



The Benefits of Employee Assistance Programs

By Rich Bayer, Ph.D.

When your employees enjoy positive emotional health, your company runs more efficiently. When your staff is happy, it shows in their work.

Dozens of scientific studies have proven this. The studies show that stressed, depressed, or substance-abusing employees lose some of their effectiveness, and therefore disrupt productivity in the workplace.

An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) helps to solve this problem. An EAP intervenes early with employees who are experiencing emotional distress and attempts to find a solution before the problem gets worse. Clearly, it's easier to treat an emotional problem when it's just starting than to wait until it's full-blown.

Also, the goal of the EAP is to minimize lost time from work. Without early intervention with an employee, the amount of time lost usually increases.

Four Benefits of EAPs

There are four key benefits to EAPs. They offer:

- 1) **Support for the Employer.** An EAP can help you manage a complex employee situation. If an employee has been struggling on the job, usually you would take him aside and ask what's happening. If he has an emotional outburst and smells of alcohol, you know there's a lot going on. Since his work performance is impaired, it could mean taking disciplinary action. But, if this otherwise very good employee is doing poorly at work because of life's pressures outside of the workplace, wouldn't it make sense to help him cope more effectively and restore his good work performance. In this case, an EAP counselor can help both you and the employee to deal with this situation and develop a plan that you both can agree on. This gives you another option, one that just might save a good employee and maintain his productivity.
- 2) **Support for the Employee.** When stress, distress, substance abuse, or depression takes hold, it begins to interfere with an employee's work. An EAP offers fast access to a confidential expert who can help. The EAP expert will help your employee figure out what's wrong and then provide support for the problem. This is the "assessment and triage" model. Assess the situation and find a solution.
- 3) **Preventive Care.** Generally, EAPs provide access to some education and on-site training. Topics include how to identify depression, negative stress, couples and family problems, and substance abuse problems, and what you can do about them.
- 4) **Emergency Consultation.** EAPs provide crisis counseling as needed. Imagine your place of business being robbed, or an employee being the victim of a serious accident. This type of trauma can impact the entire staff. Through your EAP, you can gain instant access

to a therapist who can come to your worksite and provide stress debriefing for the entire staff, thus reducing the likelihood of ongoing distress and impairment among all concerned.

What's the bottom line? While you do have to spend some money for an EAP, it can help you by:

- Reducing your health insurance costs through decreased use
- Reducing company downtime as employees miss less work
- Reducing the loss of productivity among distressed employees who make it to the job but work only at half speed
- Reduce morale problems caused by a dysfunctional employee

So actually an EAP can save you money.

If you're interested in working with an EAP, contact a couple of EAP providers and ask for bids. Generally your EAP arrangement will take the form of a contract with one of the providers. The EAP provider will agree to a certain number of services that your employees can access.

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