Employees benefit from financial & legal EAP services

For many, 2009 was a rough year financially. And, we know financial experts are predicting a slow economic recovery. As an employer, you have an employee assistance program to help employees with mental and behavioral health issues. But did you know EASE@Work can assist employees with financial and legal issues, too?

A trained counselor can help untangle a complex web of emotions regarding money and spending, and assist your employee in discovering ways to ease the emotional and physical manifestations of financial stress. But, in addition to traditional counseling, financial and/or legal consultation can be just as important.

If you knew someone were experiencing frequent migraines or dizzy spells, you would suggest they seek medical help. When we notice symptoms of a physical problem, most of us don’t hesitate to see a doctor, undergo tests and start treatment. When financial health is suffering, however, most people generally hesitate to seek help, even though current research shows that financial stress significantly affects physical and emotional well-being.

For example, one study found more than half of respondents (51%) were under moderate financial stress, 23% reported severe stress and 12% experienced overwhelming financial stress, although nearly one-quarter (23%) of respondents earned above $50,000 (Negative Health Effects of Financial Stress, by O’Neill, Sorhaindo, Xiao and Garman, 2005.)

In addition, the same study showed 82.5% of the sample said financial stress affected their health, citing ailments that included depression, headaches, insomnia, digestive problems, high blood pressure and appetite disorders. But often, people don’t realize that their physical problems are caused by stress from financial issues…and all of these issues have an impact on employee productivity.

An experienced financial counselor can help employees take an honest look at a particular situation in order to figure out the causes of financial problems and then coach them toward making better day-to-day choices. Research by Virginia Tech personal finance professor Thomas Garman shows that employees who take advantage of financial counseling get results: 75% reported making better financial decisions; 56% said their financial situation improved.

You will find that some of your employees’ financial problems may be situational, such as a divorce, a death in the family, unexpected health care expenses, job duty/shift changes or identity theft. Often, these financial issues may have a legal element, where consulting concurrently with a legal advisor might be helpful to the situation. And, both financial and legal problems may arise out of certain behaviors, meaning they are rooted in other problems and require a change in thinking and action to fix the problem.

Sometimes legal and financial issues are a result of a combination of events or behaviors that feed on one another, such as less hours on the job, leading to inappropriate use of credit and unhealthy coping behaviors—for example, excessive eating or drinking—which is yet another reason to promote EASE@Work services for employees who may have financial or legal concerns.

With financial and physical/emotional health clearly linked, treating problems in both areas should be linked as well. Using both a behavioral/mental health counselor and a financial or legal consultation can save your employees from financial, legal, physical or emotional crisis, improving their overall health, happiness and productivity.

Remind your employees they can find a wealth of financial and legal assistance on their own by going to the EASE@Work website at www.easeatwork.com/EASEy. They will need your organization’s assigned user name and password in order to access the site. Along with a library of terms and informational articles, employees can also access a variety of financial tools that can help them calculate current expenses and plan for future purchases; legal templates are available for estate planning, rental/leasing contracts, power of attorney forms and more.
A: If you have been informed of the garnishment and management considers it problematic, a supervisor referral to the EAP would be appropriate. Garnishments involve paperwork, consumption of staff time, and are a measurable drain on the organization. However, a garnishment may not be the result of an employee’s misbehavior, so you must not be judgmental. The garnishment may be the result of a legal outcome over which the employee had little or no control. A supervisor referral alone or mention of the EAP does not imply a judgment about the cause of the garnishment. Certainly, continued financial problems can be an issue of concern for the employee, and a reminder that the EAP is available to help the employee with financial or personal issues is a good move. The degree to which this problem recurs may influence how quickly the organization intervenes. Coordinate your plan of action with management and/or your human resources representative.

Q: My employee’s wages have been garnished but her job performance is fine. Obviously she has financial problems, but I don’t think it’s my business. Should I refer her to the EAP? I don’t want to accuse her of not managing her affairs properly.

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We know people! EASE@Work is connected to an extensive network of specialists who support the unique needs of Human Resources. If you’re not sure if we can help you with your needs, just ask! Here’s a recent example of how we helped:

A situation between two employees at ABC Company had to be addressed after the employees refused to speak to one another. What began as a minor disagreement between the two had evolved into hurt feelings, bitterness and spilled over to affect the entire team dynamic. The two employees refused to communicate in any way but through their supervisor and had started keeping “scorecards” against each other. After many attempts to alleviate the situation, in lieu of discipline, the supervisor called EASE for suggestions in resolving the situation. EASE suggested that a highly experienced conflict resolution specialist be brought in to consult with the individuals and formulate a plan. The consultant visited the facility, met with the supervisor and the individuals, and then brought the two employees together to work on a plan to move forward. Getting each individual to agree to take responsibility for open communication, and agreeing to set aside personal opinions for the betterment of the team was a huge leap in the right direction!

Help your employees with better financial planning in 2010…

Offer an EASE@Work seminar that can help address financial or legal topics, including:

- Getting Fiscally Fit
- Budgeting Basics
- Financial Blunders: Lessons We Never Learn
- You and Your Credit Score
- Tax Planning
- Estate Planning
- Legal Lessons For Life

Contact Valerie Nosek at vnosek@easeatwork.com or 216/325-9323 for program highlights or to schedule a session.