

*"How am I supposed to know if someone has a problem with drugs or alcohol unless they show up to work obviously under the influence? And why does my employer make such a big deal out of this? Everybody I know drinks and some use drugs recreationally . . . I don't see how that negatively affects their work."*

Managers/supervisors are the eyes and ears of the business and need to be excellent observers of change in the people they supervise. Because supervisors organize the work, oversee production, and manage employee performance, they are key to organizational success. Employers are concerned about drug and alcohol use/abuse because there is substantial evidence of its negative effects on safety, employee productivity, morale, and personal health. This issue of *The Successful Supervisor* is the first in a two-part

series on the negative impact drug/alcohol use and abuse has on organizations and how supervisors can help to mitigate this impact. We are interested in your feedback to the Successful Supervisor. Email your questions and comments to the EAP at [ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com](mailto:ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com).

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According to SAMSHA, Office of Applied Studies, National Survey on Drug Use and Health 2005 and 2006:

- ◆ 76 percent of people with drug or alcohol problems are employed

Whether an employee is under the influence while on the job or hungover from a weekend of use/abuse, the impact on safety and performance is significant. According to a 2000 study by Harwood and Reichman (*The Cost to Employers of Employee Alcohol Abuse*), employees who drink heavily off the job are more likely to experience hangovers that cause them to be absent from work; show up late or leave early; feel sick at work; perform poorly; or argue with their co-workers. The study further identifies behaviors, such as taking long lunch breaks and sleeping on the job, as problematic for supervisors.

According to a study by the George Washington University Medical Center (*Ensuring Solutions to Alcohol Problems*, [www.nrwcs.com/substance-abuse-costs-billions](http://www.nrwcs.com/substance-abuse-costs-billions)):

- ◆ 20% of employees report being injured, covering for, or working harder because of a co-worker's substance abuse
- ◆ 14% of employees in one survey said they had to re-do work because of a co-worker's drinking

Clearly, the impact on productivity is significant, but the consequences to employee morale are also weighty. When there is disparity in the distribution of the workload, employee morale can suffer. High absenteeism often means that the employees who remain bear an increased burden to keep productivity up. Research suggests that there is a strong connection between employee morale and productivity. Holding all employees to

the same performance standards brings consistency and a sense of fairness to the workplace. Tolerating poor performance from an employee with an alcohol/drug problem is contrary to safety and productivity goals.

Organizations are also concerned about the health effects on the employee. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH Publication No. 11-3770, 2011), three in ten adults drink at levels that put them at risk for alcoholism, liver disease, heart disease, sleep disorders, depression, stroke, bleeding from the stomach, and several types of cancer. They may also have problems managing diabetes, high blood pressure, and other conditions. These excess health care costs to organizations are estimated at \$26.3 billion annually (SAMHSA, Issue Brief #5, 1998).

Not everyone drinks or uses drugs recreationally. In fact, according to the National Institute of Health (Publication No. 11-3770, reprinted October 2011), thirty-five percent of the adult population does not drink at all. Twenty-eight percent, however, drink at heavy or at-risk levels. At risk levels for men are more than 4 drinks/day and more than 14 drinks/week. For women, these levels are 3 drinks/day and 7 drinks/week. About 1 in 4 people who drink this much already have alcoholism or alcohol abuse, and the rest are at greater risk for developing these and other medical conditions.

Substance abuse is a major health risk that can negatively impact every organization. Although it is not the responsibility of the supervisor to diagnose a substance abuse problem, observing performance change and decline and initiating conversation with the employee to address the performance deficit are essential. Our next issue of *The Successful Supervisor* will examine ways that a supervisor might enable poor performers and signs/symptoms that indicate alcohol and drug abuse. Call LifeSolutions at 1.800.647.3327 if you have any questions or would like to schedule a manager consultation.

*Nothing in this information is a substitute for following your company's policies related to the information covered here.*

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email or call us for your company code:

**ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com**

**1.800.647.3327**

**www.lifesolutionsforyou.com**

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