Many employees are now working remotely. Is it appropriate to offer tips and guidance on being productive at home, even if those ideas involve me telling the worker how to engage with family members to keep them from undermining productivity?

Supervising remote workers may have suddenly become more commonplace throughout the world, but it is nothing new. The supervisor-supervisee relationship is unique in each circumstance, so the relationship and quality of communication established with your employee should guide your discussions and the degree to which you offer directive guidance in dealing with work problems at home that may be attributed to family members. The last thing you should do is offer guidance or tips that pit the worker against his or her family. This is one battle you won’t win. When you sense family members are non-supportive or distracting to productivity, consider recommending the EAP. Resist invitations to process the employee’s frustrations and conflicts with family members. BUT general tips about workflow, meeting objectives, managing time, getting things done, and overcoming distractions are all fair-game topics for supervisors.

Recently, we laid off quite a few staff because of financial difficulties in the company. It has created a fairly significant grief reaction among surviving workers. How can our work unit manage this grief reaction?

After a layoff, surviving employees will experience stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance). Helping managers understand how these stages manifest among the workforce can enable them to respond more effectively to employees. EAP education for supervisors about on-the-job behaviors exhibited by downsizing survivors can also help them respond appropriately and offer referrals to the EAP if necessary. Not all employees will be in the same stage of grief at the same time. While some will focus their anger on management, particularly upper management, and will distrust supervisors, other employees will experience anxiety and fear that they are next, stress, burnout, insecurity, and decreased morale. Give employees space, time, and opportunity to talk. Communication—plenty of it and opportunity for it—is crucial for the healing process. Consistent with this need, team building can be helpful after a layoff to bring employees closer together, along with resiliency training to empower employees to cope better with future layoffs.

As a new supervisor, I feel new stresses I have never experienced before. I know I have the skills for this job, but the anxiety keeps me from enjoying it. Can the EAP help me be calmer, focused, and deliberate in how I approach all the required new skills managers must employ, or should I get a coach?

As a new supervisor experiencing worry and strain, you may benefit from a two-track approach. This would include getting a coach or supervision mentor, but also working periodically and confidentially with the EAP, where you can share what is more deeply personal about your experience and fears. The EAP can help you gain insight and acquire new skills related to communication; examine prior coping skills for managing problems in your life and learn new ones; and learn about self-awareness, relationship development, stress management, managing the experience of feeling overwhelmed, and dealing with self-doubts.

I have an employee who, after time off, is thinking about a career change. How can the EAP assist with this?

Presumably, you do not wish to lose this valuable worker. The EAP is a voluntary resource, of course, but it does not mean you can’t encourage this employee to visit the EAP and discuss his or her decision. It’s confidential, it’s free, and it might yield information that helps the worker avoid overlooking easily resolved issues that could lead to retention, improved job satisfaction, and obvious cost savings to the employer. Although the EAP may not be able to disclose the true reasons for an employee’s departure, organizational issues affecting the departing worker could apply to other employees who are at risk of leaving. With permission, these larger issues might be
shared with the organization, and this could hasten the implementation of new policies or administrative considerations to resolve them. This would positively affect the bottom line.

**Can I make a formal supervisor referral of an employee who has anxiety about COVID-19 but is ambivalent about reaching out to the EAP?**

Formal supervisor referrals to an EAP are always based on job performance, so you may wish to consult with the EAP to discuss this situation prior to your next step. The key would be to identify the performance issue that makes a formal referral appropriate. Is your employee behaving in a way that interferes with productivity? A formal referral is conceivable if anxiety prompts the employee to repeatedly spend unacceptable amounts of time engaging with coworkers and interfering with their work. A strongly encouraged self-referral may be all it takes, but let the EAP help you with the proper approach or dialogue for doing it. Formally referring employees to the EAP for problems unrelated to performance can cause concern among employees and unwittingly encourage them to hide symptoms of their personal problems.

**What is the most important consideration to keep in mind when meeting with an employee to correct behavior or performance so the employee is cooperative, appreciative, and motivated to change?**

The manner in which you speak to employees when confronting them about their performance plays a big role in facilitating cooperation and correcting their problems. Speaking down to the employee will elicit one type of response. Speaking “up” to the employee will elicit another. So approach any problem as though both you and the employee have a stake in its resolution, and as though it is a problem you mutually desire to resolve. This does not mean you as a supervisor will resolve it. It is still the employee's responsibility to correct non-compliant performance. However, this “mutual desire approach” aids cooperation, motivation, and focus. And it decreases defensiveness. This approach does not minimize the importance or severity of the problem. Share with employees that the EAP is a resource to help them find the solution and obtaining a signed release of consent from the employee in the case of a formal referral is a way to facilitate appropriate communication.

---

**Kepro’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**

The Employee Assistance Program through Kepro assists organizations and their workforce in managing the personal challenges that impact employee well-being, performance and effectiveness. Kepro's life management consultants employ a comprehensive approach that identifies issues impacting the employee and assists them in developing meaningful solutions.

The Employee Assistance Program can be accessed anytime, for free, confidential support from a professional consultant or online resource. Call or log on today.

**Phone:** 1.800.424.1749

**Website:** [www.EAPhelplink.com](http://www.EAPhelplink.com)

**Company Code:** USNH

_Solutions is a newsletter for managers, supervisors and human resource staff eligible for Kepro services. Kepro EAP services provide assistance and guidance to supervisors dealing with workplace performance issues. This newsletter is intended for general information purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health professional. Individuals should follow the policies and procedures laid out by their human resource management department concerning use of the EAP. Some articles reprinted with permission from DFA Publishing and Consulting, LLC. Kepro, Harrisburg, PA. All rights reserved._