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QUANTUM
Frontline Supervisor

■ My employee discusses many personal problems at work. One day it's health issues, the next day it's problems with her sister-in-law. It's bothersome to coworkers, and I fear it could influence some to leave the company. Should I refer her to Quantum? Is this a performance matter?

Meet with your employee in private and express your concern about so many different things affecting her life. Give her a chance to respond. She may instantly realize that she is too talkative about personal issues. (This may prompt change. Sometimes problems like this are resolved in mere seconds.) If not, share your observations about the frequency and effect of her multiple problems and suggest Quantum as a resource. If no changes are forthcoming, and self-referral to Quantum is declined, encourage her more strongly to participate. If needed, express your concerns even more directly about the work environment. Use documentation based on your observations of her interactions. The goal is to help her make changes and get help if issues in her life are serious enough to need counseling support. Don't rule out a supervisor referral in the future.

■ The problem of "presenteeism" (coming to work sick) is a serious one. Why do employees do it? Illnesses like the flu can kill people. Given that, is it appropriate to refer these employees to Quantum (when they get well) or even consider it a disciplinary matter?

You and your managers should decide the strength of your response to this problem. There is research that points to common reasons why employees come to work sick. One research study found that presenteeism was associated with employees who had managers likely to grade their performance lower or less satisfactory. Employees who come to work sick have also been shown to have more mental health issues, personal financial difficulties, work stress, and perceived work pressure from managers and coworkers who pressured them to come to work. Employees coming to work sick can therefore be symptomatic of more serious issues, internal or external. Recommending and encouraging your employee to call Quantum in the event a personal problem influences the decision to come to work unwell is appropriate. Source: theworkfoundation.com [Search: "sickness in the workplace"]

■ How can I help employees cope with workplace demands that I don't have any control over? I can't manage their stress for them, so can you suggest what role I should play?

No matter what sort of stress employees experience—or, for that matter, lack of stress—nearly all employees think about their careers and what they will be doing differently someday. Be realistic, but engage your employees about this topic from time to time, and demonstrate you're on the lookout for what will be the next steps for them in the way of skill, opportunities, continuing education, etc. Don't be a manager or supervisor who disappears on the job. When employees are stressed,

isolation can set in. Your energy as a manager and your influence can play a powerful role by breaking a naturally negative self-talk script employees are prone to playing under stress. The point: Stay engaged. Also, be sure to develop relationships with your employees. Each one is different, and they will handle stress in different ways. Understanding workers under your supervision will allow you to offer support tailored to their individual needs. The managerial behaviors described above don't eliminate stress—they simply facilitate and allow the employee's natural ability to cope with stress to come forth.

■ **I caught our mechanic drinking a beer on duty. He quickly admitted he was an alcoholic, and said he was going back to counseling and AA. I was impressed with his sincerity and felt relief, so I let the incident slide. I thought, "Okay, he is on the right track." Was I manipulated?**

Yes, you were manipulated, but your employee may have also been completely sincere. Sincerity, of course, does not translate to the proper treatment steps. So you should have acted on your organization's drug and alcohol policy. How can you be manipulated at the same time your employee is being sincere? The answer lies in the nature of the disease. A crisis—caught drinking on the job—is enough for the alcoholic to experience a convincing sense of urgency (never-again determination) to stop drinking. However, the nature of the disease dictates its course, not willpower. This sense of urgency dissipates when withdrawal symptoms return. So, the likelihood of self-referral to treatment is low, but it can be heartfelt and sincere in the moment.

■ **I am a new supervisor. I am sure there will be many challenges, but with all the different personalities of employees I supervise, how can I best help each one perform to his or her peak?**

Understanding that each of your employees will see you differently, will relate to you differently, and will need different things from you is the place to start. Many managers make the mistake of seeing their employees as "the troops." As such, they communicate with them as though they are Marines in a barracks waiting for orders. Take the opposite approach. It takes time, but over months and years, pay attention to how your employees are unique in five key ways: 1) Communication style and needs. 2) Career goals, hopes, dreams, education desires. 3) Motivation triggers and reward preferences. 4) Limitations, avoidances, and dislikes. 5) Leadership and problem-solving capacity. There are more, but these five hit most of the bases. Growing to understand each one will help maximize employee job satisfaction and productivity.

NOTES

FrontLine Supervisor is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. Articles with URLs are case-sensitive. For specific guidance on handling individual employee problems, consult with Quantum Health Solutions at 877-747-1200.