

FRONTLINE

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A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



Must everything we do as supervisors fall under the heading of “being a role model?” Personally, I think it is good to loosen up every once in a while so that employees see we are real people who can have a good time.



Why are symptoms of alcoholism and drug addiction so different among employees? The most dramatic variance I have seen in my career is the issue of tardiness and absenteeism—some had a lot, others had none.

Answers



It may not seem fair, but your employees are continuously judging you by your behaviors. By virtue of your position, every behavior you exhibit to employees is viewed in the context of you as a role model. This is an inescapable dynamic of workplace authority and supervision. But there is more to it. All behaviors of supervisors make an impression on employees because their behaviors are symbolic. They tell your employees what you value, what you support, and what you stand for. This is a powerful tool in leadership. Not understanding this dynamic can cause you to lose their respect, along with harming your ability to influence and shape a team.



The behavioral signs and symptoms of alcoholism or drug addiction usually appear where they are least likely to create undesired consequences for the alcoholic or drug user, at least in the early stages of the illness. This is a time when the addict can exert more control. As the illness grows worse, this control lessens and more unpredictable behavioral patterns result. In a job where failure to come to work on time could lead to immediate dismissal, on-time attendance is more likely. Indeed, most employees pay close attention to the degree to which on-time arrival to work is required, and what consequences ensue for failing to show or coming in late. Note that many personal problems impact attendance. You will, therefore, see a great degree of variance among employees with regard to this performance standard. Be sure to read the EAP’s [Alcohol Use: Where Do I Stand?](#) to learn more about the effects of alcohol in the workplace

Frontline Supervisor

Questions



I sometimes wonder about employees' personality problems when they exhibit difficult behavior. For example, I think one of my employees is a narcissist. Isn't it a good idea for the EAP to offer advice on how to communicate with different types of personalities?



Can the EAP provide me with more information about the nature of the employee's personal problems if he or she signs a release?



I am unsure how to respond to some problems raised by employees to explain their performance issues. For example, I have an employee with a tardiness problem who blames the traffic. I spend precious time advising on these issues, but to no avail. EAP referral doesn't make sense.

Answers



Longstanding EAP guidance on avoiding diagnostic thinking on the part of supervisors has wide-ranging importance in the management of performance. Engaging with difficult personalities with the goal of overcoming their personality traits or “out-psyching” them contributes to a delay in referring and the employee seeking help. Many people have elements of their personality that fall within descriptions of personality disorders. There is no “science” involving the mastery of engaging with personality disorders. A better way to go is to consult with the EAP about individual employees and your concerns about their work, behavior, attitude, or attendance. Then follow an effective approach for helping them become the best workers they can be. That might include help from the [EAP](#).



Technically, a release could allow the EAP to provide personal information, but this would be strongly discouraged for several reasons. The over-disclosure of information risks the loss of confidentiality and the loss of the perception of confidentiality associated with the EAP. Also, personal information disclosed to the supervisor would invite supervisor involvement in the employee's problems, and it could unnecessarily interfere with administrative or disciplinary matters. This could frustrate management, confound managerial decision making, and lead to inaccurate perceptions about EAP regarding confidentiality.



It is easy to get bogged down in helping employees troubleshoot problems like traffic or babysitting quandaries in an effort to have them perform, or in this case, arrive on time. This is all natural and quite expected in close working relationships. However, such discussions can grow wider and deeper. Here's where it gets interesting: If you have spent a large amount of time troubleshooting a problem like traffic, you may not realize that other problems may contribute to the tardiness. These other problems may actually be the primary cause and this is where [EAP](#) can be helpful.