

# The Successful Supervisor

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Tips from LifeSolutions<sup>SM</sup>  
Sandra Caffo, LCSW, MFT, CEAP

*Consulting with managers to support leadership development, performance management skills, and personal success is one of the key benefits of having an employee assistance program (EAP). Being able to speak with a consultant 24/7 when a challenging workplace situation arises can make the difference between developing and implementing a clear plan and creating unintended consequences which must then be dealt with. This month's issue provides some examples.*

*We are interested in your feedback. E-mail us your questions and comments to LifeSolutions at [ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com](mailto:ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com)*

***“An employee has come to me for a third time about her personal situation. I've suggested EAP each time with no results. I've done what I could, haven't I?”***

Many supervisors are reading this and nodding their heads in understanding. This is a common dilemma and is a good time to call EAP.

There are many variables which impact a person's readiness to reach out for help. Embarrassment or shame may be getting in the way of talking to a 'stranger' about what's going on. It may be that just dealing with the situation is draining energy, which makes it hard to take on something new like counseling ... even when it will help. Or, the person may have tried some things in the past and now believes there are no other options.

It is not the role of the supervisor to figure any of this out. However, it is the role of a supervisor to determine the best way to provide support. That's where EAP comes in. The goal of an EAP consultation is to assist the supervisor in using knowledge about the employee to develop a way to effectively respond as well as how to suggest EAP as a resource.

For example, Ann is very quiet at work and doesn't share much. The fact that she has come to her supervisor three times indicates a level of trust. The fact that she doesn't share much about herself may mean that her supervisor can only listen and respond with empathy such as "I'm so sorry that this is happening." The supervisor and the EAP consultant will look at the situation in detail and develop a number of possible approaches, one of which may be a scripted response.

EAP professionals are focused on the workplace; they have experience dealing with employees from diverse backgrounds and they will support you in using your talents to handle the situation well.

***“I'm at my wits end. This employee finds me no matter where I am to tell me the latest saga about what's going on at home. I've given out EAP information but it does no good. I'm about to tell this employee to leave me alone.”***

It can be frustrating to provide information or resources and not see an outcome. Add to that a feeling of being trapped and it's easy to understand the reaction of this supervisor. Reacting emotionally to a situation is another good example of when to call EAP. Having a

confidential place to vent whatever feelings are present can help clear the way for problem solving. One consultation outcome could be learning to set limits with this employee around when and how to approach the supervisor for assistance. A second outcome might address a way to listen to the employee that builds in an identified time frame and next steps. In doing so the supervisor establishes a way to manage personal needs while supporting the employee.

An additional outcome may include helping the supervisor explore other avenues of support available at work. Supervisors should not be the sole source of support at work. Employees concern for each other is a sign of a functioning work team and/or department. Highlighting and reinforcing employee concern for each other is an important role that successful supervisors play.

***“I don't want to begin any disciplinary action with this employee. I just want to nip the situation in the bud before it becomes a problem.”***

This is an excellent time for a consultation call to EAP. The earlier a problem is identified, the easier it is to address and the more likely it will be successfully dealt with.

In this type of call, the supervisor and EAP consultant will look in detail at what is currently going on as well as what led up to the present situation. Additionally, all that the supervisor has done and is considering doing will be explored. The goal of an EAP is to support the supervisor by using the supervisor's best ideas as a plan of action. The consultation will provide information, look at 'what ifs' to test the supervisor's ideas, and assist in fine-tuning ideas so that the supervisor ends the session with a clear sense of direction. Whether to and how to suggest using EAP to the employee will also be considered.

Consultation in any of these situations could involve a single phone call or ongoing sessions. There is no right or wrong number of sessions and every situation is different. The supervisor determines when she or he has what's needed after making the initial call.

Finally, as the *Successful Supervisor* frequently states, Human Resources is also available to you at any point along the way to help you deal with an employee concern. Knowing when to reach out is an important supervisor skill. Support and information is available to you so that you can support employees. It's important to know you are not alone. Give us a call.