

FEBRUARY
2020

FrontLine Leader

Employees — Your most valuable asset

I am a new manager. I want to be a leader who can influence change within the culture (or at least within my own dept.) so people become more respectful and positive toward each other. Where do I begin?



A: A positive workplace has roots in an institutional mindset that flows from the top down. So start by focusing on yourself and develop a keen self-awareness for how you engage with employees. Spend a week or so understanding what individual employees are trying to achieve and what they think about the work unit. In these interactions, are you being authentic and vulnerable, which means “being

yourself” rather than cool and distant? Your communication style is one key piece in helping produce (or undermine) the work environment you desire because it is amplified by your role as a leader. It is also modeled. Some people mistakenly believe a positive workplace is a matter of good luck. They point to it being the result of the type of work, a sunny office, or a few strong and

cheery personalities who are role models for others to follow. Consult with Continuum EAP to help you develop the communication style and engagement skills you need in order to reach your goal. Also, consider having your department participate in Continuum’s week-long Positively Grateful wellness campaign later this month to help engage employees in your vision.



Employees and supervisors can experience burnout. But what symptoms of burnout are generally more experienced with supervisory personnel?

A: Supervisor burnout and employee burnout have similar causes but can include different symptoms because of individuals’ respective roles. Do you experience a loss of enthusiasm in the role of leader for employees you supervise? Do you find your employees more annoying or unlikable than ever before? Do you resent or feel cynical toward employees who love their work? Do you find that you’re growing angrier

with upper management, administration and your supervisor peers? Do your supervisor peers mention or joke that you are too cynical? Do you remain behind a closed office door more often, unable to be reached by employees? Answering yes to questions like these indicates the danger of experiencing burnout, and you need to take proactive steps to rebound before your condition worsens. Continuum EAP can help.



If performance problems return after an employee is referred to the EAP, should I assume the employee is still participating in the program if no phone call from the EA professional informs me otherwise?

A: Communication is key to successfully using the EAP and helping troubled workers. So make the call to find out whether your employee's participation is still ongoing (assuming an employee-signed release of information consent form is still active), and discuss the performance issues. A number of possibilities exist:

- 1) Your employee could be fully

participating, but still be having performance issues;

- 2) The employee may represent to the EAP that they are participating in its recommendations, but are not really doing so;

- 3) The employee may have withdrawn the release and abandoned EAP participation; and/or
- 4) The employee may be participating fully in

recommendations, but withdrawn his or her contact with the EAP.

Other possibilities also exist. The bottom line is that you get to decide how to respond to the performance issues because EAPs and EAP participation do not establish a roadblock that prevents supervisors from managing their employees.



Will all employees with drug addictions, including alcoholism, eventually have job performance or attendance problems that come to the attention of management or supervisors at some point in the course of their careers?

A: Not all alcoholic and drug-addicted employees will come to management's attention because of performance problems during their careers. According to occupational alcoholism research, much of which was federally funded decades ago but is probably as accurate today as it was then, a significant percentage of addicts and alcoholics get into treatment by other means outside of the workplace, and will have no observable job performance problems of any kind prior to admission.

This does not preclude that these same employees were not aware of declines in performance only known to themselves. Occupational alcoholism researchers have observed that hourly blue-collar workers with untreated alcoholism have more overt absenteeism, while white-collar workers experience more "on the job absenteeism." (The modern term is "presenteeism," meaning present at work but not performing at peak.) This was once referred to as "half-man syndrome."

Source: Harrison M. Trice, "Absenteeism Among High-status and Low-status Problem Drinkers," IRL Research, Vol. IV, No. 1. Cornell Univ.