

Frontline Supervisor



■ **My employee has been absent for three weeks since the death of his mother. He phones to say he is dealing with estate issues. He has an attorney and family support. I think a leave abuse issue exists. Should I refer him to the EAO?**

Most important is to consult with your HR rep regarding your concerns, policies, and next steps. Employees on funeral leave, responsible for managing the affairs of the deceased, may experience additional distress or suffer from grief that affects them later because they postponed self-care while attending to the needs of others. Suggesting the EAO is always a good idea for any problem. Dozens of things could explain the absence, and you can refer your employee to the EAO. EAPs have discovered that problems like this often are multifaceted. An employee may be grief-stricken, depressed, relapsing into an addiction problem, looking for another job, taking vacation, or all of these things at the same time! This is why EAPs exist—to help sort out the issues and help organizations retain valuable workers.

■ **One of my employees went away to a halfway house for meth abuse treatment. He self-referred and now looks great. I am nervous because he socializes with employees after hours, and he drinks alcohol with them. Can meth users drink alcohol safely?**

Your employee may be abstinent from meth use, and his occupational and social functioning may be dramatically improved, but alcohol use following treatment for meth addiction would be contrary to the position of nearly all medical doctors who are experts on addiction and its treatment. According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, addiction treatment requires “engagement in recovery activities.” Recovery means abstinence from psychoactive drug use, which includes alcohol, in order to avoid relapse to the drug of choice. Your job, of course, is monitoring performance and not focusing on the employee’s personal decisions outside of work, no matter how ill-advised they may be. Relapse and its effect on performance may be evident in a week, a year, or more. If that time comes, engage the EAO.

■ **I would like to identify employees who appear to have the most creativity and drive. Is there a way to easily spot these employees in a work environment that does not allow for much of either?**

Employees with creativity and drive tend to have skills often associated with entrepreneurial thinking. Meet with your employees regularly, and talk to them about what makes them excited and what makes them feel engaged. Keep the following in mind: Do you have employees who like dreaming up new ideas? Are any employees naturally prone to spotting new opportunities? Do any employees consistently demonstrate their ability to spin positivity out of disappointment and see the silver lining? Do you have employees who take initiative

on the job to undertake something new without being asked? Evidence of these behaviors can often be spotted even in the most controlled, uninspiring, and limited work settings. Employees who are courageous and unafraid to think outside the box will find a way to get their needs met, even if it is not in your organization. Working with your managers to create opportunities for employees is one key strategy for retaining them and reaping the benefit of their flexibility and talent.

■ **I have hired many employees, and most are enthusiastic go-getters in the beginning, but after several months their energy diminishes and they become just so-so in their productivity. What causes this, and should I refer them to the EAO when I see this happen?**

When someone is fresh and new on the job, energy abounds. It is like starting a new weight-loss program—nothing could be more exciting. But then things change. To understand diminishing enthusiasm after hiring, look at what is happening between the employee and management at the time of hire. In the beginning, especially the first couple of months, new employees are treated like celebrities. They may receive higher compensation than they did at their previous job. They are made to feel excited about the future, with anticipated achievements, and they experience camaraderie. Compensation, achievement and camaraderie have been identified in many studies as essential to maintaining employee enthusiasm. It appears that in the beginning, much of what drives enthusiasm is naturally in place. Learn how to keep this motivating atmosphere thriving and you will impact enthusiasm favorably. If your attempts to fire up enthusiasm are not successful and productivity standards are not satisfactory, an EAO referral and/or management consultation is a good idea.

■ **We have a diverse work group of about 50 employees, and it is obvious to me that everyone gets along well. I never get complaints, and I witness no inappropriate interactions. Is diversity awareness education or training still needed?**

Diversity and inclusiveness awareness can be suitable for any workgroup, not necessarily because of existing problems but to reinforce and strengthen a positive work culture that already exists. Think “preventive maintenance.” Remember, if you have 50 employees, turnover is a natural part of the organizational process, and this alone could support a rationale for ongoing education. Many education programs enhance and reinforce existing strengths. A seminar on workplace communication is a good example. There is always more to know about it. Although you perceive a high-functioning and inclusive workgroup, you can never be sure that covert, unspoken, or unacknowledged biases exist and that they have been felt. Diversity and inclusion awareness plays an intervening role in averting potential problems.

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