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FrontLine Leader

Employees — Your most valuable asset



Should I worry about increased substance abuse among employees returning to work after a long absence due to our social distancing efforts?

Those with addiction or abuse issues might have used more heavily (or relapsed) without having a job to go to everyday, right?

A: Those in effective recovery programs do not relapse simply because they are not at work for an extended period of time. Many recovering persons who value their sobriety may actually take measures to reinforce their recovery programs during stressful times. Your drug-free workplace policies and procedures are

adequate to manage employees who may have increased their drug use or, indeed, relapsed during this period. Being more aware of drug and alcohol abuse or increasing your vigilance has never been proven as an effective way of spotting substance abusers. The steps you should therefore take include focusing on attendance,

quality and quantity of work, availability, conduct, attitude, and other measurable elements of job performance. There simply is no better way to identify troubled workers, including those with substance abuse problems, aside from behaviors that would substantiate reasonable suspicion of being under the influence.

I have an employee who, after time off, is thinking about a career change. How can the EAP assist with this?

Presumably, you do not wish to lose this valuable worker. The EAP is a voluntary resource, of course, but it does not mean you can't encourage this employee to visit with a Continuum EAP professional and discuss his or her decision. It's confidential, it's free, and it might yield information that helps the worker avoid overlooking easily resolved issues that could lead to retention, improved job satisfaction, and obvious cost savings to the employer. Although the EAP may not be able to disclose the exact reasons for an employee's departure, organizational issues affecting the departing worker could apply to other employees who are at risk of leaving. With permission, these larger issues might be shared with the organization, and this could hasten the implementation of new policies or administrative considerations to resolve them, which would positively affect the bottom line.

When to speak about Continuum EAP services with employees...

I referred my employee to the EAP. He had a great experience and let everyone know that in a meeting last week. He did not mention that he was referred by me. I kept silent to maintain confidentiality. It was awkward and I'm afraid some may have viewed my silence as disapproving. Any thoughts?

A: You did the right thing by not involving yourself in the public conversation about his EAP participation. Doing so may have turned the discussion toward you and the management referral of your employee and not what was gained from the experience. The positive testimonial offered by your employee will not be diminished by your lack of commenting on the program.

Although you did not publicly praise the worker for his participation, you can still encourage use of EAP services at any time through an all-staff email or another communication channel. Doing so periodically is advised, along with mentioning the free and confidential nature of the program. Word-of-mouth promotion is a great motivator for those who may be considering reaching out for assistance, so what occurred was a positive thing.



There are so many changes and transitions regarding how we may need to do our work differently in terms of remote work, distancing, and transitioning back into the workplace.

How can I use the EAP to help with all these changes?

A: Continuum EAP can offer you and your co-workers several options for examining the dramatic changes and new workplace realities that you and most companies are experiencing right now. One service involves individual assessment, problem solving, and referral if needed to examine specific work challenges you personally face.

Other services include facilitating group trainings to discuss and examine new and effective work practices for managing stress, facilitating communication, offering ideas and tips on performance management, resolving conflicts, and helping work teams stay on top of problems and issues that might interfere with or undermine productivity and job satisfaction.

What makes the EAP a unique resource is confidentiality provisions that allow it to collectively understand better than any other resource how the employer and employees are responding and adapting to changing work environments. The EAP is therefore the ideal consultant to help the workforce maximize its productivity.