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Addiction In The Workplace: How to make your workplace drug-free

Substance use disorder has a profoundly negative effect on the workplace. Did you know that 70 percent of the estimated 14.8 million Americans who use illegal drugs also are employed? According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD), most of these employees also are binge drinkers. Yet, what is more staggering is that the majority of people suffering from addiction can hide the red flags and signs from their employers. Armed with this information, it's imperative and essential for employers to understand addiction and the prevalence in which it occurs in the workplace.



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Use of substances in the workplace leads to decreased productivity and increased accidents, absenteeism, turnover and medical costs. Taking note of employees' behavior in the workplace is a crucial first step in identifying those suffering from addiction. He or she may avoid coworkers and friends or irrationally blame them for mistakes. In addition to hostile behavior, employees suffering from addiction may call out sick (especially on Fridays and Mondays) more than others and even fall asleep on the job.

Studies show that employees with substance use disorder are 2.2 times more likely to request early dismissal or time off, 2.5 times more likely to have absences of eight days or more, three times more likely to be late for work and five times more likely to file a workers' compensation claim. Substance abusers also can be linked to approximately 40 percent of American industrial fatalities.

In order to combat this, many employers have put programs in place to encourage a drug-free workplace. This creates an environment that is aware of the causes and effects of addiction, and a place where employees feel safe. By making your organization or business a drug-free workplace, you are making it clear to your current and future employees that you care about not only their well-being but the organization's well-being as a whole.

The Drug-Free Workplace Advisor of the US Department of Labor is a great resource for employers providing clients with tools to build tailored drug-free workplace policies and guidance on developing a comprehensive program. Another resource for employers is the national nonprofit Institute for a Drug-Free Workplace, dedicated to preserving the rights of employers and employees in drug and alcohol abuse prevention programs, and to positively influence national policy in this area.

The institute offers resources for employers and employees on substance-abuse detection, prevention, policy implementation and employee education. As the average employee spends 30 percent of his or her life working, the workplace should provide employees with an environment where they feel safe turning to their HR department for guidance. The workplace should be an important and effective place to address alcoholism and other drug issues by establishing or promoting programs focused on improving health and one's overall mental, physical and spiritual well-being. By encouraging and supporting treatment, employers can dramatically assist in reducing the negative impact of alcoholism and addiction in the workplace, while ultimately reducing their costs.

A proven program to be effective in the workplace is a confidential Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This program can address issues affecting one's ability to work such as; alcohol and drug abuse problems, emotional and mental health problems, marital and family problems, financial problems, and dependent care concerns.

These programs can help employers address substance use and dependence in their employee population by implementing a drug-free workplace and other written substance abuse policies, offering health benefits that provide comprehensive coverage for substance use disorders, including aftercare and counseling, reducing stigma in the workplace and educating employees about the health and productivity hazards of substance use disorder through company wellness programs.

Employers with successful prevention programs report improvements in morale and productivity and decreases in absenteeism, accidents, downtime, turnover, and theft. In addition, they report better health status among employees and family members and decreased use of medical benefits by these same groups. **B&W**

Author Bio

Rebecca Flood is executive director and CEO of New Directions for Women, a world-renowned, exclusively female, private drug and alcohol rehab program providing social model residential addiction treatment services for women of all ages, including pregnant women, women with children, women who have relapsed, had prior treatments and suffer from a co-existing disorder. With nearly four decades of experience in the addiction field, Flood has demonstrated expertise in program development, implementation, evaluation, clinical oversight, business development and responsible fiscal management.

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