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Supervisor Wire

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Published by CARE's WorkLife Solutions to help supervisors in their goal of maintaining a productive workforce

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Can You Be Both... A Supervisor and A Friend?



Congratulations! You're moving up the company ladder. Your chance to make all the changes you've wanted are now possible. After the handshakes and the pats on the back you come to the realization that you will now be signing your friends' time cards, and authorizing their requests for vacation time. You will now be supervising them! Below are a few helpful suggestions that may help you make a smooth transition from friend to supervisor.

Define the relationship. To maintain the respect of your employees, and continue to maintain their friendship, you must be clear in your role as their supervisor. Acknowledge that there has been a change in the relationship. Share with the employees what your goals are and how they fit into helping accomplish these goals. Letting the employees know what they can expect from you and having clear communication will lower the risk that you will be misinterpreted.

Find support. While you and your co-workers can remain friends, the dynamics of the relationship have changed. It is essential that you replace the support that you were receiving from your friends. Consider developing a network with people in similar roles in other programs or organizations. Joining a local professional association can help accomplish this.

Treat everyone equally. Avoid favoring any employees in the workplace. Doing so will only cause distrust, and morale will suffer. This may also cause the employees to resent one another causing conflict in the work environment.

Keep it confidential. It is your responsibility to keep information confidential, and you need resist the urge to share private information about other employees with your friends.

Think Positively. The changes can be scary, but are often welcomed. Many new supervisors have found that their friends supported the changes, eager to have a more supportive supervisor.

Spotlight on Safety—Save The Date

Workplace violence can be any act of physical violence, threats of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening, disruptive behavior that occurs at the worksite. Workplace violence can affect or involve employees, visitors, customers, contractors, and other non-employees.

A number of different actions in the work environment can trigger or cause workplace violence. It may even be the result of non-work-related situations such as domestic violence or "road rage." Workplace violence can be inflicted by an abusive employee, a manager, supervisor, co-worker, customer, family member, or even a stranger. Whatever the cause or whoever the perpetrator, workplace violence is not to be accepted or tolerated.

There is no sure way to predict human behavior and, while there may be warning signs, there is no specific profile of a potentially dangerous individual. The best prevention comes from identifying any problems early and dealing with them.

CARE's WorkLife Solutions in collaboration with SAFE Macomb, will be hosting a half-day "Safety in the Work Place Conference" at the Macomb Intermediate School District on October 15, 2008. During the conference, a "Spot Light" will shine on a business that goes above and beyond to protect its employees, customers and/or its community. Please call 866.888.1555 ext. 218 for more information on how to nominate your organization or to R.S.V.P. to attend. Cost to attend is \$15.00 and includes a full breakfast.

Supervisors as Enablers

The serious impact of alcohol and substance abuse in the workplace is well known. Why does this problem continue to get worse each year?

Could supervisors be playing a role?

Dr. Vernon Johnson, founder and president of the Johnson Institute and author of “I’ll Quit Tomorrow” and “Intervention: How to Help Someone Who Doesn’t Want Help,” maintains that professional enabling may be contributing to the problem.

Dr. Johnson explains that “some supervisors function under the notion that those who are in trouble with alcohol and other drugs must come to them and ask for help.” By nature, substance abuse often leaves its victims incapable of suddenly recognizing the severity of their symptoms. Waiting until they ask for help is just waiting to watch them die.

Supervisors that want to help often unintentionally support the illness and actually allow it to progress. The supervisor often protects the chemically dependent person from fully experiencing the harmful consequences of the disease. The employee loses the opportunity to gain significant insight into the severity of their problem.

“Supervisors take on this role because they tend to focus only on their sincere efforts to help. Since the disease initially presents only a few episodes of loss of control, the enabler often perceives these episodes as isolated instances of intoxication and not as a pattern of harmful dependency,” Dr Johnson states.

Supervisors can become enablers when, out of kindness, they accept substandard or incompetent work performance from the dependant employee. Often times the supervisor will even help pick up the slack which can lead to resentment and job burn-out. Supervisors quite often become enablers when they try to deal with the problem alone and try to counsel the employee through the many problems a chemically dependent person faces.

If the person with a substance use disorder is to survive, it will be through the intervention of others who care. Most often those persons will be members of the victim’s own family, typically the spouse or possibly the adult children. A co-worker may provide the necessary intervention. It is important that the supportive person realizes that the drinking and using episodes are not isolated incidents caused by pressure from other problems. They are the symptoms of chemical dependence that are aggravating the other problems.

The first task of the supervisor is to focus on the decline in performance. A person who is coming to work while “hung over” is probably NOT going to be performing at his best. A person beginning to feel the symptoms of alcohol or drug withdrawal is not going to be productive. An employee focused on when they will be able to leave work and be able to drink is distracted and at risk for injury.

The supervisors CAN assist those with addiction problems by addressing it in terms of productivity. Be supportive and provide an environment that has good policies and practices and that supports healthy choices. Refer to CARE’s WorkLife Solutions at every opportunity by using the “Sometimes Speech” below.

The Sometimes Speech

Employee Assistance is an invaluable resource for employers who have employees with job performance problems. However, there is growing concern that, when confronting a troubled employee, a supervisor risks saying something that may infer that s/he has “diagnosed” the employee. Terms like “alcoholism” and “depression” are diagnoses that can only be made by trained medical professionals. To protect supervisors and employers, while at the same time offering them help, try using the “Sometimes Speech”:

“Everyone wants you to improve your performance, especially me. We all have personal problems sometimes. Everyone in this organization has had to carry some personal burden. And whether they realize it or not, these problems sometimes show up on the job and start to affect work. I’m not saying this is true in your case, but if it is, CARE’s WorkLife Solutions is available to help. It is free and it’s confidential. Regardless of whether you contact them or not, you and I need to meet again in 30 days to review your progress concerning your job performance.”

CARE’s WORKLIFE SOLUTIONS CAN HELP WITH MANY CONCERNS

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