



COUNSELORS & CONSULTANTS

ERC

FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

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Should I worry about increased substance abuse among employees returning to work after a long absence due to our state's stay-at-home order? Perhaps those with addiction or abuse issues might have used more heavily (or relapsed) without a job to worry about, right?

Addicts in effective recovery programs do not relapse simply because they are not at work for an extended period of time. Indeed, recovering persons who value their sobriety may take measures to reinforce their recovery programs during a stressful time. 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 an effective way of spotting substance abusers. The steps you should therefore take include focusing on attendance, quality of work, availability, conduct, attitude, quantity of work, 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.

Can I make a formal supervisor referral of an employee who has anxiety about COVID-19 but is ambivalent about reaching out to the EAP?

Formal supervisor referrals to ERC are always based on job performance, so you may wish to consult with ERC first to discuss this situation prior to your next step. The key would be to identify the performance issue that makes a formal referral appropriate. Is your employee behaving in a way that interferes with productivity? A formal referral is conceivable if anxiety prompts the employee to repeatedly spend unacceptable amounts of time engaging with coworkers and interfering with their work. A strongly encouraged self-referral may be all it takes, but let ERC help you with the proper approach or dialogue for doing it. Formally referring employees to the EAP for problems unrelated to performance can cause concern among employees and unwittingly encourage them to hide symptoms of their personal problems.

Recently, we laid off quite a few staff because of financial difficulties in the company. It has created a fairly significant grief reaction among surviving workers. How can our work unit manage this grief reaction?

After a layoff, surviving employees can experience stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance). Helping managers understand how these stages manifest among the workforce can enable them to respond more effectively to employees. EAP education for supervisors about on-the-job behaviors exhibited by downsizing survivors can also help them respond appropriately and offer referrals to the EAP if necessary. Not all employees will be in the same stage of grief at the same time. While some will focus their anger on management, particularly upper management, and will distrust supervisors, other employees will experience anxiety and fear that they are next, stress, burnout, insecurity, and decreased morale. Give employees space, time, and opportunity to talk. Communication—plenty of it and opportunity for it—is crucial for the healing process. Consistent with this need, team building can be helpful after a layoff to bring employees closer together, along with resiliency training to empower employees to cope better with future layoffs. If you need support navigating these difficult challenges with your team, you may want to consider contacting ERC for support and direction on how to improve communication and start team building.

ERC: Counselors & Consultants is your company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider. For info, visit our website ERCincorp.com or call 1-800-222-8590. Our professional staff is available to customers for consultations on employee matters and EAP referrals. Call the Leaders Hotline at 1-800-222-8590. Information contained in the *Frontline Supervisor* is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. Copyright © 2018 by DFA