

WORKPLACE TRENDS & STRATEGIES

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Some Recent Questions to the EAP:

Q. I am a skeptic who believes that alcoholics can't learn to quit drinking. Aren't success rates from treatment programs overblown? My father drank until his last days, and there were a lot of incidents that should have motivated him to quit.

A. Your experience underlies your belief that alcoholics can't be treated successfully. In fact, successful treatment is common. There are millions of treated, abstinent, recovering persons. An impressive demonstration of alcoholism's treatability is the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration's management of more than 1,500 alcoholic airline pilots over the past thirty years. The vast majority have been successful in treatment, which means they completely abstain from substance use. The program has been independently studied and found to have an 85% success rate. The key is rigorous follow-up and support for the participants. Once a pilot is treated, the program permits a return to the job after abstinence and participation in recovery for a defined period of time. As with most chronic illnesses, relapses sometimes occur. In those cases, pilots aren't necessarily terminated but are evaluated to determine whether they can reestablish their recovery programs.

Q. My employee has adult attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). I know this because the employee told me. Unfortunately, his symptoms are very evident. He has a doctor, but if he is taking medication, it's not having much effect. Can the EAP help?

A. Make a supervisor referral to the EAP based upon the performance issues you have documented. Take your focus off the ADHD diagnosis. With this approach you will see faster improvement because the EAP can address the reasons underlying the problems you are witnessing. Adult ADHD is not simply a medication issue. There are two important components of ADHD: the condition itself and the psychological impact of the person's failed attempts to adjust to and compensate for symptoms. Both of these issues must be addressed by treatment professionals.

Q. I have many young employees working for me. Most are in their middle or late teens. They are loud and defensive when confronted. Going to an EAP to address personal problems is probably never going to happen, right? What advice can you offer supervisors with employees in this age group?

A. Do not underestimate the willingness of the most stubborn teen employee to seek help from the EAP. Your belief is the only roadblock standing in the way. An informal recommendation to use the EAP may go unheeded, but performance problems will eventually force the threat of job loss. Teens are no different from any other employees in wanting to preserve employment. Most will take their chances at the EAP before suffering job loss. Like adults, most have at least a fuzzy understanding of what behaviors contribute to their problems. Defensiveness and a tendency to project or place blame on others is characteristic for their age group, but don't let this fool you into thinking they can't be motivated to seek help for their own benefit.

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