

# The Successful SUPERVISOR

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Tips from  LifeSolutions®

## “How do I handle this situation? One of my key people is struggling. I think it may be a problem with alcohol.”

Supervisors and managers often lack confidence that they can effectively address problems that appear to be the result of alcohol or drug abuse. This issue of *The Successful Supervisor* will present steps that have proven to be effective with this type of employee problem. As always, we are interested in your feedback, questions, and suggestions. E-mail questions and comments to EAP at [ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com](mailto:ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com) or contact an EAP account manager at 1.800.647.3327.

Employee Assistance Programs got their start over sixty years ago by helping managers and employees deal with co-workers who had drinking problems. In those early days, there were few treatment options and a climate of little hope for someone in the throes of alcoholism.

Typically, the EAP professional facilitated an intervention, connected the employee with supportive services to initiate the recovery process, and continued support after the employee returned to work. The success of this model led to the expansion of EAP services to cover a wider range of problems that employees and employers can experience.

Employees experiencing drug or alcohol problems can be challenging. Substance abuse impacts the employee in a multitude of ways, causing changes in cognitive functioning, emotional response, behavior, and work performance. Employees may present in one of three ways:

- ◆ **A Personal Problem** – Preemptive use of EAP, *before* there are work-related problems, is the most cost effective and least disruptive for both the employee and the employer. Employees may confide in their manager or supervisor, sharing that they are struggling with an alcohol problem or admitting that they are worried about their drinking. Recommending that they contact EAP is often all the motivation and direction they need. The manager should always refer to company policy and/or speak with an HR representative regarding self-disclosures prior to assuring confidentiality.
- ◆ **A Job Performance Problem** – An impaired employee may be the last to recognize the problem. It is essential to focus on *job performance*, documenting specific examples of behaviors that are unacceptable or substandard per company policy. Again, it is recommended that the manager consult with HR before speaking to the employee. Focusing on behaviors, instead of opinions or diagnoses, allows you to avoid potentially inflammatory reactions. Avoid labeling the employee (“I think you may be an alcoholic.”). EAP consultation can help you identify specific signs of deteriorating performance. Non-judgmental descriptions of the perceived changes in thinking and decision-making, interactions with managers and peers, and reactions to changes in work orders or work flow can lead to an acknowledgement of the need to change. At this point, a formal referral to EAP connects the employee with the intervention process described above. It is important to always contact EAP prior to making a formal referral on any employee. EAP staff will make sure the referral is properly set up, walk you through the process, and provide tips on handling the conversation with the troubled employee. Remember, you don’t have to “diagnose” a substance abuse problem; that is our responsibility.

**Albert Moore, MPM, CEAP, SAP**

- ◆ **An Impaired Employee** – Occasionally you may be called upon to deal with an employee who is actively impaired on the job. This requires prompt action to ensure the safety of the employee and others in the workplace. In these situations, it is essential to first contact both HR and EAP to make sure you are following company procedure. EAP can, once again, offer guidance on making the referral and handling the employee. EAP will help you coordinate with HR and the necessary professionals to ensure that the employee is appropriately evaluated. These referrals to EAP are usually categorized as “Mandatory Referrals.”

Each potential situation gives you an opportunity to demonstrate leadership. Peers of the employee, who may feel powerless to intervene, gain respect for your problem-solving and appreciate your concern for co-workers. Keep in mind that untreated substance abuse always gets worse. The sooner you intervene, the better for the employee and for the workplace.

### Quick guidelines for intervention:

- A. Be Aware/Available.** Listen to employees, note problem behaviors, and always encourage employees to take advantage of EAP services.
- B. Take charge.** Be the “Boss.” Provide direction and motivation to employees.
- C. Consult.** Bring concerns to EAP and HR. Coordinate strategies for addressing the problem.
- D. Document.** Record specifics. Share a summary when intervening with job performance problems.
- E. Engage.** Talk with the employee about an action plan to correct the problem. Share your concern for him or her. Refer him or her to EAP when necessary.
- F. Follow through.** Remain in a consultative role with EAP to support the employee in the workplace.

EAP is here to help you solve the problem. Consult with us as soon as you have a concern. Call us at 1.800.647.3327.