

Q A I suspect my employee may be drinking during lunch breaks. His performance hasn't slipped yet, but his breath sometimes smells of alcohol. Do I need to wait for a performance problem before referring him to the EAP?

The answer depends on your company's policies regarding alcohol and drug use in the workplace, and the type of work your employee does. For example, is any use of alcohol on duty a violation of the policy if no other signs, symptoms, or noticeable behavioral effects exist? Get clarification from your human resources advisor. You do not need to wait for a decline in performance to act, especially for safety-sensitive workers. You can confront the behavior of an employee having alcohol on their breath (which is considered sound workplace management practice), but this is addressed as a conduct issue. Why? The smell of alcohol can create discomfort, erode trust, and lead to tension among coworkers—even if the employee's output remains acceptable. Most workplace policies consider this a disruption of professional standards. Always remind employees of the availability of EAP services for any problem or concern that may be associated with conduct or performance. Remember, smelling alcohol is a concrete, defensible observation. It allows you to address the situation without speculating about causes or labeling the employee. Your HR will guide you with next steps to take, and you can also call EAP for guidance and support.

Q A I am a dedicated and very approachable supervisor. The proof is my door is always open to any employee. However, my manager thinks I am not an approachable person. She believes employees hesitate to come see me or share information. What does she mean? How do I use this feedback?

You need to know more about your manager's observations. Keeping an open door is commendable, and it shows you want to be accessible. However, your manager is referring to your approachability as an interpersonal experience. Employees can walk through your door, but how do they feel about it? What is their experience? Are employees reading your tone, facial expressions, body language, or communication style as unwelcoming, impatient, or even intimidating? When this happens, employees will shy away. Many risks then follow. They may bring you problems late instead of early, if at all, and your team may find ways to work around you rather than with you. The good news is that the skills of approachability, including empathy, active listening, emotional awareness, and warmth in communication, can be learned and strengthened. Talk with an EAP professional to explore this feedback further and get practical guidance. The bottom line: Even the most dedicated leaders sometimes need to bridge the gap between how they see themselves and how others experience them.

Q A My employee is telling me she is unhappy with her career and wants to go back to school to learn a different profession. Ultimately, I wish her the best in whatever she pursues, but I don't want to lose her. Can the EAP help an employee like this one? I wonder if something else is going on.

It is often the case that a top performer who feels unfulfilled is struggling in ways that go deeper than career dissatisfaction. Recommend the EAP based on the employee's expressed concerns about dissatisfaction and life direction, rather than assuming a hidden issue exists. Frame the referral as a supportive opportunity to explore goals, values, and next steps with a professional. Depression, anxiety, chronic stress, and other conditions can profoundly... *[Continued]*



{Continued} ...affect how a person views life, choices, and the future. What feels like career regret may reflect something clinical that is influencing her overall outlook. This does not mean her feelings are not real or valid. It means they deserve a proper, professional look before any major life decisions are made. Try this approach: "I've noticed something may be weighing on you lately, and I want you to know the EAP is a completely confidential resource that has helped many people work through situations like this." That is enough. Plant the seed with warmth and without pressure.

Due to his argumentative demeanor, I recommended my employee visit the EAP. I'm tired of the bickering. He claimed the counselor agreed that I'm the problem. I'm ignoring this and still expect him to change. Is this the right approach?



Stay focused on the goal of helping the employee improve his performance, regardless of what was allegedly said at the EAP. The EAP exists to help employees return to a satisfactory level of performance, not to referee workplace disagreements. That said, maintain documentation of the employee's conduct, attendance, quality of work, and any other relevant factors, along with his response to constructive feedback. Follow your organization's performance improvement plan process as needed. It may also be appropriate to make a formal EAP referral based on performance issues. This would include a release of information to align communication between you, the employee, and the EAP around the same performance expectations. The result is less confusion from secondhand claims and a clearer focus on expectations and outcomes.

I promoted one of my best performers, and within weeks she was struggling badly. I assume it's a skill gap, not a personal problem, so why would I involve the EAP?



The assumption that a sudden performance decline in a newly promoted employee must be a skill gap is understandable, but it is still an assumption. Start by asking your employee how she is adapting to her new role, particularly around any struggles she's experiencing. Suggest she contact the EAP if she believes something personal may be affecting her work. A formal referral is also an option if performance concerns are urgent. The moment you conclude this is a skill issue rather than a personal one, you have made a diagnostic determination that could lead to years of frustration for both of you as you work to improve performance without addressing the real cause. New promotions bring new pressures: higher expectations, a different peer group, and sometimes a shift in identity as the old role is left behind. Any of these stressors can surface or intensify personal problems that were previously manageable, such as anxiety, relationship stress, alcohol use, or depression. There is no reliable way to know which factor is at play without the help of the EAP.

Continued EAP Challenge for the top Supervisors, Managers, and HR Professionals:

Your organization has received new EAP brochures with a Company Passcode to access **My Stress Tools** – a new suite of helpful tools on our website to manage stress. **Your homework:**

- (1) Go to the EAP website either by scanning the QR code on the new brochure or going to <https://eapacific.com/employees/my-stress-tools.html>;
- (2) Register for My Stress Tools (call us if you need your organization's Passcode, it's also on the new brochure);
- (3) Take the Stress Profiler and discover what small thing(s) you could do to reduce your stress this year;
- (4) Start doing that; and
- (5) Promote this to your employees so they reduce their stress and burnout and have a better year!

Your stressed employees probably won't do much if you don't believe it will help. Using **one small free tool** to reduce YOUR stress will help them be much more likely to take advantage of your experience and recommendations!



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