



Boosting Productivity

How providing EAP services can help improve employee performance

As an employer, you may see your employees simply as workers, hired to help you achieve an end.

But they are real people, with lives and problems outside of work, and those challenges could impact their productivity on the job, says Greg Banks, HealthLink EAP account manager.

“Whether you like it or not, your employees’ personal lives follow them inside your property line every single day and affect their ability to do their jobs,” says Banks. “If you ignore that, that’s your choice, but it’s not what’s real.”

What is an EAP?

EAPs are not a new concept. Beginning in the late 1970s, most large companies had internal EAPs that mostly focused on alcohol and drug use. Today, most EAPs are through an external vendor provider program and there is a much broader scope in the service menu. They still do alcohol and drug counseling, but from an employer perspective, the benefit is about productivity.

An EAP provides employees who are facing a challenge in their personal lives with a resource that they can easily access to help them solve that problem, so they can be where they are supposed to be at work, doing what they are supposed to be doing, and doing it safely and with full presence of mind.

From an employer perspective, if someone has a cocaine problem, it is in some ways no different than someone who has a childcare problem. If the result is that they are not at their job, getting the job done safely and in the way that it is supposed to be done, the bottom line to the employer is the same. And that’s where the EAP comes in. It’s about risk management and employee productivity.

They’ve become the norm at large organizations, but they have also made the leap into mid-sized and smaller organizations.

Is it costly for an employer to offer this service?

No. It's very inexpensive, less than \$2 per employee per month.

The service menu is very deep, offering legal, financial, childcare, elder care, drug and alcohol counseling, etc., but the services are capped. The EAP provider is responsible, for example, for four counseling sessions, but it doesn't have to put the employee in the hospital and pay those bills. That is the responsibility of the health plan. There is a limit on those benefits, so it is a fairly constrained risk.

The other factor keeping the cost low is the Internet. EAPs can deliver more services to more employees with fewer people because of the electronic tools available today.

Can an employer mandate that an employee seek help through an EAP?

Ninety-eight percent of the time, it is the employee or a household member who initiates contact. However, it is also an option for employers to coordinate EAP services with corrective action or a performance improvement plan to help someone save his or her job. For example, if someone has a problem and that person's performance has deteriorated, the employer, in the process of dealing with this person, can bring in the EAP, which can case manage that situation with that employee for a period of time.

What would you say to employers who say their employees' personal lives should remain private?

First, the service is confidential. While the employer will get a report stating which services were accessed and how often, it will not know who accessed them. The CEO won't be able to distinguish the CFO from the newest hire in the report.

Second, all you're doing is giving people who are having problems a way to get some help so that they can continue to be at work and be able to do their jobs. Rather than sending employees home if they are having a problem and leave them wondering what they should do, the EAP gives them a path. And when that path is sanctioned by the employer, it gains legitimacy in people's minds.

The employer is acting as a vetting service, saying these are good resources, you can trust them and they are legitimate and credible resources. That makes it easier for people to take that first step and seek the help they need.

When an employee calls the EAP, how does the process work?

The nice thing about an EAP is that it's not just one service or another. For example, say a woman has small children, is caring for elderly parents and is feeling overwhelmed. That person might want to see someone face-to-face for support and clarification about why they are waking up at 3 a.m. and why they are yelling at the kids.

But she may also benefit from assistance related to elderly care services, so there's an elderly care consultant brought in. She may also need assistance with after-school activities for the kids, and maybe some financial planning to work on a budget that has been challenging for her. There is not a boundary on how many different kinds of services the employee can choose when she picks up the phone and calls.

If someone is really not doing well in life, an EAP is a great front door, a way to access critical services for mental health issues, drug and alcohol problems and other life challenges. For a very small investment in EAP services, an employer can help employees live happier, healthier, more productive lives.

