

# Solutions for Supervisors

October 2018

## Professional Boundaries: Why is it so complicated?

For everyone from nurses to bankers to IT specialists, professional boundaries are a part of our workplace. Social service and healthcare professions often face challenging boundary issues with the service population. How many of us have been asked questions around accepting gifts from patients, lending money to clients, or getting Facebook friend requests from consumers?

And it's not just with clients- what about professional boundaries between colleagues? For example, have you ever worked with someone you feel "over-shares" about their personal life? Have you ever supervised an individual who gossips or likes to bring up "hot-button" issues (politics, religion, sexual innuendos) at work?

If any of this is sounding familiar, you are not alone! We each have reasons why professional boundaries can become blurred, but it is important to keep in mind that as human

### From your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

**Remember that EAP is here to help in any way that we can. Call on us for consultation and assistance anytime!**

**For more information about how to best handle employee work performance problems call your EAP at:**

**TTY dial 711 for VRS then dial 1.800.769.9819  
[www.affiliatedeap.com](http://www.affiliatedeap.com)**

**Affiliated EAP offers many educational programs designed to help leaders become more effective in supervising their staff. For a complete course listing or to schedule training, contact us or visit our website.**

beings, we often seek connection with others. When we are spending 40+ hours a week with colleagues, it makes sense that professional boundaries become more difficult to define...we are spending almost as much time with co-workers as we are with our families!

Nevertheless, as a supervisor, it is our role to model and maintain appropriate and effective professional boundaries in the workplace.



## Tips to establish effective workplace boundaries:

1. Talk about it! Make sure everyone is aware and familiar with the idea of professional boundaries, and what is and is not appropriate for your workplace. Encourage employees to seek supervision when boundary concerns come up and provide education and regular conversation around professional boundaries (involving both clients and colleagues) within your workplace.

2. Engage in self-care! If we are having a rough day, it usually becomes more difficult to manage our emotions in the workplace...which can lead to professional boundary violations (over-sharing, distracting others from their work, engaging in gossip). Keep tabs on yourself and your staff in terms of what are acceptable ways to take a step back if needed during the workday. Perhaps brainstorm this at a team meeting or post a weekly thought on self-care.



3. Ask the question! If we struggle with maintaining professional boundaries, it is important to ask ourselves why. What is motivating this boundary violation? Are we triggered by a patient or coworker? Are we not getting social or emotional needs met outside of work? Are we burning out? Keep in mind that often workplace boundary violations are unintentional, or simply a bad habit. Thinking about the “why” is a good way to become increasingly mindful of our workplace interactions.



4. Walk the talk! As supervisors and leaders, we provide an example of how to behave at work. If we practice our own professional boundaries, those in your office who struggle with this skill will have real-time examples to observe and learn from. It is easy to develop personal relationships at work, but actively modeling the primary goal of being the best employee for your job reinforces the message to staff that while in the workplace, work comes first.

