



FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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HOW IS MY INFORMATION USED?

Q. If I phone the EAP to provide information concerning a rumor I heard about an employee's drug use who was recently discharged from treatment, will the EAP keep my phone call confidential? How will this information be used?

A. A key principle in working with addictive disease employees is to avoid enabling and codependent-like responses to their behaviors. In this instance, seeking to verify such a rumor would be chasing something likely to be nearly undiscoverable. The EAP, understanding this dynamic, will avoid engaging in such controlling behaviors, but instead use the information as a backdrop to have a more effective follow up discussion on progress in treatment and follow-through with a recovery program. EAPs don't provide treatment, so follow-up with the treatment provider will be important allow clinical staff working with the employee to better manage or intervene if necessary. You did the right thing in passing along this information, but your goal should continue to be satisfactory performance.

DOCUMENTING A BAD ATTITUDE

Q. How do I document a bad attitude? It is too subjective. I would almost need a video to accurately describe it.

A. You're right. A bad attitude cannot be documented as such. It requires more quantifiable language. The Oxford dictionary defines "attitude" as "a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically one that is reflected in a person's behavior." The clue is behavior! Behaviors that can be seen, heard, and therefore described, constitute the language that reflects attitude problems. But it does not end there. The next piece is linking these behaviors to undesirable or problematic effects. If for example, your employee is constantly making cynical remarks in team meetings, asking the team how this behavior affects them and learning about its negative consequences for their enjoyment of the work environment or ability to be productive or undermining confidence is what's needed to create effective documentation. Can the EAP help? Yes, this is one the most commonly referred employee issues.

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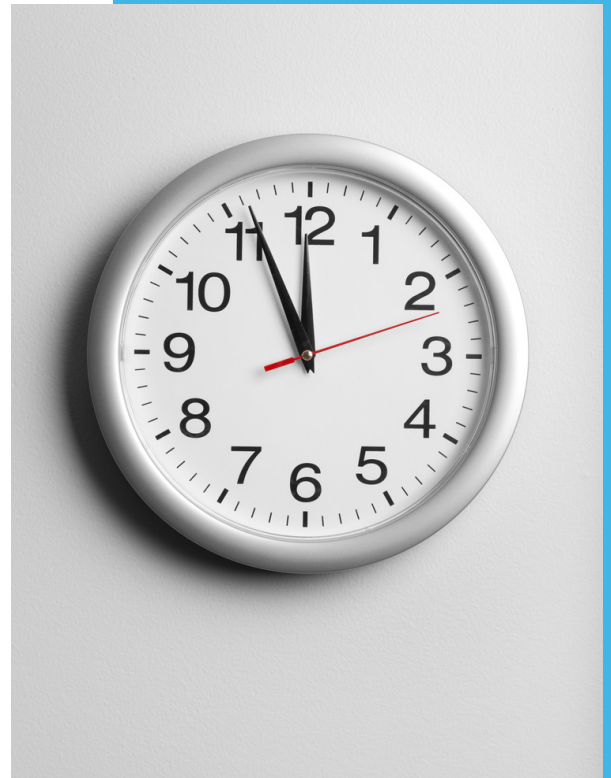
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THE NEXT STEP FOR TARDINESS

Q. My employee has been late too often over the past several months. I have mentioned it to him several times in passing, written him up, and I referred him to the EAP in the memo. What is my next step?

A. Tardiness is a frustrating problem for supervisors. Oddly enough, a common missing piece of the solution is sitting down in private with the employee to discuss the matter, and most importantly, expressing disappointment. Be sincere. You may be angry, and feel like lecturing, but express your disappointment. Contrast this disappointment with what you envisioned for the worker. This can trigger a stronger awareness of responsibility and guilt (which is a good thing.) Employees with chronic behavioral issues use defensive mechanisms like denial and rationalization to avoid experiencing anxiety caused by their improper behavior. Healthy anxiety is the “juice” of change. Your expression of disappointment can overpower this self-reinforcing process and make the EAP referral more certain and participation more likely. If you are trying to avoid disciplinary action, the above is your next step.



IDENTIFYING SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Q. Which is more effective as a means of identifying substance abusers - spotting signs and symptoms of addiction, focusing on performance issues, signs and symptoms of use, or looking for performance issues like absenteeism and conduct problems?

A. When employee assistance programs emerged fifty years ago, a major shift occurred in supervisor training. The field moved away from training managers to look for the signs and symptoms of addiction to instead being observant of performance issues that did not improve, and referring employees to the EAP based upon these performance issues as the primary means of identifying troubled workers. Some of these workers might also be alcoholic or drug addicted. Since evidence showed addictive disease ultimately would manifest as absenteeism, quality-of-work issues, and behavioral problems, the new approach flourished. Today, supervisors are also taught to spot signs and symptoms of substance abuse to support reasonable suspicion testing, particularly in regulated occupations deemed safety-sensitive, especially by the U.S. Department of Transportation. So, decades later, the two strategies have somewhat merged. However, the dominant model of observation, documentation, confrontation, and referral to the EAP has proven to be the most effective for salvaging the most workers.

