem. Depending on the assessment and after a referral, a doctor or other licensed clinician will make that determination. EAC will consider issues that explain the behaviors you are seeing. Speak with EAC prior to referring to the program. Discuss your observations and documentation. Too often supervisors miss this critical step, wherein details examined in a discussion could improve the outcome of an assessment later. Good communication will be important to help your employee maintain appropriate conduct and follow through with any counseling or treatment. Could this be adult ADHD? Possibly, but keep your focus on the issues that led to this referral when following up in the future.*

**Q.** *When supervisors inquire about complaints regarding harassment in a work unit, what are some of the classic mistakes they make that cause bigger problems later for organizations? It feels accusatory or at least somewhat awkward to mention EAC as a source of support for a complainant.*

**A.** A common mistake of supervisors investigating complaints of harassment is not working closely with their HR advisors or following instructions provided to them. Beyond these missteps, allowing one's misconceptions about harassment to interfere with or influence an investigation can contribute to larger problems. An example includes suggesting, even slightly, that some responsibility lies with the victim of the harassment. Another is deciding or suggesting that the complaint is not that serious if a long delay exists between the date of the incident and its first report. Another is making a judgment that the incident is not serious or making a statement about how serious it appears. Showing a lack of empathy or not appreciating that victims of harassment may feel powerless and traumatized are common blunders. Remember that victimized employees of any trauma can benefit from a confidential and empathetic listener. This role belongs to EAC, so a supervisor's suggestion to use EAC is completely appropriate.

**Q.** *My employee has been coming to work late. I finally sat down to confront him. He opened up about the problems he is facing at home. He wants leave without pay (LWOP) for a week to deal with these problems. I don't mind authorizing the leave, but should I ask him to visit EAC too?*

**A.** The seriousness of the attendance problems makes a formal/mandatory referral to EAC appropriate. Consider this as the first step. Discuss the attendance pattern with EAC or share documentation to allow a more thorough assessment. The assessment could discover that the problems he has shared with you are not primary, but symptoms of larger issues that should be resolved before attendance issues will stop. Taking time off might be a needed accommodation recommended by EAC, but maybe not. (Note that the EAC cannot tell you to approve or disapprove LWOP.) A release will allow EAC to share essential basic information, without details, necessary for you to manage your employee's productivity and attendance issues. On a side note, this scenario with your employee is a good example of how easy it can be to accept what you are hearing at face value from a troubled employee without knowing it will resolve the problem. Consider waiting to hear what EAC recommends.