I know the EAP is confidential, but when I attempted to refer my employee recently he resisted, saying that he didn’t trust the program. I feel stuck with this excuse. How should I respond? Should I permit or recommend another source of assistance?

You should recommend only the EAP. An established EAP is the only official source of help for personal problems that your organization permits you to officially recommend. No other source of help will include key activities that make EAPs work successfully. Recommending another source of help would also be a mistake because it would invite problems and issues associated with lack of accountability and problematic communication. Only your EAP operates with the proper understanding of how to help employees, interface with supervisors, control access to information, follow up, intervene with problems during follow-up, direct employees to proper resources, or re-motivate employees, if necessary. EAPs follow confidentiality laws and communication procedures that typically are more stringent than those of community resources. Contact your HR or IMPACT representative directly for more advice on how to address your employee’s concerns around confidentiality.

I have an employee who does not participate in any after-hour activities that the other employees attend. She’s a great performer, but I tend to think more highly of employees who join in the fun. Should I inquire about why she does not join in? Maybe there’s a personal problem.

Employees who do not participate in social activities are often judged harshly for what appears to be their avoidant or “antisocial” style by those who feel annoyed or rejected by their absence. Typically, these employees do not actually demonstrate behaviors associated with mental health issues involving social avoidance and they maintain a good work/life balance. They may have close and valued relationships away from work that more effectively meet their needs. Many dedicated workers won’t see potential gains in undirected social activity. Some prefer closer, more intimate associations and are unmoved by peer pressure to join in other social opportunities. Some employees simply prefer their own company and the solitude of their creative thoughts. Try sharing how much you would personally like this employee to join you and the group. Emphasize the creativity or new ideas that often emerge in a less pressured setting, and share how much others would value his or her company. This direct invitation may break the ice. Be prepared to reinforce with the employee that there are no negative consequences for opting out of after-hour socializing.
Respect and civility are still an important part of the workplace. You must assert your authority with an employee who is disrespectful. Meet with your employee and list incidents that are unacceptable. State that the behaviors will incur consequences if the disrespect continues. Your employee may claim that he is not being disrespectful, but you’ll need to define the standards of behavior and expect change. You will probably be successful in correcting this behavior in one meeting because most employees heed direct messages of this sort. The EAP can help, but don’t let these behaviors continue too long before making a referral. Review the “Coaching for Improved Performance” guide under Management Tools when you log in to www.MyIMPACTSolution.com (password = Manager), and if the behavior continues, reach out to your HR or IMPACT Representative to discuss formally referring your employee to the EAP.

Did the EAP fail to work if performance problems remained after the employee went to the program and cooperated with the EAP? What’s next now that problems remain?

Not every employee referred to the EAP will resolve personal problems or performance issues. Still, EAPs serve the valuable purpose of giving you another alternative to tolerating or terminating troubled employees. Ideally, employees should return to prior levels of performance or even better, but even if not, the program still worked as a service for the employee and as a management tool for you to intervene. You should make a decision about your next step. The EAP cannot advise you about what this administrative reaction should be, but let the EAP know about the status of your employee regardless of your decision so it can evaluate the employee further. Unless some agreement with your employee exists, nothing precludes making another supervisor referral. Your employee assistance program worked as intended, but employees are in control of whether they use its services and benefit from them. Reach out to your HR or IMPACT Representative to strategize about next steps in addressing ongoing performance issues.

My employee argues with me in ways that I would not have dreamt of when I was his age 25 years ago. What can I do about a disrespectful employee? Is this part of the “transformational” world we live in, or do I need to be more assertive?

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I referred my employee to the EAP for performance issues, but was asked, “What will the EAP do or say to me?” I know the EAP helps employees, but I couldn’t be specific. I think the employee is worried about sharing too much with the EAP.

Most employees do not realize that EAPs do not treat employees psychologically and only interview as much as needed to ascertain the true nature of the problem, with the goal of getting the employee to the right source of help. This is a critical distinction that can help employees feel more willing to go for help. Assessment and referral are the operative terms. EAPs who would attempt a long-term treatment relationship or in-depth clinical examination of an employee’s issues risk having other employees who are friends of a client become fearful that they too would be probed too personally about their problems. All this is good information for your employee to know. EAPs know how to interview properly to gather only the necessary information. Set the expectation with your employee that they are in control of the information they choose to share, and they do not have to reveal anything that makes them uncomfortable or that they are concerned about sharing.