



REACHING OUT

LEADERSHIP EDITION

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource — Employees

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■ **Our company lost a major contract with a customer we've done business with for decades. Some employees are coping well, but others seem to be horribly depressed. I'm scared by the reaction and some folks taking this too hard. Can the EAP help?**

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 that are consistent with your job and that will help your employees. You're witnessing grief, which can be associated with many things, including financial loss, career disappointments, and broken dreams. Be sure to acknowledge to your employees that you understand how devastating this loss of business 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 lose confidence in themselves. 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.

■ **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.**

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 talk 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.

■ **What are soft skills and how do I develop the soft skills I am lacking or that need improvement? Do EAPs do soft skills training? I once was criticized for my lack of fol-**

Soft skills are personal attributes that relate to your ability to interact within a larger environment. Soft skills may include your 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 criti-

low-through and poor communication, but I don't see these as EAP issues.

cisms from those you trust. Consider a workbook on the subject. The most recent offering on this topic (2012) is *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.

■ I want to be fair when giving assignments to employees, but I discriminate based on whether I trust them. Maybe it's believability, authenticity, or realness—I can't put my finger on it—but this difference among employees affects my judgment. What's my problem?

Trusting your employees is a risk, but good leaders must learn to do it. Each of your employees has unique skills and abilities, but you will not discover what they are until you test them with assignments that can reveal them. Some employees are more adept at unveiling who they are to others. Part of their appeal is an ability to be vulnerable and show authenticity. Others are just as competent, except they do not exhibit these qualities in their personalities. So the issue for you is clarity. Because you are not clear about who these employees are, your impulse is to trust them less. This gives you a clue to your next step, which is to engage more with them so they become less of a mystery to you. More trust will follow.

■ Employees who are “part of the club” seem much happier. Some employees avoid socializing with their peers. They rely solely on their performance to advance in the organization. I know it's not fair, but social skills and competence are important. How can I help?

The reality is that social competence in the environment is important. When examined closely, employers more often choose to hire employees who have these abilities because they can help create an upbeat work culture and positively influence the bottom line. Although socializing, telling jokes, and bringing in the doughnuts are not essential duties, it is still appropriate to help your employee connect with peers. Some of this depends on your employee's willingness to be more engaging. During reviews, if appropriate to your organization's format, inquire as to how the person feels about his or her connection to the larger environment and with peers. Statements indicating a desire to be more a part of the social network will give you a sense of how far you can go in making recommendations. Remember, the EAP is always ready to help.

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