

DRUG ABUSE IN YOUR WORKPLACE?



The Data

Data from the Substance and Mental Health Services Administration shows that **62 % of the adults in the U.S. with substance abuse problems are employed full time.**

Seventy-nine percent of heavy drinkers are employed full time and seventy-five percent of drug users are employed. In addition, SAMHSA reports that 10% of the workforce is dependent on substances, 85% on alcohol and drugs and 15% are dependent on drugs only. Marijuana continues to be the most popular drug while the use of cocaine decreased and the use of prescription drugs has increased. *These facts alone mean that your bottom line is negatively impacted by substance abusers.*

Other studies show similar results:

- A recent study by George Washington University found that workers in the leisure, hospitality, entertainment, arts, design, media and construction fields were more likely to use drugs and alcohol while those in education, social services and public administration were least likely to abuse substances.
- A national survey, Frone (2006), found that over 2 million employees used drugs during the work day in the previous year and over **3 million used drugs within two hours prior to working.**



Employees abusing alcohol and drugs impact the workplace with:

- Increased rate of **accidents**
- Make costly **mistakes**
- Negatively impact **productivity and morale**
- Take more sick days and have **double** the health care costs of non-substance abusers
- Managers spend countless hours handling the work performance and employee relations issues associated with substance abuse.

In a 2007 survey, Hazelden found 67% of Human Resource professionals view the problems associated with substance use one of the most serious issues they face as it results in an increase in absenteeism and a reduction in productivity.

Studies have shown that treatment can be effective and improve the bottom line. A study by Slaymaker and Owen (2006) found substantial improvements in absenteeism, productivity and workplace conflicts when substance abusers returned to work after treatment.

(Scroll down to Page 2)



How Can Your EAP Help?

Your Employee Assistance Program is an important partner in addressing the costs associated with employee substance abuse. The role of the EAP takes many forms and is not only associated with the clinical assessment. The EAP should also:

- Provide **management training** in the identification of work performance problems, documentation and referral to the EAP
- **Consult** with managers to plan the tough conversations with employees about their job performance
- Documented internal quality assurance processes to **monitor identification and frequent and regular follow-up** with substance abuse cases
- Provide management consultation to **assist managers** with employee's job performance difficulties and structured improvement plan

What Can Manager's Do?

Substance abusers try to hide their addiction and cover up mistakes and other job performance difficulties. They often deny that the problems exist, blame others and divert a manager's attention to other issues. The best thing a manager can do is follow **basic supervisory practices** and **address performance issues as they occur**. Using those skills a manager should:

- **Document** the specific job performance difficulties using behavioral terms with no judgment or conjecture about the cause of the problem
- Avoid discussing the employee's personal difficulties, **direct them to the EAP** for assistance instead.
- Specifically state the behaviors that have to change related to the job performance in **direct behavioral terms**
- Set a specific **time frame** in which changes in job performance have to occur and when the manager will follow-up
- **Follow-up** and give the employee specific behavioral feedback about the things that have improved and those that continue to need improvement

Most employees value their job and when the problems caused by substance abuse threaten their job the employee is more likely to seek treatment. Most substance abusers will not seek treatment unless the consequences of their use begin to impair their ability to carry on with their life. The possibility of losing a job is an important motivator to seek treatment.

A recovering employee will need continued support and the EAP functions as an intermediary between the workplace and the employee to ensure that the employee has the treatment supports needed for ongoing recovery. The EAP can provide the consultation to the manager about any questions or concerns regarding the recovering employee and handling those concerns in the workplace.

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