



The Frontline Supervisor

March 2022

Q. Urine drug testing is part of our comprehensive drug-free workplace program. I know that a test will tell us whether indeed someone is positive and what drug he or she are using, but will it also prove they were impaired? My employee insists he was not impaired.

A. Your company may conduct a urine drug test in accordance with its policy, and a positive test alone is grounds for taking administrative action. However, a urine test does not prove impairment. That is not the focus of the policy, so your employee's argument that he or she was not impaired is irrelevant. An employee can be completely sober but still test positive for a substance, because metabolites can be present in the urine for days or even weeks. Many people confuse the objectives of business organizations that test for drugs of abuse with those of law enforcement officials, who must be able to prove impairment if a person is arrested for drunk driving. A field sobriety test or a certain blood alcohol level establishes the legal existence of this impairment.

Q. My employee apologizes constantly for her inadequate performance. I know she is sincere, but I feel a bit guilty putting pressure on her and taking some action that could cause her to lose her job. She will not go to the EAP. I feel torn. I am more frustrated with myself than with her!

A. Your employee may indeed be sincere, but she is not a satisfactory performer. When she apologizes without correcting her performance, she effectively avoids disciplinary action you are unwilling to take. Until now, you have been manipulated to avoid taking stronger measures to correct her performance. But remember, discipline is not punishment; It is a tool for correcting performance. Your own performance is suffering because you are not managing this situation properly. What's more, if her problems are chronic, eventually the current performance issue will get worse. This could lead to a crisis you want to avoid. Consider this: By not acting more decisively, you have enabled her problems to grow worse. Not all employees are defensive when confronted. Some simply agree with you and but not feel motivated enough to change. Consult with the EAP about your indecisiveness. The EAP will not tell you to take disciplinary action or suggest what that action should be, but it will help you with personal issues that keep you avoidant and indecisive.

Q. My employee participated in a court-mandated driver education course related to alcohol and drug use after a recent DUI arrest. The court did not refer him to treatment, and I disagree with that decision. I think he is an alcoholic, because frankly, I am recovering myself. Can I involve the EAP?

A. If your employee's job performance is satisfactory and the employer has not determined that the arrest and court referral constitute a business concern (i.e., "conduct unbecoming of our employees"), then you do not have a basis for a formal supervisor referral. You do know about the DUI, however, and that an assessment of alcoholism was not made by the court. How did you come by this information? Did the employee volunteer it? If so, suggesting a self-referral to the EAP as a source of help and assessment is appropriate. Regarding your status as a recovering alcoholic, be cautious. There is nothing wrong with sharing personal information, but do not diagnose your employee or engage in a diagnostic discussion. Realize that the crisis has passed, and the pursuit of treatment for alcoholism is usually motivated by a sense of urgency based on circumstances. You are not likely to inspire a revelation. Still, such conversations can play a role in a future decision to enter treatment.

Q. The EAP has been a wonderful service for our organization. Many employees have been helped, and it is a great resource for our supervisors. I have noticed not all supervisors use the EAP equally. Other than simply lack of training, why might some be resistant?

A. Although EAPs help both employees and supervisors, and protect the organization by reducing behavioral risk; some supervisors may feel that the EAP takes away something that has given their job meaning: counseling or at least advising employees about personal problems, in addition to using persuasion to inspire changes. Some supervisors possess a style that includes being a confidant, a friend, and a wise advice giver. Some supervisors are more empathetic than others and are more interested in the human experience. This is positive, but their identity may be too closely connected to how others look up to them beyond pure performance and leadership matters. The desire to play a larger role in employees' lives can conflict with the role of supervisor and the critical link needed in facilitating referral to the EAP for troubled workers with severe problems that the supervisor is unable to resolve or possibly even identify.

Q. What is the "Lone Ranger Syndrome" that is sometimes used to describe supervisors and how they conduct themselves in their role?

A. The Lone Ranger Syndrome is a construct originated 50 years ago by Arthur Purvis, an EAP author and federal employee personnel specialist. It describes supervisors who take on so much responsibility for managing workers' performance as well as their personal problems that they begin to burn out. They may feel anger, confusion, frustration, and helplessness, and their state of overwork may lead them to ineffective management practices. When EAPs first originated in the mid-1970s, it was important to recognize this construct in order to motivate supervisors to come forward and take advantage of what the EAP could offer them in the way of relief. It is considered a classic in EAP education and training.

Questions? Call during business hours 815.748.8334, or after hours at 800.373.3327

