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## **Benefits of Using an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**

Many businesses and industries, both large and small, recognize the importance of employee wellness and what results if employees have problems inside or outside of the work environment. Sometimes other work, family, or home life problems interfere with job performance at the work site. When job performance is poor, the employee and the employer suffer.

Employee Assistance Programs or EAPs are designed as an information and referral service to assist employees and their families with problems that interfere with work or home life. It's about wellness and work performance. The employer will assume the costs, making it a free service to the employee. It is part of their benefits package. It is a way to assist an employee and/or their families to seek services for a variety of problems without the employer having to know any personal information about the problem. The employer cannot require an employee to use the EAP, but can only suggest it.

An example of the use of an EAP is a 44 year old male that had been recently appointed as a new supervisor to some of the former line employees that he knew very well. He reported that he was not receiving enough help and was thinking that the newly hired employees were not "catching on fast enough." He was experiencing more work stress and stated that when he gets confronted he gets defensive and makes rude comments to others. His supervisor suggested he utilize the company's EAP.

Another example is a 24 year old female presenting with depression symptoms, thinking that nobody cares about her. She cites conflicts with a parent, another friend, and her boyfriend. She claimed to be controlling at times with others, with jealousy and possessiveness toward her boyfriend. She denied suicidal plans and claimed that she wouldn't end her life, but was wondering about her purpose in life. She sought assistance with her company's EAP on her own, as she knew of the program being part of her benefits package with the employer.

In both examples, the employees were struggling with some aspects of their life, either at work or personally outside of work. The employer expects the very best job performance from each employee. Their role is to ensure that employees are doing the best job possible at the work site. They are watching productivity and guiding the work flow. Their role is not to monitor behavioral or chemical health, legal issues, marital problems, gambling issues, or financial problems, etc. It is not to say that they aren't concerned about these issues, but their role is to monitor job performance. If an employee's job performance is down, they may suggest a referral to an EAP professional. The referral could come from the supervisor or human resources department, or simply be a self-referral.

An appointment with an EAP Provider can be made simply by calling the telephone number made available to them. The appointment will be scheduled usually within three working days or the same day if it is an emergency. Once at the appointment the EAP Provider will listen, assess the issues presented, help create a plan of action, and make a referral if necessary. The EAP Provider may meet with the employee between one and three times for assessment and short term assistance. If further assistance is needed, a referral for more services or other resources may be made. The EAP Provider may give up to three options for other resources from which to choose.

Some of the types of problems that an EAP Provider can help with or refer include marital/relationship, family/parenting, depression, grief and loss, anxiety and stress, alcohol or other substance abuse, gambling problems, self-esteem, financial stress, legal problems, job stress, career concerns, and others.

Employee Assistance Programs present as Win-Win-Win for all involved. The employee gets assistance with personal issues in their life, the employer gets an employee who is more productive without having to be intrusive, and the EAP Provider is able to assess problems and provide care in their area of specialty.

The South Central Human Relations Center provides several EAPs for businesses and industries in the surrounding area of southern Minnesota either directly or subcontracting with larger EAP Providers. All of the EAP Providers at SCHRC are experienced and licensed mental health professionals with licenses either in Psychology, Marriage and Family Therapy, Social Work, or a related field.

*Editor's note: Mark Skrien is a Licensed Psychologist, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, and Clinical Director at the South Central Human Relations Center.*

