

FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



Our organization lost a major contract with a customer we've done business with for a long time. Some employees are coping well, but others seem to be horribly depressed. I'm concerned by the reaction; some folks are taking this too hard. Can the EAP help?



My employee comes back from lunch every day with alcohol on the breath. Is this person an alcoholic?

Our policy states employees can't be under the influence at work. This person doesn't appear under the influence in any way.



What are soft skills? How do I develop the soft skills I am lacking or that need

Answers



Talk to the EAP. During your discussion, the EAP will help you formulate an approach to offer more support and suggest steps you can take that are consistent with your job and that will help your employees. You're witnessing grief, which can be associated with many things, including financial loss, career disappointments, and broken dreams. Be sure to acknowledge to your employees that you understand how devastating this loss is. Let your employees know that they speak with you privately if they feel the need. Ask each employee how you can best support him or her at this time. After an event like this, some of your employees may lose confidence in themselves. You need to step in ahead of that reaction to offer realistic assurance. When you meet with disappointed employees, be sure to invite them to contact the EAP.



Diagnosis is something to avoid. Conceivably, you could have nonalcoholics in your workplace who drink at lunch every day and chronic alcoholics who never do. Your policy may have a list of signs and symptoms to determine reasonable suspicion for testing, if permitted. Is "alcohol on the breath" listed? May it be used as the sole criterion to act? Do you have discretion as to whether to ignore it unless other performance or behavioral indicators exist? Work environments with safety-sensitive positions may have Drug-Free Workplace policies and/or collective bargaining agreements that view alcohol on the breath as the only criterion necessary to authorize a test for reasonable suspicion, while some employers draw distinctions between job classifications for this purpose. Talk to your supervisor, human resources representative, and the EAP. Be clear, and consider whether you are overlooking other less obvious but important behavioral indicators to justify taking action in response to an employee possibly being under the influence. Consultation with these professionals will help you determine the best course of action to take.



Soft skills are personal attributes that relate to your ability to interact within a larger environment. Soft skills may include your ability to remain organized, inspire and

Frontline Supervisor

Questions

improvement? Do EAPs do soft skills training? I once was criticized for my lack of follow-through and poor communication, but I don't see these as EAP issues.



I want to be fair when giving assignments to employees, but I discriminate based on whether I trust them. Maybe it's believability, authenticity, or realness - I can't put my finger on it - but I don't want this difference among employees to affect my judgment. How do I deal with this?



Employees who are "part of the club" seem much happier. Some employees avoid socializing with their peers. They rely solely on their performance to advance in the organization. I know it isn't fair, but social skills and competence are important. How can I help?

Answers

praise employees, communicate effectively, establish productive work habits, be a team player, resolve conflicts, or be dependable and conscientious. There's no absolute list of soft skills, yet some, such as effective communication, are commonly referenced. Consider past performance reviews, interactions with others, and honest criticism from those you trust. Consider finding a workbook on the subject. If you recognize limitations in soft skills areas that you think may be holding you back, talk to the EAP. Acquiring those skills or deepening them may be enhanced by professional counseling to help you past psychological roadblocks or challenges that impede your progress..



Trusting your employees is a risk, but good leaders must learn to do it. Each of your employees has unique skills and abilities, but you won't discover what they are until you test them with assignments that reveal them. Some employees are more adept at unveiling who they are to others. Part of their appeal is an ability to be vulnerable and show authenticity. Others are just as competent, except they don't exhibit these qualities in their personalities. So the issue for you is clarity. Because you aren't clear about who these employees are, your impulse is to trust them less. This gives you a clue to your next step, which is to engage more with them so they become less of a mystery to you. More trust will follow.



The reality is that social competence in a work environment is important. When examined closely, employers more often choose to hire employees who have these abilities because they can help create an upbeat work culture and positively influence the bottom line. Although socializing, telling jokes, and bringing in the doughnuts aren't essential duties, it's still appropriate to help your employee connect with peers. Some of this depends on your employee's willingness to be more engaging. During reviews, if appropriate to your organization's format, inquire as to how the person feels about his or her connection to the larger environment and with peers. Statements indicating a desire to be more a part of the social network will give you a sense of how far you can go in making recommendations. Remember, the EAP is always ready to help.

Notes: