

Q One of my employees has been verbally abused by a customer, and she is pretty shaken up. I think she'll get over it. It happens to all of us periodically, but what are some tips for responding and deciding whether to encourage her to contact the EAP/PAP?

A Give her a little more credit than “she'll get over it” — what she's feeling right now is a normal reaction to something that genuinely wasn't okay. The best thing you can do is sit down with her privately and just let her talk about what happened, without brushing past it. It's common to feel shaken, anxious, or angry afterward, or to have trouble sleeping or shaking the memory of it for a while — that's a normal stress response, not a sign something's wrong with her. It doesn't automatically mean she needs to call the EAP/PAP, but letting her know that option is there can go a long way. This kind of thing can hit a little differently here, too — a lot of our workforce is in tourism and other customer-facing jobs, so an incident like this can stir up other tough interactions from the past. If she's still struggling after a few days, or it starts affecting her work, that's the point where you'd want to more directly suggest she reach out to the EAP or PAP.

Q I had an employee tell me she didn't feel life was worth living anymore and I panicked and didn't know how to respond. What should supervisors do when they wonder if an employee is suicidal?

A September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, so good timing! Finding that middle ground between panicking and nonchalance when an employee sounds suicidal is a skill most managers struggle with. It's important to watch for warning signs and concerning statements, and respond appropriately. One key point, often overlooked, is to STAY with them until your concerns are answered. It's okay to ask “Are you okay?” or “That sounds like you may be thinking about suicide” to an employee you're concerned about. Listen to their response and check for a plan. Then your options range from calling EAP to involving HR to calling 911 depending on what the employee tells you. Our [Employee Newsletter](#) for this month can help, as can our Supervisor Flyers on [Suicide Prevention](#) and [If Someone Is Talking About Suicide](#). You always have EAP/PAP available 24/7 if you have questions or concerns.

Q Some of my younger employees tend to disclose personal, private things to me. They seem to have no boundaries when it comes to sharing their mental health or relationship challenges. What can I do?

A Many supervisors these days have a similar problem. They want to be helpful and appreciate when their employees are honest and open with them; but then they find themselves playing “counselor” or backing off on discipline or performance issues as they don't want to escalate the employee's problems. The best advice is that it's okay to listen without judgment; but then ask how this is impacting their work. Point them toward the EAP/PAP instead of trying to fix it yourself or giving relationship/therapy/medication advice. Crossing the line usually results in blurred boundaries and overinvolvement that leads to greater management challenges. We have a [flyer](#) on this that can help remind you what to do.

Q I have a young employee with great ideas and initiative, but he lacks organizational awareness. Recently, he took an idea directly to our vice president without telling me or my director, making us look uninformed. How do I correct this without discouraging his initiative? Could the EAP or PAP help?

Sounds like you've got a sharp employee who just hasn't learned the ropes yet — that's pretty normal, especially for someone



newer to the workforce. Reading the room and knowing how ideas are supposed to move through an organization takes time to pick up. Getting blindsided by your VP is frustrating, no doubt, but try not to let that overshadow the good stuff — his initiative and ideas are genuinely worth having, and you want him to keep bringing them. Just be direct with him: tell him you love the thinking, and here's how it needs to go next time — through you first. In a smaller place like Hawaii, where everybody in an industry tends to know everybody, that kind of misstep gets noticed fast, so it's worth taking seriously now rather than later. Skip the lecture about office politics — just walk him through who needs to be looped in and when it's actually appropriate to go straight to leadership. If this keeps happening, that's a good one to bring to the EAP/PAP — they can help him build those communication skills.

Frontline Supervisor



I referred two employees to the EAP/PAP because of ongoing conflict. I realize that my missteps in managing these workers may have allowed their relationship to worsen. What are the most common mistakes supervisors make when dealing with employees who can't get along?

Honestly, most supervisors trip up on the same few things here. The biggest one is trying to play peacemaker — sitting the two down and hoping they'll hash it out and go back to being friendly. Grown adults with real workplace friction usually don't work that way. Another trap is turning into a counselor yourself: trying to figure out who's really at fault, or getting pulled into endless conversations about feelings and history. That's not your role, and it can actually make things messier. Playing favorites — even unintentionally, because one person is easier to talk to — is another common one. And don't expect the EAP or PAP to swoop in and fix it for good; that's not really how it works. What actually gets people to change is you being clear and consistent that the conflict has to stop, and being specific about what you expect from both of them going forward.



What is the difference between using the EAP/PAP as an alternative to discipline and using it as a substitute for discipline?

There's a real difference here, and it matters. When you use the EAP or PAP as an alternative to discipline, you're telling the employee, "I have grounds to discipline you, but I'd rather help you turn this around first." They still know that if the performance issues continue, discipline is still on the table — you haven't taken it off, you've just added another option. Using the EAP/PAP as a substitute for discipline is a different story. That's when a supervisor sends someone to the EAP/PAP because they don't want to deal with the harder conversation about discipline. The problem is, employees pick up on that. It sends a confusing message and makes the EAP/PAP look like a consequence instead of a resource — and it can actually make them less motivated to fix the real problem. It also doesn't get you off the hook: you're still responsible for managing performance either way. The EAP or PAP can help with what's going on underneath, but it's not a stand-in for you doing your job as a supervisor.

Continued EAP/PAP Challenge for the top Supervisors, Managers, and HR Professionals:

Your organization has received new EAP/PAP brochures with a Company Passcode to access **My Stress Tools** — a new suite of helpful tools on our website to manage stress. **Your homework:**

- (1) Go to the EAP website either by scanning the QR code on the new brochure or going to <https://eapacific.com/employees/my-stress-tools.html>;
- (2) Register for My Stress Tools (call us if you need your organization's Passcode, it's also on the new brochure);
- (3) Take the Stress Profiler and discover what small thing(s) you could do to reduce your stress this year;
- (4) Start doing that; and (5) Promote this so your team reduces their stress and burnout and has a better year!

Your stressed employees probably won't do much if you don't believe it will help. Using **one small free tool** to reduce YOUR stress will help them be much more likely to take advantage of your experience and recommendations!



Employee Assistance of the Pacific
1600 Kapiolani Blvd., Suite 1610 Honolulu, HI 96814

FrontLine Supervisor is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. Gender usage in questions is randomly assigned. ©2026 DFA Publishing & Consulting, LLC. For specific guidance on handling individual employee problems, consult with your EA professional by calling (808) 597-8222 or toll-free (877) 597-8222.

