

FrontLine Supervisor

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■ **The EAP phoned to say my employee was a self-referral but wanted to sign a release so I could learn of his participation. Nothing else was permitted. I am glad he self-referred because I was considering a formal referral for attendance issues. Should I still make one?**

You could still make a formal supervisor referral, but you can also wait to see if the attendance issues clear up. Consider letting the EAP know about attendance issues, however. The release signed by your employee is obviously limited, so do not expect follow-up reports, etc. Note that the release may be rescinded at any time, leaving the EAP without the ability to communicate with you. It will not be able to acknowledge follow-through with recommendations or share status of participation. Still, none of this will interfere with your ability to manage performance. If attendance issues continue, decide whether to initiate a formal supervisor referral, in which you can request more structured communication (but not clinical information) or take corrective action, as you and your advisers deem appropriate.

■ **I read that rude behavior at work is getting worse. Is this overblown? Haven't employees always shown a bit of rudeness periodically? What can supervisors do, and is there a role for the EAP helping overcome this sort of problem?**

Rude behavior is incivility at work, a topic that has received increased attention because surveys show it has grown worse. Approximately twice as many employees complain about rudeness today than they did 20 years ago. One poll showed that nearly half of employees intentionally decreased their work effort in response to rudeness, intentionally decreased time spent at work, intentionally decreased quality of work, lost time worrying about and stewing over incidents, avoided the rude person, and admitted declines in commitment to the organization. Twenty-five percent said they took out their frustrations on customers! Obviously, rudeness takes a toll on the bottom line. A positive workplace that reduces rudeness is not an accident. A strategic approach that includes education, awareness, and proactive and supportive policies, like those that address other organizational risks, is worth considering. And, of course, EAP referral when needed is appropriate. Start with a sit-down assessment with your EAP to design a customized approach that fits with your work culture. Learn more: <https://hbr.org/2013/01/the-price-of-incivility>.

■ **I think of the EAP as a productivity program rather than a counseling office, and I convey this**

Your view of EAP is consistent with the business rationale for such programs and with that usually mentioned in policies that establish them. Such a viewpoint may increase the number of employees seen for personal problems, especially among troubled workers, some of whom

viewpoint to employees. It distinguishes the program from a mental health service, which most people are familiar with. Can this view reduce stigma?

pose greater risk to the organization. Direct appeal to reduce the stigma of seeking help for personal problems, however, is also part of the solution to maximize utilization and impact. So a balance of viewpoints is ideal. If employees only view the EAP as a “counseling office” for “personal problems,” the stigma of seeking help can reduce motivation to participate. However, if the added focus on productivity improvement and work quality is well-promoted, these factors will work synergistically for the benefit of all.

I recently stopped paying attention to my phone in meetings with employees, after one of them called me on the carpet for checking it while in meetings. It’s a bad habit, I know! I actually sense the anxiety of not checking it. I’m amazed. Can the EAP help?

Behavior you are describing is referred to as “boss phone snubbing” in one research study, and it is also known as “phubbing” (phone + snubbing). Anyone can be guilty of this off-putting behavior and earn the ire of meeting participants, but when bosses do it, their status and authority, and the power of being a role model others want to admire, can have an especially negative impact on subordinates. Research on this topic discovered that supervisors who cannot resist looking repeatedly at their smartphones while meeting with employees risk losing their employees’ trust. The productivity cost is loss of engagement. Smartphone addiction is not a recognized disorder, at least not yet, but the problem can create distress. Consider whether your use of a smartphone causes problems but, despite your best efforts, you can’t stop. If that is true, contact the EAP. Check out this less-than-scientific, but humorous quiz on smartphone addiction: <http://www.quizony.com> (search “smartphone”). It is at least a good awareness builder. Also, see the study: www.baylor.edu (search “boss phone snub”).

I should be more decisive, but I like to seek the opinions of my team. Secretly, I fear being wrong, so gathering opinions is a way to procrastinate with some of these tougher calls. How can I develop better, faster, and more confident decisions-making skills?

There are many reasons people hesitate to make decisions. Fear of being wrong is one, but what drives this fear? This question is one the EAP can help you understand more clearly. You must make decisions, of course, so your anxiety translates into stalling techniques with the information-seeking, which is a legitimate and responsible step that covers for your hesitancy. You are using it as a crutch. The rest of the problem about making decisions—the mechanics of the process—can be found in hundreds of resources. In your journey of discovery, examine whether any of these decision-killers affect you: 1) perfectionism (it slows progress), 2) fear of disapproval, and 3) over-analyzing. Great decision makers have a history of overcoming mistakes. It is these mistakes that turn them into leaders who can trust their gut—an art that gets better over time. This is your goal: to be a great gut-level decision maker who is often right, but not perfect.

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