Q. I have been a manager for 20 years. Although I have given advice to other supervisors on confronting difficult employees, it still seems more like an art than a science to get changes from an employee. What are the best tips for confronting difficult employees to keep and pass along?

A. Although each of the following could be divided into additional steps, they represent some of the best tips in correcting behavior or performance. 1) Don't delay in dealing with a problem. As time passes, it generally becomes more difficult to correct.
2) Prepare to be surprised by an employee's explanation for the behavior or issue. Be open-minded about what to do next. 3) Don't be long-winded, lecturing, or parental. It triggers resistance. 4) Employees are your most valuable resource. Keep this in mind and you will use the right tone. 5) Don't be angry with employees to the degree that you omit reminding them what they do well. Doing so generates motivation to cooperate with you. 6) Bring notes or an outline. It helps you and helps the employees take you seriously. 7) Meet in a nonsocial, business setting to convey importance. 8) Mention the EAP as a resource for employees to use if they experience difficulty making the changes requested.

Q. What is meant by an employee having a "growth mindset"?

A. A growth mindset is a term first coined by Carol Susan Dweck, Ph.D., a Stanford University psychologist. She was famous for her studies of mindset, temperament, and personality. Growth mindset refers to the way employees approach the world of challenges and obstacles with optimism, a sense of opportunity, resourcefulness, positivity, and resilience. This contrasts with employees who may have a "fixed mindset" and resist learning something new, give up easily when faced with obstacles, feel anxious about others' successes, and shy away from negative feedback. Consider researching "growth mindset" online to identify articulable descriptions of positive behaviors associated with the mindset. Then you can reward and affirm these behaviors while also helping struggling employees by guiding them in performance reviews to adopt the behaviors and work attributes that support productivity and help demonstrate outstanding performance. You also can use the EAP to help employees overcome patterns of ineffective approaches to work struggles.

Q. Most of the employees in our office, including me, wander into work late by 10–15 minutes every day. One employee has started coming to work 45–60 minutes late. All of this has to stop, so how do I "push the reset button"? Should I have a meeting and lay down the law?

A. The near-universal problem of tardiness coming to work that you describe has its origins in the permissibility you have shown by your own example.

So, the starting point is changing your behavior first, both to model a new standard and to set the stage for something new. You then can have a meeting, but going forward, deal with your employees individually rather than as a group regarding this issue, because it is personal responsibility, not a team effort, that will be required to make the changes needed. One employee is coming in extraordinarily late. Anticipate this person coming in on time when the new standard is set, but later, coming late again would not be unusual if a personal problem of some sort exists. Consider use of the EAP if this pattern resumes.