



Alcoholism in the Workplace

Alcohol abuse is a widespread problem that affects all areas of a person's life, including their job. According to The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), 1 in every 13 adults in the United States abuses alcohol or is an alcoholic; 53% of Americans report that one of their close relatives has a drinking problem. Alcoholism affects people of all colors, occupations, and incomes.

The NIAAA provides four questions to help determine if someone has a drinking problem. They are:

- Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking?
- Have people ever upset you by criticizing your drinking?
- Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking?
- Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hang over?

Answering yes to any of these questions suggests that a person may have a drinking problem. Answering yes to several makes it highly likely that a problem exists and that a person should seek help and support. However, alcoholism is often never that easy to diagnose or treat.

Every workplace, no matter how large or how small, should have some kind of policy regarding alcohol. It is even more important, especially at the managerial level, to understand your company's alcohol and drug policy and enforce it. Surprisingly, the majority of alcohol-related problems in the workplace are caused by light to moderate drinkers as opposed to alcohol-dependent employees. It makes sense, because the ratio of truly alcohol-dependent employees is rather small when compared to the number of employees who might drink slightly heavily on the weekends, for example. Hangovers have been shown to have a significant affect on attendance, productivity, mood, and concentration, making it more likely for an accident or error to occur. It may be beneficial for your company to address all types of drinking, or provide education on how drinking at home could affect an employee's performance at work, including safety issues.

Another means to discourage problem drinking in your company is simply setting the right example. A workplace culture that accepts drinking at lunch and at company events is more likely to have employees who have drinking problems. Co-workers spend a lot of time with each other and therefore hold a great deal of influence over one another; this is especially true of managers. Setting a proper example is an effective means to both prevent and combat alcohol-related problems in the workforce.

Sources:

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/booklet.htm

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

www.rwjf.org/publications/punlicationsPdfs/anthology1999/chapter_04.html

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