The supervisor’s job is to coach, direct, develop, educate, and counsel employees on work issues. He or she performs these functions as a representative of the work organization with whom the employee has a pay-for-hire relationship. Supervisory functions do not include demonstration of anger that the organization feels toward employees for failure to perform satisfactorily. Because this role does not exist, the supervisor...
expressing anger is implying that his or her personal boundaries have been violated, and is supplanting the organization’s relationship with his or her own. When employees disappoint, corrective tools and administrative measures exist to help them improve performance. A supervisor can feel anger, of course, but to act on these feelings and display an emotional reaction can only diminish the quality and effectiveness of the relationship the employee has with the organization.

Recently a rumor circulated that my employee lost $100,000 in the stock market. A day later, he went on vacation. I feared he might commit suicide, but had no reason to phone 911. Upon his return, I did not inquire about the loss or recommend the EAP. Should I have?

When you learn through the grapevine that an employee is in crisis, that knowledge, learned within the context of the work setting, makes inquiring about it appropriate. This is not the same as probing a personal matter and invading privacy. Many employees attempt to make extra money, take risks, and fall prey to Internet get-rich-quick schemes, or legitimate but high-risk money-making opportunities like options trading. Some of these after-hours activities can be associated with compulsive gambling or Internet addiction. Other personal problems may further exacerbate these issues. Obviously, suggesting the EAP is a good idea, and for this employee, doing so now might still be a good idea.

I have an employee whose teenager was caught at school with “bath salts.” Now I hear the teen is in a drug treatment program somewhere in California. Is there any reason to suggest the employee contact the EAP, since the teen is in treatment?

Suggesting the EAP as a source of help would be appropriate because of the personal problem that exists and availability of the program. It is likely that other behavioral-medical issues exist in this instance, because residential treatment is usually not provided for use of bath salts (illegal in many states, but available online). However, there will be recommendations by any treatment program for aftercare, follow-up, possibly 12-step meetings, and most likely self-groups for the parents. Unfortunately, treatment centers out of state are notorious for minimal follow-up after discharge, and do not typically identify solid resources and help necessary to keep the entire family plugged in to recovery. If the employee requests EAP assistance, these concerns and needs can be easily addressed.