

# Solving Problems at Work Should Include Support for Employees & Guidance for Supervisors

## Balance Support with Education

**Counselling has been around forever.** It can be formal and provided by an accredited professional or it can be informal and provided by caring friends and family members who support each other and give advice. The latter usually occurs in comfortable social settings and often over a beverage (coffee or tea is suggested instead of wine, beer or spirits).

The business world has taken advantage of counselling services to offer them as one of the many benefits in their employee packages, recruitment strategies and methods to improve productivity. The terminology to define employee counselling services is Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) or Employee & Family Assistance Programs (EFAP). The premise is to offer a set number of counselling sessions and services to employees and their dependent family members. The intent is to help employees solve problems, reduce stress and improve coping strategies so they can be successful at work and in their personal lives.

The EAP is an easy pitch to sell when businesses understand the benefits, features and return on investment (ROI) when purchasing these services for their company and staff.

### **Competitive Advantage**

The reduction of stress will enable your staff to be more courteous, creative, and able to concentrate longer. This will give you a significant advantage in today's competitive and rapidly changing market.

### **Absenteeism**

15% of the work force causes 90% of absenteeism. Emotional factors account for 61% of time lost through absenteeism. Statistics Canada reports that the typical employee is absent 8 days per year. Their studies also show that absenteeism costs the employer 1.75% of an absent employee's wages. Companies spend 5.6% of their payroll on absenteeism.

### **Productivity**

The Canadian Mental Health Association estimates that 10% to 15% of employees have severe personal problems. The work performance of these employees is at least 35% below normal. The reduced productivity of troubled employees costs companies 3.5% to 5% of payroll.

An employee with problems disrupts the working environment of others. The effects of one employee's problems on the productivity of co-workers are considerable, but difficult to measure.

### **Turnover**

Only 15% of terminations are the result of employees' inability to perform their job function. Personal and interpersonal factors account for 65% to 80% of all terminations. The EAP helps employees resolve personal and interpersonal problems before termination is necessary.

### **Disability**

Stress contributes to 85% of accidents. An EAP will reduce the stress of your workforce. This will reduce the claims and rates of your extended health care and short term disability plans. Your long-term disability rates should also be reduced as a result of the lower risk of your employees.

### **Others**

Personal problems contribute significantly to tardiness, theft, arson and fraud. Stress adversely affects physical health and quality of life.

### **Analysis**

If 5% of your employees used the EAP the potential monetary savings would be 3.45% of payroll for reduced absenteeism and improved productivity from problem employees. The savings from these areas alone justify the cost of 0.14% of payroll.

Source: <http://www.benefits.org/coverage/health-care/employee-assistance?showall=&start=1>

**Unfortunately, the usage rates of EAP benefits are much lower than companies anticipate.** There is frustration because help is available but employees do not access the services as much as they could or should.

**There are a few reasons to explain why these obviously great benefits are utilized far less than the dental benefits.** And who wants to go to a dentist? Clients who I work with report three common barriers:

#### **1. Zero trust**

Confidentiality is a challenge because clients are concerned with who will know they are attending and if details are shared. They also

struggle with how to hide their absence when they leave work for a counselling appointment.

## 2. Big stigma

There is great discomfort with the idea that “I might be crazy”. There is huge fear that others will find out. The stigma that comes with mental health problems is alive and well. It is no wonder silence is still a common form of coping.

## 3. Who knew?

The first day of employment usually includes fear, excitement and overwhelm. The benefits list is the last thing new staff remember. When these benefits are forgotten, most people will not think to walk into HR's office to ask and get the contact information.

One or a combination of these barriers mean staff will not seek help, support and assistance when it is needed most. In addition, HR and managers do not freely talk about EAP or advertise it for fear of being discriminatory, judgemental or in violation of a policy that protects employees' rights and privacy. This leaves EAP benefits underused and the ROI minimal because staff continue to struggle.

As a therapist and consultant, I get to witness both sides of this problem. I help clients when they wait too long to come in for counselling and might already be regularly missing work or on a medical leave. I hear from companies how they spend thousands of dollars and do not see or benefit from the purchase of an EAP.

**Many of my clients report workplace problems and describe the root of the problem is poor communication or a bad boss.** Employees feel frustration, stress and anger when their supervisors treat them poorly. Often these emotions escalate to anxiety attacks, lack of concentration and physical symptoms (i.e. headaches, stomach problems, neck/shoulder stiffness, etc.).

**In situations like this, it seems that helping employees with communication, stress management and assertiveness is not enough. It is also necessary to help the supervisors become better communicators and bosses.**

**To resolve both sides of this problem, it is important to combine counselling help for employees with consulting help for managers.** So how will a program like this make EAP's better used and more effective?

**1. Increase trust with a common provider**

When I offer counselling to staff as well as consulting to management, both sides feel confident with a neutral, unbiased professional helping each in a fair and equitable manner.

**2. Improve attendance with communication options**

Counselling and coaching services should be available in person or via distance. Even if clients are a block down the street, some people prefer support by video, on-line or telephone. These methods reduce fears of identification, labelling or needing to hide time off for appointments.

**3. Enhance independence with tools and strategies**

When I provide therapy for staff or consulting for management, it is not enough to only work on the current problem and get to a solution. It is essential to improve people's abilities by teaching tools, skills and strategies so they can independently tackle future challenges with confidence.

**I call a program like this the Employee Assistance/Management Consulting (EA/MC) program.** I believe that people should not be in therapy or coaching long term. When situational problems and issues are managed with a combination of counselling and consulting, then companies will see good usage of the benefits. The ROI will be evident when trust increases, there is no stigma to ask for help and staff feel like a team in problem management.



If you want to learn more about the EA/MC Program [click here](#). If you are ready to implement a successful and well used program in your company, contact us at [pam@pampaquet.com](mailto:pam@pampaquet.com) or 204-415-5858.