

BENEFITS



EAPs worth the investment

Text by Kathleen Greer

Employee assistance programs (EAP) help to keep employees and managers productive by helping with personal and professional concerns that might otherwise interfere with on-the-job performance.

A good EAP costs less than 1 percent of health insurance while offering myriad work-life services. Yet, unlike health insurance, you hope that employees and family members access the EAP frequently. When problems are left to fester, they usually get worse.

Over the course of a year, at least 50 percent of a work force should have some contact with its EAP, either through face-to-face counseling, telephone counseling, crisis intervention, onsite wellness events or website visits.

To get this much use, an EAP must be proactive. If it is not constantly in front of employees, they may forget that the EAP is standing by to assist with personal and work concerns. Employees can use the EAP for such issues as burnout, elder care, child care and legal and

financial issues.

Having a low-profile EAP plan in place can be worse than having no EAP at all. When an EAP keeps a low profile, it means that employees won't access help when they need it, or they may get caught up in voice prompts or receive inadequate care when they connect.

A strong EAP works closely with HR to promote the service and comes onsite frequently in order to stay visible to all employees. What do you look for when searching for a high-touch EAP?

- Ask your networks for the best EAPs in the local area.

- Check references and find out about whether the EAP is proactive. Does the EAP come onsite? Are they proactive in providing utilization reports? Are their utilization rates strong?

- Have a face-to-face meeting with several EAP vendors and get a feel for their personal touch.

- Make sure that the EAP is willing to have regular wellness meetings with you and your other vendors. This way, you can formulate

an overall wellness plan that will impact your total population.

- Look at the comprehensiveness of the services. Do they have nutrition counseling? Fitness consultation? Financial and legal help? Child and elder care?

- Try out the website and see if it is rich with content.

- Test out the EAP by calling with a test case. This way, you get a sense about how the telephone is answered and how comprehensive the approach might be.

Managers need to be trained on how to suggest the EAP to a troubled employee, and might also need support of their own when managing difficult situations. Most managers who have worked with a strong EAP never want to be without them.

Having a proactive, high-impact EAP is a win-win benefit for companies and employees.

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