

# THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

*Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees*

**GUNDERSEN**  
**HEALTH SYSTEM®**  
*Where Caring Meets Excellence*

December 2023

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have related to their employees and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to EAP for a management consultation at (608) 775-4780 or (800) 327-9991.

Q. I suspect that the vast majority of nonalcoholic drinkers have been drunk at least once. Certainly, many nonalcoholic drinkers have stayed home or come to work with a hangover, even if others didn't notice. Has research documented the cost of hangovers?

A. The hangover has a unique and identifiable cost to business and industry. Both alcoholic and nonalcoholic drinkers may experience hangovers, although alcoholic drinkers may experience more of them. Most research has focused on the high cost of alcohol use in general. One credible study, however, reported in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* (2000; Vol. 132; pp 897-902) examined the hangover condition specifically. The goal was to convince fellow physicians that it was better to treat a hangover than teach patients a lesson by allowing them to suffer with it. But the study also examined related costs to business and industry. Costs associated with absenteeism and lowered productivity caused by alcohol-induced hangovers is about \$148 billion per year. Research showed that costs associated with hangovers are attributed mostly to nonalcoholic drinkers.

Q. Many employees in our company have a high-level security clearance. Some are reluctant to use EAP because they think it means they have sought psychiatric care. How can management encourage employees to use EAP and be less fearful?

A. Unfortunately many employees equate visiting EAP with seeking psychiatric care from a mental health professional. Although EAP sees employees for many different problems, the misperception that EAP is a psychiatric service is a common one. Licensed mental health professionals may hold positions as employee assistance professionals, but a visit to EAP is not tantamount to the acceptance of psychiatric care. The most sensitive government agencies in the United States, including the National Security Agency, the CIA and the FBI have an EAP. These programs have high utilization rates because the highest levels of management have repeatedly endorsed and supported use of the programs. You can do the same. Frequent endorsement and ongoing support by top management can help employees to overcome their reluctance to use the program.

Q: I like a quiet office environment and tend to stay to myself most of the day with the door shut. Some employees think I am too aloof as a supervisor. I tell employees they can interrupt me anytime. Can I help it if they don't speak up? What more can I do?

A: You say that you welcome interruptions by employees at anytime, but they are receiving a nonverbal message from your closed door that you do not like to be interrupted. Assurances that your door is still “open” will not likely change their conditioned response of not interrupting someone behind a closed door. As a result, employees will bring issues to your attention based upon their degree of importance, and they will eventually feel resentful that you are not proactive with them. Less important and personal concerns will not get the attention they deserve. Herein lies the hazard of keeping your door closed. A common problem in management is the failure to hear about and intervene with workplace problems early enough to be effective at resolving them. Being aloof-or being seen as aloof-virtually guarantees you will discover workplace problems later. This will increase the likelihood of a crisis or other loss.

Information contained in the FrontLine Supervisor is for general information purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. For specific guidance on handling individual employee problems, consult with your Employee Assistance Professional. Copyright by DFA Publishing & Consulting, LLC. All rights reserved.