

Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **Recently I attended a presentation on workplace substance abuse and was told marijuana was addictive. I do not know anyone who ever became addicted to marijuana. So what is the real story on how dangerous this drug truly is (or is not)?**

The medical professionals who are the most knowledgeable about marijuana are addiction medicine physicians who specialize in the treatment of alcoholics and drug addicts. The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) has 4000 such physicians in its membership. ASAM states that marijuana is “a dangerous drug with harmful effects.” Addiction to it is classified as “the disease of marijuana dependence.” According to these experts, marijuana requires some addicts to smoke four times as much as they once did to get the desired effect. Withdrawal symptoms can last two to four weeks, and may be so severe that medical support and detoxification are required to overcome cravings. Like alcohol, not everyone becomes addicted to marijuana. Similarly, a user’s past experience with the drug will influence the believability about its addictive potential.

■ **Preserving “top talent” is very important. Management expects supervisors to take the lead in keeping our best and brightest happy and productive. What are the fundamentals of doing this, and how can the EAO help?**

Meeting the needs of talented employees is a popular management topic of study. Talented employees have a need to be in a work environment that supports their continued growth. Beyond pay, much of this support boils down to frequent feedback, good communication, clear expectations, and opportunities for training and skill development. There is nothing new about these desires, but talented employees today have higher expectations for getting this support faster than in decades past. With no guarantee of long-term employment or a hefty retirement, talented employees (and most employees in general) feel more pressure to ascend rapidly in their career. Sometimes talented employees are unhappy because of other issues and problems that do not come to management’s attention. This is where the EAO can help. The EAO offers confidential consultation regarding personal and work-related issues.

■ **Can I refer my employee to the EAO for being argumentative? No matter what my suggestion, some nuance, problem, issue**

An argument is not necessarily a bad thing, but the frequency of these interactions interferes with productivity and the quality relationship you need with your employee. A larger problem may exist; therefore, an EAO referral is appropriate, particularly if you have requested that this behavior stop. Even if your employee is accurately spotting problems

objection, reason to hesitate, or correction is raised by this employee. What causes this behavior? Is it simply a bad habit?

and shortcomings in your every request, this does not preclude the need for some intervention. There is a way to communicate more effectively that will enhance your relationship and productivity and not position every request as a battleground. Many explanations could exist for this behavior. Keep notes on the next few interchanges and share them at a supervisor consultation with the EAO prior to referring your employee.

■ **I was promoted from among my co-workers because I had the best work record. I don't think I need supervisor courses. I think I am "a natural." I know how to keep a crew of people in line. It is all common sense, right?**

A history of successful interaction with co-workers may lead you to believe that you possess a full range of skills necessary to manage them. The fact that you are asking this question could suggest a fear of being vulnerable enough to admit that there is more to learn about supervision. This same issue can translate into problems with your supervisory style on the job. It indicates that you may have difficulty putting your ego aside, accepting compromise, showing patience, nurturing others, managing conflict or making decisions that will test your leadership ability. These stressors are routine for active supervisors. Once you are in a position of authority, your attitudes about supervision and leadership, beliefs on what motivates others and other personal issues will influence your decisions. Without training you will be less self-aware about how these factors may interfere with your role, and thereby increase your risk to the organization. Our campus has an Office of Human Resource Development that offers classes to enhance leadership skills.

■ **Most employees are stressed, but some are to a point of being distressed. I would like to know what they might sound like or look like so I could recommend the EAO. Can a seriously *distressed* employee still perform satisfactorily?**

Distressed employees experience great pain, anxiety, or sorrow, and they may be faced with acute physical or mental suffering. It is possible that distressed employees could mask their symptoms and perform satisfactorily, yet still be at risk for greater mental or physical problems. Distressed employees spend about \$1,700 more on healthcare per year than other employees spend, have more ER visits, and use more home health care services. It is not possible or advisable to give supervisors a list of signs and symptoms to help them diagnose distress. As a general rule, encourage your employees to take advantage of the EAO when you witness talk of hopelessness and worthlessness, the inability to be cheerful or carry a smile, or always appearing tired and worn out. In short, you can usually see evidence of an employee's pain. Encourage these employees to get help.

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