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What is an EAP and Should You Invest in It for your Small Business?

With so many other concerns on a small business owner's plate, you may be wondering whether your company should also consider investing in an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Far from being just a fringe benefit, adding an EAP to your company's profile may help your professional efforts in a number of ways.

Benefits of an EAP typically include:

- **Very High Returns.** Companies that invest in an EAP often receive more than a 100% return on the investment, with some saving as much as five to ten dollars for every one spent on the program. This kind of return makes clear the financial benefit of a company's EAP.
- **Improving Productivity with Happier Employees.** You know that poor morale results in loss of productivity. With an employee suffering from depression or dealing with a family crisis, work performance can often be adversely affected. Suffering employees may also be absent or tardy more often than other employees—situations that become costly to a business. An EAP program can help the employees find the steps to recovery, and help to reduce the costs that poor performance and excessive absenteeism incur.
- **Saving on Insurance Costs.** Providing counseling services for subscribers is the primary function of an EAP. Most programs provide anonymous crisis and short-term counseling for employees. One of fastest rising health care costs is mental health. By using an EAP to provide counseling services, you can reduce the number of insurance claims.
- **Reducing Workman's Compensation Claims.** Research supports that a large number of insurance and workman's compensation claims, as well as many patterns of absenteeism, are directly associated with alcohol or drug problems. To help combat this growing problem, many of the EAPs provide drug/alcohol screening and programs specifically designed to help companies meet federal "drug-free" requirements. Some programs also offer prevention and abuse counseling.
- **Helping to Reduce Employee Absenteeism.** Childcare and eldercare are two of the largest issues facing employees. Many times, employees must take time off to work out the issues associated with finding places to care for elderly parents or children. Plus, a

parent will often stay home to care for a child when childcare is unavailable. Having the childcare and eldercare referral services through your EAP can prevent these occurrences by assisting an employee in finding a credible, licensed care facility quickly and easily.

- **Providing Training and Human Resource Services.** A majority of the programs offer some HR services, mostly in employee and executive training. These onsite training programs will provide classes on issues such as recognizing and dealing with harassment or conflict resolution. Training classes on stress management and how to create an organizational structure (setting priorities) are also usually offered. With some programs, an executive training and consultation service is available. These training sessions work with management and supervisors on developing better communication and organizational management skills.

You can see the benefits of using an EAP are numerous, and how they may be effective in bringing positive results to your company. Investing in an EAP could result in more balanced and productive employees, and will also help in bring the business up to established state and federal standards. In short, an EAP can be a deliberate step forward, one taken toward helping you (as the business owner) to create and retain a productive, valuable and long-term workforce in a respectable place of business.

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