



How to Identify and Help a Troubled Employee

As a manager, it is important to recognize warning signs in troubled employees. Think about the employees that you supervise. Do any of them have any of the following characteristics?

Absenteeism

- Instances of leave without prior notice
- Too much sick leave
- Frequent Monday and/or Friday absences
- Repeated absences that follow any pattern
- Too much tardiness, especially with an established pattern
- Leaving work early
- Unusual and increasingly hard-to-believe excuses for absences
- Higher absenteeism rate than other employees for common illnesses
- Frequent unscheduled short-term absences (with or without medical explanation)

"On-the-job" absenteeism

- Continued absences from work station—more than job requires
- Presenteeism—physically present, but not productive due to health problems or personal issues
- Taking long breaks
- Repeated physical illness on the job without medical interventions

Safety issues

- Accidents on the job
- Accidents outside of work that affect job performance
- Behavior that is unsafe and that could easily cause an accident

Lack of concentration

- Work requires more and more effort
- Tasks take more and more time to complete

Confusion

- Difficulty recalling instructions, details, etc.
- Increasing difficulty handling complex assignments
- Difficulty recalling work errors, however, able to recount errors of co-workers

Spasmodic work patterns

- Alternate periods of high and low productivity
- Change in the amount of effort required to meet deadlines

Reporting to work

- Coming/returning to work in an obviously abnormal state (mental/physical)
- Difficulty beginning work upon arrival

Generally lowered job efficiency

- Missed deadlines
- Mistakes due to inattention and/or poor judgment
- Wasting materials or resources
- Making poor decisions
- Complaints from customers or clients
- Hard-to-believe excuses for poor performance
- Increase in personal activities and phone calls

Poor employee relations

- Overreactions to real or imagined criticism
- Wide swings in morale
- Borrowing money from co-workers
- Complaints from co-workers
- Unreasonable resentments
- Avoidance of associates

Tips for managing troubled employees

- **Be prepared.** Document specific work performance issues you want to address with the employee. Be prepared to explain why these specific examples are a problem and why they need to be corrected.

- **Make no exceptions.** Do not make exceptions to your standard supervisory rules just because you suspect an employee has a personal problem.
- **Never try to diagnose or address the personal problem yourself.** That is the role of the Employee Assistance Program. Stick to work performance problems.
- **Stay focused.** The employee may wish to share details of his problems. Remember, your job is to focus on the work performance problems.
- **Place responsibility for seeking assistance on the employee.** Explain that you want to ensure that her needs get met and that is why you are referring her to the EAP. Emphasize that the EAP is confidential.
- **Ask for the employee's feedback.** Offer the employee an opportunity to communicate to you what he feels is helping or not helping and develop the most effective plan for improving work performance.
- **Be clear about the consequences.** Let the employee know what will happen if work performance does not improve.
- **Document the main points of the conversation** and the employee's response to the requested job performance improvements.
- **Respect the employee's privacy.** Only discuss the situation with those directly involved in developing a plan of action for the employee.
- Finally, be sure to use your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is here for you

Checking any of the items listed above may mean it is time to reach out to your EAP. EAP professionals are highly trained and can help you evaluate the situation and develop an appropriate plan of action. EAP conversations are confidential by law and there is no cost. The EAP is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Remember, if you are worried about an employee's safety or your own, call 911 right away and talk with your supervisor.