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Drug problems, solutions addressed through Employee Assistance Programs

PROTECTING YOUR BEST INVESTMENT
BY REESE MATYE



Consider the following scenario:

You run a close-knit construction company with a small permanent workforce of roughly five or six people – your crew size varies from job to job. You've just started two new projects, and the long-running project that has been bringing in a good steady cash flow is being managed by one of your consistent project managers. Monday morning, you receive a phone call from this job site informing you that your project manager has failed a random drug test administered by the owner representatives.

What would you do?

In the old days, you had few options beyond termination. Today, there are numerous options, and many of them can be anticipated or planned for with the inclusion of Employee Assistance Programs in your hiring and personnel management. EAP can be an extremely valuable tool for smaller businesses, and a growing number of group insurance programs are starting to include EAP services in their standard package of service options.

Whatever the economic conditions, maintaining your core personnel is one of the most important management challenges you will face – regardless of your business size. Construction firms face some unique challenges in this field as they often have a small core of permanent employees,

leveraging field management personnel to oversee a flexible group of skilled craftspeople. In recent years, the industry has come under increased scrutiny in areas of drug and alcohol use as owners and insurance companies have brought more attention to the subject.

In fact, drug and alcohol use in the workplace has been a growing concern since the plant operations during World War II saw a rising abuse of alcohol having an impact on productivity. Alcohol use that led to increased absenteeism, tardiness, poor workmanship, and the inappropriate use of health benefits affected wartime priorities by employees in defense plants.

Of course today, the range of drugs that can be used and abused – including prescription drugs – is vastly expanded. But just as the drug variations have expanded, so too have the professional developments in a variety of fields that can assist business owners. EAPs can assist business owners by reassigning a valuable employee who has a substance abuse problem. Whether it's a diversion and treatment program or more involved intervention, EAP options can bring your employee back to work with renewed commitment, and further serve as an example to other employees how committed you are to their well being.

You have invested perhaps thousands of dollars of training in your project manager. You have invested a lot of your company's public goodwill in that person, too, especially with the owners of projects the employee was your leading representative for. The support and assurance an EAP offers you can go a long way in restoring

any trust that may have been damaged.

A good EAP provider will step in and take over the management of your employees' care options and decisions for getting back to work. From overseeing a complete drug and alcohol evaluation, to guiding the employee through treatment and follow-up (if necessary), your EAP provider can serve as your intermediary.

The EAP provider will investigate what factors may have led to a positive drug test. Are there additional stress factors outside the workplace? Was it the stress of the job that contributed to the drug/alcohol use? Was it a weekend party situation? Is there family history or propensity for this problem?

With a complete evaluation in hand, your EAP provider will offer you a broadened set of options for retaining your valuable employee and seeing the return on your investment in that person.

Many workers' compensation insurance carriers offer some form of EAP services to their clients, and many of them are triggered by a job-related incident. A few group and employer-based health insurance programs offer EAP as a health care option. If you currently don't have access to an EAP program, look into the local options you have. You will be surprised at how little it can cost you and how big the return can be as you continue to invest in your most important asset – your employees.

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