

Frontline Supervisor



■ **We dismissed an alcoholic employee who relapsed after treatment, but now we hear he has been sober for over a year. It's incredible because his case was a 25-year saga of problems and relapses. What explains this? He lost a six-figure salary.**

It is impossible to know all the factors that contributed to the surprising success at recovery after termination. However, some common observations about recovery are worth understanding. Chronic alcoholism is always accompanied by an unpredictable path of progression—including problems at work and home, physical illness, and enabling patterns within the family and in society, all of which direct the course of the illness and the timing for when (if ever) the addict will accept treatment. A 25-year history of issues at work suggests a long-term pattern of enabling and confusion within the organization that may have contributed to the alcoholic's belief that one more day without entering treatment was possible and that after treatment, a relapse would be accommodated. Alcoholism is a drug addiction accompanied by cognitive distortions in thinking, especially denial. A possible explanation is your employee's fear of job loss may never have materialized until after it was experienced, wherein the need for treatment and recovery was accepted in order to financially survive.

■ **I was about to make a supervisor referral of my employee to the EAO, but before I could, he went to the program as a self-referral. This is great, but I don't have a release signed, as I would if this was a formal referral. Should I ask him to sign one now?**

You can monitor your employee's performance for now as you normally would, and you *should* expect resolution of performance issues. You may feel in the dark about what the status of your employee's participation in the EAO might be, but such is the case with any self-referral. That's okay. If your employee continues to struggle, then make an EAO referral. The key is to focus on performance. You may also benefit by contacting EAO for management consultation with any employee performance concern.

■ **I am growing tired of being a supervisor because I don't like solving everyone else's**

The most common struggle supervisors face in understanding their role is learning to manage and lead. This includes establishing goals and objectives, and then helping employees get clear on the required outcomes. When employees have this clarity, and your life gets easier.

problems. This is how I see my role. How can I see this job differently? I am about to quit.

Is it okay for supervisors to talk about their personal problems and stress in front of employees, or are we supposed to never let them see us struggle?

Employees then know what to do, and you become less of a micromanager. Delegation is an integral part of this process, of course. It entails assigning work, handing over authority, and holding accountable those to whom work has been assigned. Consulting with the EAO to process this journey to improvement will make it much more likely that you will be happier at work. EAO provides coaching and can recommend additional resources to build your supervisory skills.

Employees who perceive you as a “real person” are more likely to consider you approachable when the need arises for help or intervention with job problems they can’t handle alone. This does not mean that you must make an effort to share your personal problems. Instead, you should present yourself in a way that fits your personality style and facilitates a professional and constructive relationship with employees. It is a matter of choice regarding how much you personally share, unless your job setting dictates otherwise, such as in a military or similar context. There is no hard-and-fast rule about personal disclosure, but you should consider the impact. Remember, your relationship is not just with your employees, but also with *each individual* employee. Some employees may need you to be more formal, while others may benefit from seeing your more relatable side. You may wish to invite an EAO representative to a staff meeting so employees can learn about the many resources available to them to address personal concerns.

How can I energize my employees and get them to feel excited about the work we are doing?

Energize employees by taking every opportunity to recognize their contributions while urging them to excel. Spend time periodically letting them feel your enthusiasm for the work, the goal, the vision, and the ultimate outcome. Positivity is contagious when it’s genuine. Be sure you find your own ways to stay excited and energized because if you can’t feel engaged yourself, it will not be possible to pass it along to them. Remind employees about their achievements, and help them to understand the underlying reasons they succeeded and did so well. This will offer clues about what keeps them energized. Ask them what they need from you to feel enthused about their work. Include them in goal setting and decision-making. Find out what their career goals are and how you can help them achieve the next step. Consider offering an occasional teambuilding exercise, celebrate personal and work-related milestones and promote wellness at work.

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