

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

March 2008

# Frontline Supervisor



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■ **I have several employees in my office struggling with eldercare issues that sometimes get in the way of work. Everyone knows about the EAP, but I don't think any have called. Maybe they don't know everything that the EAP can do for them. Can you elaborate?**

The scope of help the EAP can offer may include arranging a workshop to discuss and discover answers to tough eldercare issues. The EAP could also conduct an assessment of home and work problems to find ways of providing eldercare without these responsibilities interfering with work. Sometimes employees need some coaching in how to share the difficulties they are facing at home, and also requesting reasonable adjustments or allowances in their schedules so they can perform satisfactorily and meet the needs of home and work. This lack of assertiveness creates many large problems for employees, and sometimes it is the key roadblock to resolving tough problems employees face. Also, believing that one's problem or concern is fundamentally different from others who struggle with the same issue is a common reason people avoid asking for help. They can't imagine someone offering a solution that has not yet been considered.

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■ **Is all the talk we hear about workplace stress overblown, or is there something to it? After all, the workplace has always been stressful. Things should be better with all the technology options, right? What does the research say? Is there anything new to report?**

**According to a recent** study by Watson Wyatt Worldwide, an international consulting firm, workplace stress is the most frequently cited reason U.S. employees consider leaving their jobs. Employers acknowledge that stress is affecting business performance, but few reportedly are doing much about it. Nearly half of U.S. employers (48 percent) say stress caused by working long hours is affecting business performance. However, only 5 percent are addressing this concern. Similarly, more than one-quarter (29 percent) of employers believe stress caused by widespread use of technology such as cell phones and personal digital assistants is greatly affecting business performance, but only 6 percent are taking action to confront the issue. By not intervening with stress, employers invite an increase in unscheduled time off, absence rates, and health care costs — all of which hurt a company's bottom line. (Feb. 14, 2008; Press Release, [www.watsonwyatt.com](http://www.watsonwyatt.com))

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■ **I referred my employee to the EAP, but at the time I wasn't concerned whether the appointment was kept. I saw it as the employee's**

**If you call the EAP**, and no release has been signed, the EAP will be unable to confirm your employee's participation. The chances are high that no release exists. The EAP may bring the matter to the employee's attention, but don't take a wait-and-see approach to whether a release is signed. Focus on what you are observing: an unsatisfactory absenteeism

**business. The employee did go, but is still not showing for work half the time. Can I still get a release signed, or is it too late?**

pattern. Nothing precludes making a second try with a formal referral that includes advanced communication with the EAP, and a request that a release be signed. The employee may perceive a different level of seriousness and resolve, especially if the possibility of disciplinary action is discussed. Many possibilities could explain what you are seeing, including delay or nonparticipation in the EAP's recommendations, or even the resolution of a personal problem that had no relationship to the absenteeism.

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**■ Please explain why an employee making a six-figure income who is an Ivy League graduate, with multiple books, inventions, and reportedly a high IQ, can't decide that they should phone the EAP as a self-referral to resolve a personal problem?**

**Many people associate** high intelligence and notable accomplishments with less likelihood that denial could interfere with the ability to recognize and resolve a personal problem. Unfortunately this is not the case. Mental health treatment professionals, and especially those with extensive experience in addiction recovery (where denial plays a prominent role), have observed that these things can interfere with a decision to accept help. Intellectualizing to avoid treatment is particularly challenging to confront in bright people with personal problems. What moves people to change is pain or perceived pain of some sort. The more tangible or intangible resources available to the troubled person, the more opportunity exists to avoid or postpone this point of decision. This is what makes intervention a useful tool to help ill persons in denial, and it is why a formal supervisory referral to the EAP has a high possibility of success, even for the most advantaged employee.

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**■ I'm a concerned manager and want my employees to come to work every day enjoying what they do, and feel like I am measuring up to their expectations as a great supervisor. How do the most successful managers accomplish this?**

**Employees are resources** to companies, and because they are paid for what they do, a partnership or contract exists to provide them with benefits in exchange for work. Frequently, managers and business organizations get too stuck within this model trying to help employees feel motivated by looking to benefits, rewards, and tangibles to keep them happy and loyal to the organization. But this is only half of the picture. The other half is an effective relationship employees have with the organization. It is also part of the contract, although much of it or perhaps none is in writing. You're the closest representative of that relationship. Meeting employees' needs in this part of the loyalty equation requires things that are harder to produce for some managers. They include getting closer to the employee by offering coaching assistance for career goals, helping employees connect with mentors, giving them lots of feedback, and ensuring that no "trees" are growing between you and them by keeping communication channels open and demonstrating that you are empathetic to their needs.

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## NOTES