## Employees-Yôur Most Valuable Resource

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE OFFICE (EAO) – 608/263-2987 – www.wisc.edu/eao

- I know "presenteeism" refers to employees coming to work sick and being less productive, but it can be difficult to spot related job problems. How do supervisors intervene?
- **Presenteeism is a** relatively new term, but it is essentially a modernized version of what in the past has been referred to as "on the job absenteeism." Although presenteeism is an interesting topic for discussion, attempting to identify who is affected by it is more difficult. It is better to avoid the technical aspects of this syndrome and instead focus on what you can document in your pursuit of helping your employees maximize their productivity and job satisfaction. Presenteeism typically refers to employees being at work while sick, but it also has been used to describe almost any nonproductive activity of employees on the job, no matter what the underlying reason might be. If you stay aware of behaviors that demonstrate an employee is either not performing competently or is without motivation for the tasks they are supposed to perform, presenteeism may exist. Your EAO can consult with you about presenteeism and possible intervention strategies.
- **■** What can supervisors do to improve their ability to spot signs and symptoms of an employee who is impaired on the job because of alcohol or drug use? A checklist is important, but some symptoms can be very subtle and easily missed.
- Beyond a checklist, the one thing supervisors could do to improve their ability to identify the signs and symptoms of drug or alcohol use on the job is to get to know their employees better. Knowing your employees and having frequent face time with them is your best intervention strategy. This is because over time you will develop an awareness of or "sixth sense" for your employees' appearance, attitude, and demeanor, and how these things change from day to day. An employee with a substance abuse problem will exhibit behaviors that are inconsistent with what the supervisor has grown accustomed to experiencing. So, initiate friendly conversations and make eye contact with employees on a regular basis. You will then be more likely to notice uncharacteristically slurred speech, a glazed facial expression, an unsteady gait, glassy or bloodshot eyes, and dilated pupils. These things can be easy to miss or dismiss if you are not frequently close to your employees.
- I am a new manager in my organization and I want to do a good job. I am not trying to be liked, but I know leadership is not like it is on a TV show
- You're right that being a good leader or manager includes getting the work done, but your success will depend on your ability to develop relationships and trust among those you lead. This can be a tough assignment for some managers. A good supervisor is usually liked by those they supervise; however, the real payoff comes when they are effective with people. To be effective, meet with individual employees

where being tough and intimidating can still leave employees thinking you're a hero. Is there some middle ground? privately and discover what talents, hopes and goals they possess. Use this information to develop and challenge them during the year. Praise them for good work and behave the way you want your employees to behave: Come to work on time, be reliable, follow through, fix problems quickly, and be honest about what's going on in the organization. Talk to the EAO early on if you experience or sense trouble in relating to employees or feel disconnected from them.

■ Our team training budget has been cut this year, so are there any strategies or techniques my employees can regularly practice that have an ongoing "team building" effect to keep us cohesive and less prone to conflict with each other? Team members with regular habits of communicating in positive ways with each other have fewer conflicts and better group cooperation. Here's a technique that may help your group. It's essential purpose is to help employees practice appreciation and gratitude with each other. See if you can make it a tradition. At the end of meetings, ask whether any team member has positive feedback for any other team member. Model what you are asking. For example, say, "I would like to thank Mary for coming in last Thursday to work on the mailing project. I felt relieved of pressure and really appreciative of her for doing that." Members take turns sharing feedback. The exercise may be a bit awkward if these are new behaviors, but because they are inherently positive, group members should catch on. This strategy builds resilience to stress and allows conflicts to be resolved more quickly.

■ Can the EAO help me consider my approach to confronting employees with bad breath, someone who smells bad from what they eat or has some other bad habits or personal matters like body odor, so that I don't offend the employee?

The key roadblock to discussing an annoying personal habit or behavior with an employee is imagining how horrible you would feel when confronting the employee, along with the shock on the employee's face when the issue is raised. Fortunately, most supervisors discover that this fear is overblown, that instead of acting offended and horrified, the employee is grateful and thankful. Usually there is a business reason for requesting that an employee alter an annoying behavior or change a disagreeable habit. The key is being able to identify it, articulate it and link it to your request. The EAO can help with this process and add some role playing if you think it may be helpful. Generally, the business rationale is a requirement that the employee cooperate with the cultural standards of the workplace or how behaviors or habits directly affect the business and productivity.

## **NOTES**