

# FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Spring 2013

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MIIA  
Employee  
Assistance  
Program

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## Drinking at Lunch



**Q.** My employee comes back from lunch every day with alcohol on the breath. Is this person an alcoholic? Our policy states

employees cannot be under the influence at work. This person does not appear under the influence in any way.

**A.** Diagnosis is something you should avoid. Conceivably, you could have nonalcoholics in your organization who drink at lunch every day and chronic alcoholics who never do. Your policy likely has a list of signs and symptoms to determine reasonable suspicion for testing or a fitness-for-duty examination. Is “alcohol on the breath” listed? May it be used as the sole criterion to act? Do you have discretion as to whether to ignore it unless other performance or behavioral indicators exist? Organizations with safety-sensitive positions may have policies that view alcohol on the breath as the only criterion necessary to authorize a test for reasonable suspicion, while some employers draw distinctions between job classifications for this purpose. Talk to your supervisor and to the EAP. Be clear, and consider whether you are overlooking other less obvious but important behavioral indicators to justify taking action in response to an employee possibly being under the influence.

## Overly Sympathizing With Employees

**Q.** I feel sorry for some of my employees. When I confront a performance issue, I probably demonstrate an overly sympathetic attitude of compassion and understanding. Is this undermining my ability to manage them effectively?



**A.** Helping employees produce satisfactory work and feel happy about their contributions requires setting clear management expectations. It also requires employees to

believe that corrective measures will ensue if performance is unsatisfactory. Most supervisors don't understand the interplay between these two things. Love of a job is why many people come to work, but the need for job security is why they arrive on time. Without the reality of unacceptability and consequences for failure to meet performance expectations, nearly everyone would test boundaries and allow other personal interests to compete with the demands of the job. By overly sympathizing, you remove this important dynamic and send a message of leniency that reduces the healthy sense of urgency needed to perform productively.

### Management Consultation Services

- Employee Performance
- Change Management
- Workplace Trauma
- Conflict Resolution
- Layoff Support
- Lunch & Learn Seminars
- Management Trainings
- Organizational Stress

### Employee Services

#### Confidential Counseling

- Addiction
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Family Issues
- Stress Management
- Work Concerns

#### Resources & Referrals

- Legal
- Financial
- Child Care
- Elder Care

## Developing Soft Skills

**Q.** What are soft skills, and how can I develop or improve them? Do EAPs help with soft skills training? I've been criticized for my lack of follow-through and poor communication, but I don't see these as EAP issues.

**A.** Soft skills are personal attributes that relate to one's ability to interact within a larger environment. They may include the ability to remain organized, inspire and praise employees, communicate effectively, establish productive work habits, be a team player, resolve conflicts, or be dependable and conscientious. There is no absolute list of soft skills, yet some, such as effective communication, are commonly referenced. Consider past performance reviews, interactions with others, and honest criticisms from those you trust. You may also wish to consult a workbook on the subject, such as *Soft Skill Training: A Workbook to Develop Skills for Employment* by Frederick H. Wentz. If you recognize limitations in soft skills areas that you think may be holding you back, talk to the EAP. Acquiring those skills or deepening them may be enhanced by professional counseling to help you past psychological roadblocks or challenges that impede your progress.

## Coping With Layoffs

**Q.** Our town recently made budget cuts that have led to layoffs. Some employees are coping well, but others seem to be horribly depressed. I'm scared by the reaction; some folks are taking this too hard. Can the EAP help?

**A.** Talk to the EAP. During your discussion, the EAP will help you formulate an approach to offer more support, and suggest steps you can take to help your employees. You're witnessing grief, which can be associated with many things. Be sure to acknowledge to your employees that you understand how devastating this is. Ask them individually to speak with you privately if they feel the need. Ask each employee how you can best support him or her at this time. After an event like this, some of your employees may have doubts about their own future employment. You need to step in ahead of that reaction to offer realistic assurance. When you meet with disappointed employees, be sure to invite them to contact the EAP.

## Substance Abuse Denial



**Q.** Employees with drug or alcohol problems exhibit patterns of trying to hide their affliction and put their best face forward. Doesn't this prove that substance abusers are not really in denial? We hear addicted people are in denial, but their behavior seems to contradict that notion.

**A.** Denial is a defense mechanism that does not preclude some awareness of the existence of a problem. In fact, some awareness is necessary in order to use denial as a defense mechanism effectively. Denial defends against the anxiety produced by evidence that a problem exists. That is its purpose. Denial isn't meant to fool others, but to fool one's self. The evidence that this is true is found in stories of recovering addicts - although they no longer abuse substances, they are able to clearly recall how they lied to themselves about the true nature of their problem during the time when it was most acute. Denial for the addicted person is about a refusal to accept reality because it is too threatening. More accurately, denial is a refusal to consciously acknowledge what the addict and others can plainly see is a problem.

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