



ERC

COUNSELORS & CONSULTANTS

FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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Q. When documenting evidence of reasonable suspicion of substance abuse, what should I be cautious about not omitting so my documentation is useful and effective?

A. Common omissions when creating documentation to support reasonable suspicion of substance abuse include failure to contrast behaviors witnessed with those normally observed. These other non-problematic behaviors show that what you have observed is not easily explained away by another cause. For example, if you witness an employee's uncontrollable and inappropriate laughter—a possible indication of illicit drug use—be sure to describe how the employee's mood and demeanor normally appear. Likewise, if an employee is behaving in a belligerent or aggressive manner, be sure to state that no provocation existed prior to the disturbing behavior, if indeed none was witnessed. These contrasts help make your documentation credible. In the latter example, the behavior documented is far less likely to be challenged and dismissed as a happy-go-lucky personality style.

Q. When an employee is referred to the EAP by a supervisor, if the employee truly believes they have no personal problems, isn't this the same as forcing the employee to participate? Isn't this a problem for the EAP as a matter of ethics?

A. As a matter of policy, EAPs are voluntary and established to help employees address personal problems that may affect job performance, and they serve as helpful and appropriate mechanisms to assist supervisors in managing troubled employees. Within this framework, a supervisor referral based on job performance, even if an employee says they have no personal problems, does not conflict with ethics or the EAP's fundamental principles of operation. The classic example is the alcoholic in denial who attends the EAP after referral for performance problems, but later is motivated to enter treatment based upon an assessment, motivational counseling, and evidence. Some employers may modify their policies to make participation in EAPs mandatory for certain infractions. This is often referred to as a 'Last Chance Agreement' and can be very effective in motivating employees to take constructive actions to address problematic behaviors.

Q. My main problem as a supervisor is lack of assertiveness. I imagine conflict and hesitate to ask employees to do certain things, or I avoid raising issues I perceive will create conflict. I am very frustrated with myself and want to overcome this problem. What do you suggest?

A. The battle is half won with your desire to change. It appears that you are linking assertiveness with aggression. Assertiveness is not aggression, which takes rights from others. Shift your focus to your right and responsibility to supervise, direct, and lead others because it is your job to do so. The EAP can work with you to master this supervisory skill. Every day is an opportunity to practice assertiveness, so give the following a shot: When you experience an opportunity to be assertive, mentally identify the justification. For example, tell yourself, "My job requires asking (Jim) to have all the statistics to me by Friday." Later, make a note of how well you performed at being assertive, and how you'll improve at the next opportunity. These steps of thinking, writing, reading, practicing, and evaluating will lead you to your goal.