

October 2016

We experienced a death at one of our industrial plants. The EAP came out to meet with employees and to offer support, but some close coworkers didn't show. I was surprised. Should I be concerned?

I am a recovering alcoholic and attend a weekly AA meeting, where I was surprised to see one of my employees. This employee has absenteeism problems. Should I avoid discussing this chance meeting with him at work? Is it breaking confidence if I mention it to the EAP when I refer him?

I read somewhere that supervisors should never get angry at their employees. I am not sure I agree with that advice. Isn't it better for employees to see the real person in a supervisor rather than a machine with no emotions?

It is difficult to know why some of your employees did not show up, but meetings of this type may be initially avoided by those directly affected by the death. They simply may not yet be ready to share their reactions with others. These employees may demonstrate their grief later, and each potentially in a different way. Let the EAP offer guidance on steps you can take to help your employees respond to their grief reactions. Don't rule out having more than one meeting where employees can come together and share and talk with each other. Be attuned to the productivity levels of your employees in the coming months and suggest the EAP for those who struggle to return to a desired level of productivity.

If your employee approaches you at work about the meeting, it would be your decision whether to share personal information or discuss the encounter. Approaching your employee first, however, would not be recommended. Alcoholics Anonymous has time-tested traditions related to how it functions, especially with regard to anonymity. It would be consistent with those traditions to not share your employee's participation with anyone. It is also not a work-related matter. EA professionals accept referrals without preconceived notions as to what might ultimately explain a work performance problem. With this in mind, EA professionals typically screen for substance abuse issues as they engage the employee client. The history of the EA profession is based on this precept.

The supervisor's job is to coach, direct, develop, educate, and counsel their employees on work issues. He or she performs these functions as a direct representative of the organization with whom the employee has a pay-for-hire relationship. Supervisory functions do not include demonstrations of anger that the supervisor may feel toward employees for failure to perform satisfactorily. When employees disappoint, corrective tools and administrative measures exist to help them improve performance. A supervisor can feel anger, of course, but to act on these feelings and display an emotional reaction can only diminish the quality and effectiveness of the relationship the employee has with the supervisor and the organization as a whole.