

How can I be an effective leader?



How Counseling can Support You in Your Role

These days, we're more and more defined not by who we are, but what we do. Jobs play an increasingly powerful role in people's lives than ever before. So it's not surprising then that a 2000 Statistics Canada study found that 34 per cent of those surveyed felt working too many hours or having too many workplace demands was a major source of stress. And with technological advances since then, along with the belt-tightening tactics of many organizations in these uncertain economic times, those numbers are likely to climb.

Stress at work can be a positive force that motivates and inspires you, but in excess it can be destructive: negatively impacting your physical and mental health, work performance and personal life.

If you feel like stress or emotional challenges are affecting your job performance and overall quality of life—whether they're caused by personal or professional stresses—counseling services from your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help. Unfortunately, because of the many misconceptions around professional counseling, people often hesitate before getting help. Instead of waiting for a challenge to balloon into a crisis situation, why not be proactive, put yourself first and get the support you need now? Below are some common "myths" many people have about counselling and their Employee Assistance Program.

Whether you're facing overwhelming work pressures like managing deadlines, meeting targets or handling an office conflict, or coping with a jam-packed schedule that makes it hard to fulfill your personal and family commitments, an EAP counselor can help.

Myth 1: If there's a problem I only need my friends and family to help me through it.

Although you may receive strong support from your friends and family, it can be hard to talk about your challenges openly and honestly—especially if they have to deal with intimate relationship issues, or other difficult life experiences such as depression, the death of a loved one or anxiety issues. Your friends and family are often looking at your

circumstances through a very narrow lens and you may not want to disclose the whole truth for fear of judgment. Counselors on the other hand, can offer unbiased, impartial help and are professionally trained to help you reach your goals, find solutions to your problems and recognize the strength you already have. They can also provide you with better coping strategies for future challenges that will inevitably come your way.



Myth 2:

Counselors only deal with people with severe mental illness.

It's a common misunderstanding that counseling is only for people battling severe mental illness. Counseling actually helps you deal with life's everyday problems without waiting for them to spiral out of control. It takes a strong, well-adjusted person to interfere with your life and work.

The reality is that counselors can be a great resource to help you deal with life's daily ups and downs, both big and small. Whether you're facing overwhelming work pressures like managing deadlines, meeting targets or handling an office conflict, or coping with a jam-packed schedule that makes it hard to fulfill your personal and family commitments, an EAP counselor can help. In fact, a 2011 survey of EAP users found that about one-third of respondents used their EAP for workplace-related issues. Counseling can also help you address the many personal issues that can be impacting your ability to do your job. These can include:

- Relationship or family issues
- Major life changes
- Depression or anxiety
- Anger
- Loss and grief
- Parenting challenges
- Physical or emotional abuse
- Addictions



These tips will help me support my team.

And while the expression goes that “it’s lonely at the top,” with your EAP at your side, it certainly doesn’t have to be that way.

Myth 3: I only need counseling if I’m in crisis.

You don’t have to wait until you burnout or hit rock bottom to speak to a counsellor. Professional help can be a great way to support and maintain your general mental health, keep you on a healthy track and prevent problems in the future. However, counseling becomes particularly important if you experience:

- Sleep problems and exhaustion
- Anger
- Loss of appetite
- Severe headaches
- Depression or anxiety
- Helplessness
- Social isolation
- Absenteeism
- Using food, drugs or alcohol to cope

If you’re ever questioning whether or not you should visit a counsellor, this is a very strong indication that you should.

Myth 4: As a leader, my job is to handle problems on my own.

Yes, you’ve been hired to lead others and make decisions—both of which can be quite taxing and tough. Good bosses, however, know that great leadership comes from enlisting the best people for the job at the right time. If you’re struggling with a work/life challenge, or finding it hard to cope with daily work stresses and conflicts, then doesn’t it make sense to bring a professionally-trained counsellor—full of insights, ideas and perspective—into your realm?

And while the expression goes that “it’s lonely at the top,” with your EAP at your side, it certainly doesn’t have to be that way. An EAP counsellor can give you the insights, tools and resources you need to ensure both your work and personal life stay on track for success. In fact, research suggests people who engaged in EAP counseling improved their mental health by 15 per cent.

Myth 5: The service is free, so I’m sure I’ll get what I pay for.

Actually, all of our skilled team of counselors have a master’s degree or higher in psychology, clinical social work or educational psychology. They are experienced professionals who can help you deal with your life challenges including the difficulties of leading others. Many of our counselors specialize in specific areas like marriage and family therapy, assertiveness training, anger management, stress, bereavement issues and physical or emotional abuse—so you’re bound to find someone that’s the right fit for you and your unique situation.

Myth 6: I have to meet face-to-face.

If an in-person counseling session isn’t accessible, convenient or makes you uncomfortable, there are other options available to you. Your EAP program also offers E-Counseling or help over the phone. Whatever method you choose (in-person, over the phone or online), immediate and confidential help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Myth 7:

My employer or co-workers will find out.

Counselors are legally bound by strong ethical codes and your EAP program is strictly confidential. Your employer will never know you have reached out for help, records will never become a part of your personnel file and no information will ever be released to anyone without your written consent (unless the counselor believes you’re a danger to yourself or others). The only people who will ever know you are seeing a counsellor are those you choose to tell.

That said, enlisting the support of your EAP for work or life challenges is really a great way to “walk the talk” of workplace health. As a leader, you’ll not only benefit from the insights and tools of counseling, but will also be able to tout the benefits of taking a proactive approach to emotional health and well-being. If you’re workers are struggling with their own challenges, you can recommend your organization’s Employee Assistance Program as a valuable resource and (if you so choose) disclose that you yourself found it was a helpful tool.

Seeking counseling is a healthy and proactive way to manage life’s many challenges—no issue is too big or too small! Counseling can go a long way to give you more control over your life, make better decisions and significantly reduce stress and anxiety levels so you can be better at your job and develop into a healthier, more resilient version of you.