

# SOLUTIONS

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**Question:** My employee has adult attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). I know this because the employee told me. Unfortunately, his symptoms are very evident. He has a doctor, but if he is taking medication, it's not having much effect. Can the EAP help?

**Answer:** Make a supervisor referral to the EAP based upon the performance issues you have documented. Take your focus off the ADHD diagnosis. With this approach you will see faster improvement because the EAP can address the reasons underlying the problems you're witnessing. Adult ADHD is not simply a medication issue. There are two important components of ADHD: the condition itself and the psychological impact of the person's failed attempts to adjust and compensate for symptoms. Both of these issues must be addressed by treatment professionals. Stress, substance abuse, poor self-esteem, and depression can all be indirectly associated with ADHD. Procrastination, for example, a possible symptom of ADHD, may contribute to a host of personal problems. These problems could lead to more problems associated with family and relationship issues. As the employee's supervisor, remember to keep your focus on performance indicators and let the EAP explore the other issues.

**Question:** How can I support employees who remain after downsizing? Many relationships were lost, and grief and anger exist. Will this situation eventually right itself? Perhaps I should make myself scarce because I represent management, the target of their anger?

**Answer:** Do not make yourself scarce. You have the ability to influence employee attitudes and improve morale by what you say, do, and don't do. If employees are angry and upset, you will ratchet up their feelings of resentment by avoiding them. Likewise, coping with your stress by hiding out will also backfire. Healing will take time, but remember that you and your employees want the same thing—a happier workplace. With that in mind, get closer to your employees by accepting, in the short run, their view of themselves as survivors. As a manager, you take center stage after downsizing, and employees are waiting and watching to see if you demonstrate compassion and understanding. This is crucial to their recovery. Employees can then move to the next stage of adaptation and acceptance of change. Never declare that employees should “get over it.” Talk with the EAP about how to encourage activities that rebuild the feeling of commitment workers have toward the organization.



**Question:** I feel insecure about my position. I don't seem to be able to get my point across to upper management, gain their acceptance for my ideas, or satisfy them. Can the EAP help me?

**Answer:** Many supervisors struggle with uncertainty about their abilities and relationships with management. EAPs can help because they observe best practices in communication and become sensitive to the nuances of work culture. They provide tips, techniques, guidance, and “know-how” to help supervisors improve their effectiveness. So give the EAP a try. You may discuss many topics like how to analyze issues from upper management's perspective or how to use empathy to deepen your understanding of the boss's outlook. You may discover which part of your operation management cares about the most, what pressures they face, and how they define success. You may learn to avoid mistakes like bringing only ideas and excitement to a meeting, to avoid making assertions without proof, and also to not take the rejection of your ideas personally but rather as a challenge to discover missing pieces.

**Question:** I confronted my employee whose breath smelled of alcohol. Immediately, the employee admitted to drinking, thanked me, and agreed to get help. This is a good sign, right? Doesn't it indicate that treatment is more likely to be successful?

**Answer:** Assuming alcoholism exists, the cooperation you've seen is a good thing, but the rigors of recovery from addiction are challenging to the patient and family members (or enablers). Successful treatment depends on the patient's attitude toward education while in treatment, willingness to change and practice behaviors to support recovery, the degree to which enablers can be enlisted to support the patient, and cooperation with an effective

program of recovery. Practicing alcoholics, many of whom mistakenly believe that willpower is the key factor in staying sober, may experience relief or even excitement over a renewed sense of determination prompted by an adverse event such as a positive drug screen at work. The person's belief that he or she can “do it this time” may appear as sudden insight and enlightenment. This enthusiasm is no match for the illness without a rigorous treatment program. Cooperation by your employee when treatment begins will be the key.

**Question:** My employee does not follow through on assignments that I delegate. When I ask why, the employee says it is “busywork.” I want to refer this individual to the EAP, but I'm open-minded. Perhaps I have delegation all wrong. How do I know for sure?

**Answer:** It's not hard to determine whether you are delegating work to your employee or simply piling on tasks that you need done. Many supervisors do not know the difference. Employees often do, as signified by their reaction to what and how things land in their laps. Ask yourself if the assignment you are delegating frees you up to do what matters most. Do you spend time training and motivating employees regarding the assignments given to them? If you're just anticipating a due date, that's not delegation. Delegation will test your communication skills. Encouragement; delivery of praise for a job well done; and provision of tools, resources, and authority are often necessary in the delegation process. What about goals, timetables, and expectations? Have you explained the importance of the assignment and how you will measure success? With delegation, both you and your employee grow from the experience.

**Question:** My employee doesn't trust anyone, and in my view, probably won't open up with the EAP. How do EAPs work with employees like this? I am sure the belief that some employees won't "open up" with the EAP plays a role in some supervisors' reluctance to refer them?

**Answer:** Do not presume that an employee you know well, who appears to be closed and unwilling to warm up to others, won't be just the opposite with the EAP. An EAP interview may be the only place where your employee feels safe enough to disclose his or her personal story. Employee assistance professionals are specially trained and experienced at establishing trust with their clients. They know how to listen and ask the right questions in the right order without making judgments. Employee assistance professionals are able to put clients at ease and determine how slowly or quickly an employee will begin to share personal information. They also know where to start asking questions in order to help an employee feel safe and open up. Even more important, they know when certain questions should wait until the next meeting.

**Question:** I gave a copy of my documentation (a list of issues) to my employee and made a referral to the EAP. The employee became upset when I said the list had already been faxed confidentially to the EAP. Is this just manipulation?

**Answer:** Consider your EAP policy and the steps your organization wants you to follow when making a supervisor referral. Obviously the employee was taken aback, but sending your documentation to support the rationale for the referral is consistent and customary with the EAP process. Even so, you want employees to feel motivated to participate in the EAP, so sending the information after your meeting, even though you don't need permission, is probably a better way to

go. Remember, an EAP without information from the supervisor relies solely upon what the employee-client reports. Let the EAP know about this reaction because it will help the EAP to set the employee at ease during the first appointment.

**Question:** Our organization has developed a policy on bullying behavior. Can you provide an outline for a private corrective interview with an employee who has this problem and what steps to take?

**Answer:** Documented complaints and your personal observations should accompany you to your meeting. Also, plan on the following steps:

- 1) Start by explaining what has prompted the meeting, and share what has been observed and reported.
- 2) Describe the effect of the behavior on morale and productivity. If employees feel dread in anticipated interaction with the employee, let the employee know it. It could have a big impact in motivating change.
- 3) Do not joke or make light of issues in this corrective interview. Doing so will undermine your outcome and perpetuate the problem behavior.
- 4) State that the behavior cannot continue. A bully likes to discuss others' personalities and motives. Avoid this discussion, but do ask what your employee thinks about his or her interaction with others.
- 5) Be patient and listen, but focus on what the employee can do to improve interaction with coworkers.
- 6) Make an EAP referral and schedule a specific date and time for a follow-up meeting.



**Question:** Some of the employees I supervise are struggling financially. My building trades staff (painters, carpenters, etc.) could benefit from side jobs like fixing my house, painting, or gardening work. Is offering personal work a problem as long as I keep it “strictly business”?

**Answer:** Don't do it. Although it is tempting to have employees perform tasks at your home, there are many landmines associated with doing this. Your motivation is to get work done at your house, despite your stated interest in helping them, which is where you will place your priority outside the workplace. But this is only the beginning of the conflict-of-interest problems. Switching roles between supervisor and employer can easily affect your performance management decisions and it will taint the decisions employees make on the job. Ultimately your employer is the one at risk because both you and your employees are placed in a situation where they are motivated to act in a way that is no longer impartial—the essence of a conflict-of-interest relationship.

**Question:** I am very stressed out in my supervisor role. I would like to relax and physically work off my stress, but exercise doesn't seem to help. As a result, I don't keep up with it.

**Answer:** Physical activity is one of the best ways to relieve stress but don't expect much if you only begin to exercise when you're already stressed out. For real benefits, you must make a commitment to a regular program of it, say 20-30 minutes a day, with your doctor's approval. If you keep up with your exercise program, you will experience better capability and resilience when you are under stress in the future.

To speak with an EAP professional,  
or for TDD Access, please call:  
**866.598.3978**

