

FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



What's a key reason some supervisors don't refer employees to the EAP, despite being trained to do so? Referring to the EAP is a straightforward process. I can't believe it's because supervisors forget, don't see the need, or don't believe in the program.



I feel sorry for some of my employees. When I confront a performance issue, I probably demonstrate an overly sympathetic attitude of compassion and understanding. Is this undermining my ability to manage them effectively?



Employees with drug or alcohol problems exhibit patterns of trying to hide their affliction and put their best face forward. Doesn't this prove that

Answers



One common, but seldom-discussed, reason supervisors neglect to use the EAP is their emotional reaction to troubled employees and the decisions that follow, which don't include arranging a referral. Consider the emotional reaction a supervisor might have to multiple instances of unauthorized leave, excessive sick leave, long coffee breaks, difficulty in recalling mistakes, blaming the supervisor for the mistakes, complaints from customers, and wild mood swings. Very commonly, the feeling is anger - and with good reason. However, this reaction has an overpowering effect of interfering with the supervisor's decision to make a formal referral. The demonstrated anger might be a "successful" way for the supervisor to feel vented and self-satisfied, but without a resolution to the problem. Hence, problems return or later crises result in a dismissal of the difficult employee.



Sympathy without accountability often does a disservice to employees and lessens their chance for success and professional growth. A supervisor can and should approach an employee with empathy and directly address what areas need to improve. It's also an opportunity to ensure that the expectations are clear, understood and manageable. When addressing a performance issue, don't limit your feedback to only areas where improvements are needed, but also acknowledge where the employee succeeds. By using tools such as active listening and constructive feedback, you provide a stable balance between sympathy and accountability. Embrace the value of transparency around constructive feedback and the value on personal and professional growth. It's about moving forward and empowering the employee to do so with the language of respect and support. Remember, your EAP is always available to assist you.



Denial is a defense mechanism that doesn't preclude some awareness of the existence of a problem. In fact, some awareness is necessary in order to use denial as a defense mechanism effectively. Denial defends against the anxiety produced by evidence that a problem exists. That's its purpose. Denial isn't meant to fool *you*. It's to fool one's self. The evidence that this is true is found in the stories of recovering people

Frontline Supervisor

Questions

substance abusers are not really in denial. We hear addicted people are in denial, but behavior contradicts that notion.



How do I find out what motivates my employees? Most of them would say “money,” but that’s off the table. I wonder if my employees even know what inspires them. Are there any motivational strategies commonly overlooked by supervisors?



Periodically, we have employees incur back injuries on the job. Some get pain medications, which I know can be addicting. Although I haven’t noticed any employees affected by drug dependency, what are the symptoms?

Answers

who no longer abuse substances, and yet they have the ability to recall how they lied to themselves about the true nature of their problem during the time when it was most acute. For someone with no alcohol-related problems, denial has an entirely different meaning. Denial for the addicted person is about a refusal to accept reality because it’s too threatening. More accurately, denial is a refusal to consciously acknowledge what a person and others can plainly see is a problem.



There are hundreds of nonmonetary strategies for motivating employees. However, it’s hard to tell which strategy will work for which employee. Simply spending time with your employees is one way to gather an impression of what inspires them, and, of course, you should also ask them what motivates them. One link to motivation many supervisors overlook is information. A lack of knowledge about a task or job function often results in a lack of motivation to consider attempting it. So don’t overlook the obvious. Some experts argue that you can’t motivate employees; they can only motivate themselves. This is only partly true. Don’t overlook a balanced approach of positive and negative reinforcement when it comes to motivation strategies. You’ll more likely match the needs of more employees. Why? You have two types of employees: employee “A” pays a bill on time to avoid the possibility of a late fee, while employee “B” is desirous of positive feelings associated with keeping the desk clear of unpaid bills. Both drop the payment in the mailbox at the same time!



Addiction to prescription painkillers, particularly the opioids, is a growing problem. One recent study showed that one in 12 injured workers using this class of painkillers became addicted. Addiction to pain medications is also linked to lower productivity, presenteeism (coming to work affected by health issues or severe troubles), and severe absenteeism. Those addicted to prescription painkillers miss 50 percent more work than non-using peers. Employees who become addicted to opioids have more difficulty returning to work as well. When they return, there’s an increased risk of accidents, and they may illegally share medications with friends, become addicted to other opiates like heroin, “doctor shop” to find a willing prescriber, steal from the employer, sleep on the job, and suffer domestic problems resulting from addictive behavior in the home. The EAP is your key resource for intervention when performance and attendance problems emerge with recovering injured workers, no matter what the cause. For more information, go to <http://tinyurl.com/opioids-work>.