



# Training Your Supervisors

## What Supervisors Can Do: Carry Out the Policy Fairly and Firmly in Routine and Crisis Situations

The success of the drug-free workplace policy and program depends to a great extent on supervisors. Supervisors are responsible for implementing many of the drug-free workplace policy and program elements. They must set and maintain the right tone—achieving a delicate balance between being supportive and firm. They must always be fair and consistent. They often are the first to notice or be informed of a possible problem.

## What Is the Supervisor's Role in Maintaining a Drug-Free Workplace?

Each organization defines the role of a supervisor differently, based on factors such as the nature of the work, how the work is organized, and where the work occurs. Some supervisors (for example, a foreman of a construction team) work near their employees every day.



Others (such as a supervisor of a traveling sales team) may see their employees less frequently.

The levels of risk associated with the work environment and the workers are likely to differ in each industry—perhaps even in each workplace. Accordingly, the supervisor's role in maintaining a healthy, safe, drug-free workplace must be tailored to suit each specific organization. All supervisors are key players in promoting a safe and healthy drug-free workplace. A drug-free workplace program's effectiveness may even hinge on the supervisors. Through routine interactions with employees, supervisors carry out many of the policy and program elements developed by the

employer's drug-free workplace team. Supervisors follow the tone set by the employer for the policy and program.

Supervisors play a vital part in creating an environment that not only complies with minimum health and safety requirements but also actively supports the creation of a healthy, safe, productive drug-free workplace. Armed with the right attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge, supervisors can serve as powerful motivators and agents of positive change who inspire all employees to stand behind the drug-free workplace policy and program.

In general, supervisory attitudes or styles for handling substance abuse problems fall into one of two categories: passive or active.

### Passive Attitude

*Once again, Harry did not show up for work at the coffee shop. And once again, Joe Kelly, owner and supervisor of Joe's Joe, did nothing. Everyone, including Joe, was aware that Harry was an alcoholic. Joe was used to Harry going a few weeks without reporting for work. Joe simply let Harry show up when he was ready to and never confronted the problem of his absences.*



Passive-attitude supervisors deal with problems only when they become obviously disruptive. This head-in-the-sand approach may appear to work in the short run because it keeps marginally effective employees on the job. However, in the long run it



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does not maximize health, safety, or productivity. A problem left alone rarely improves.

### **Active Attitude**

*"I know all my staff. When one of them is having a problem—at home, or with the job—I'm the first to know. And I'm the first to do something about it."*

This is one example of an active attitude, which is essential to the creation of a safe, healthy, and productive workplace. Active-attitude supervisors



assertively support a healthy and safe environment, know the signs and symptoms of substance abuse, and immediately and appropriately confront issues in accordance with the drug-free workplace policy.<sup>1</sup>

### **What Are the Supervisor's Responsibilities in Maintaining a Drug-Free Workplace?**

Supervisors have numerous responsibilities that are critical to the success of a drug-free workplace policy and program.

**Maintain a Safe, Healthy, and Productive Environment for All.** Supervisors are responsible for evaluating and discussing performance with employees, treating all employees fairly, and acting in a manner that does not judge or humiliate anyone.

**Have a Clear and Complete Understanding of the Drug-Free Policy and Program.** To implement the drug-free policy fairly and firmly, supervisors must know both the policy and the program thoroughly.

**Give Positive Feedback.** Most supervisors have the ability to set the day-to-day tone for the workplace. Highlighting positive behaviors that are healthy, safe, and productive—rather than

managing through harsh criticism and intimidation—is a better motivator in making positive changes.<sup>2</sup> Recognizing behaviors that are unhealthy, unsafe, or unproductive and addressing them skillfully and compassionately also are important ways of supporting the drug-free program and promoting a healthy, safe, productive workplace.

Giving positive feedback is one of the most potent drivers for productivity.<sup>3</sup> It is one of the few things managers can do that have no monetary costs and inevitably enhance productivity. Constructive, informal feedback helps clarify expectations, corrects misperceptions, and communicates standards. It also increases employee commitment.

**Understand and Talk About the Ways a Workplace Supports the Policy.** Both formally and informally, supervisors can play a central role in promoting a drug-free workplace. Knowing and sharing support mechanisms offered by the employer and the community can help encourage employees to self-refer for treatment (see "Advocate for Employees," next page). Active supervisors encourage employees to have the courage and wisdom to get help before anyone else has to know about their problem.<sup>4</sup>

Supports that the employer may have in place can be internal or external. Internal support



mechanisms include workplace or organizational systems such as human resources (HR) departments, unions, security, management, in-house employee

assistance programs (EAPs), and internal health/wellness programs. External support mechanisms include relationships with outside providers of health promotion or substance abuse prevention interventions such as EAPs, health care

providers, and health wellness programs. Informal support mechanisms within the community are also useful for employees who may not be ready to acknowledge that they need help but who are beginning to think that there may be a problem. These include for-profit and nonprofit support groups (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous, <http://www.aa.org>).

***Keep Open the Lines of Communication in a Manner Appropriate to the Workplace.***

A supervisor who is accessible is key to creating a safe, healthy, and drug-free workplace. Effective supervisors seek feedback by encouraging their work teams to express ideas and opinions. Further, they promptly handle conflict constructively and fairly.<sup>5</sup>

That said, supervisors are not expected to provide substance abuse counseling. Neither should they try to diagnose alcohol or other drug problems. If



a supervisor suspects a problem, particularly one associated with poor job performance or conduct, the employee should be referred to the appropriate resources

for professional evaluation and assistance.

***Advocate for Employees.*** One of a supervisor's most important responsibilities is to observe and evaluate employee job performance. Supervisors can encourage employees to deal with work-related problems that may or may not be connected with alcohol or other drug use. They can suggest sources of help and support, such as an EAP or a local treatment program, when an employee has problems.

Being an advocate for employees also means supporting treatment and recovery. There is a general stigma associated with addiction and a mistaken belief that substance abuse is a personal

or moral failing. Viewing the employee as a person struggling with a chronic, treatable disease rather than as an offender is another way to be supportive of recovery. This does not mean *enabling*; it means *supporting*. If an employee has been given a chance to improve job performance but has not changed his or her behavior, the supervisor may need to take a more forceful approach. Still, the emphasis should be on improving the employee's job performance, not on judging the employee.

**To Carry Out the Policy, What Guidelines Should a Supervisor Follow?**

To maximize the effectiveness of a drug-free workplace policy and program, customized supervisor training should take into account the particular characteristics of the workplace.

Seven general guidelines have been found to be useful for many employers, supervisors, and HR staff:

1. Know the organization's policy and program.
2. Be aware of legally sensitive areas.
3. Recognize potential problems.
4. Document.
5. Act.
6. Refer.
7. Reintegrate.

***1. Know the Organization's Policy and Program***

Be familiar with the policy and the program along with the rationale for implementing them. Ensure that these are clearly communicated to all staff members. In some organizations this may require bilingual, or trilingual, replication.

***2. Be Aware of Legally Sensitive Areas***

- Where applicable, follow union contracts.
- Maintain confidentiality of all employees.
- Follow the procedures and policy the same way for all.

- Provide due process and opportunity for response to allegations.
- If testing is a part of the policy, ensure quality control and confirmation of positive tests.

### 3. Recognize Potential Problems

Drug use can be classified as experimental or circumstantial, and as progressing toward casual, intensive, compulsive, and addictive.<sup>6</sup> There are no general rules that explain the misuse of alcohol and other drugs for every individual.<sup>7, 8</sup>

Many studies have documented how one's personal background and work environment can



help in predicting the likelihood of substance use in the workplace.<sup>9</sup> Issues related to misuse can include an individual's biology and external issues such as stressful working

conditions.<sup>10</sup> Many issues can be attributed to a combination of internal and external factors. In the workplace, however, a safe, healthy, productive employee is the expectation.

Do not wait for a crisis. Being aware of potential issues before they become problems goes a long way toward creating a safe, healthy, and productive workplace.

There are at least six signs of possible substance use problems in the workplace. These signs alone do not indicate substance use. They do, however, indicate that perhaps the employee is experiencing personal issues that may affect job performance.

- A. A change in work attendance or performance
- B. An alteration of personal appearance
- C. Mood swings or attitude changes
- D. Withdrawal from responsibility or associate contacts

- E. Unusual behavior patterns
- F. A defensive attitude concerning any problems

### 4. Document

It is important to have a systematic, legally defensible appraisal system and documentation system in place.<sup>11</sup>

The first line of defense should be a well-defined job description along with appropriate job training. In this way, supervisors can be explicit about the behaviors they expect.

Along with this, if a supervisor suspects an employee is under the influence, careful documentation should occur. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration provides a supervisor's checklist for determining reasonable cause (see [http://www.dea.gov/demand/df\\_manual/01adf\\_01.htm](http://www.dea.gov/demand/df_manual/01adf_01.htm)).

### 5. Act

Constructive confrontation is a proven effective strategy for dealing with employees who have a performance problem that may be associated with substance abuse.<sup>12, 13</sup>



Constructive confrontation works particularly well for employees who are heavily invested in their jobs.<sup>14</sup> And it stands to reason that it works

well for supervisors and employers who are heavily invested in their employees.

Constructive confrontation involves<sup>15</sup>

- Organizing a confidential meeting
- Including a union representative if applicable
- Presenting the employee with documented evidence of performance deficits

- Ensuring the employer’s willingness to support help-seeking and to suspend disciplinary steps if the employee follows through on dealing with the problem

Constructive confrontation does not involve

- Letting everyone know the situation
- Approaching the employee with hostility
- Firing the employee without due process

### 6. Refer (to Appropriate Programs)

May Goya, an employee relations manager for the Waipi’o, Hawaii-based food service business FCH Enterprises, Inc., said of her company’s drug policy: “From the start, we’ve made it clear that we’re not going to catch somebody and kick them out. They don’t get fired. We get them an



assessment of where they are with their drug usage and allow them to get treatment. When I approached one employee who tested positive, she was ‘real relieved’—

that’s how she put it. It had gotten to the point where her family was asking her to look at what she was doing and to stop doing it... but when it



came from the workplace, she couldn’t deny that it was a problem any more. She’s still working with us.”<sup>16</sup> A referral is not an adverse action. This

may be the first step toward helping the employee get back on track.<sup>17</sup>

Referrals should be consistent with—and supervisors should be trained on the specifics of—your drug-free workplace policy.

## When Investigating a Potential Crisis Involving Possible Drug or Alcohol Use, There Are a Few Important Questions to Ask



- 1 Does there appear to be unusual behavior taking place (e.g., illegal activity, policy violations)?
- 2 What specific behavior is visible?
- 3 Does the situation involve an individual employee or a group?
- 4 Are reliable witnesses available?
- 5 What are the physical dangers of taking or not taking action?
- 6 Is the situation serious enough to call security or law enforcement?
- 7 Is there a specific policy that applies to the situation?
- 8 Is it necessary to call in expert consultation with HR, the EAP, a health specialist, or security?
- 9 Does the situation call for reasonable-suspicion testing?
- 10 Is this an opportunity to prevent a problem from escalating?

Documenting observations and responses is important. It can help to have another supervisor there as well.

Guidelines for making a referral, depending on the size and professional skills of your organization, include the following:

- Assistance should be selected based on established effectiveness.
- The referral should consider the particular employee’s health insurance coverage.
- The referral should be consistent with the employee’s job demands and career goals.
- Someone in management (e.g., an HR professional) should be directly involved in the process, monitoring compliance.
- This same person should participate in easing the employee back into the workplace, involving the supervisor as appropriate.

- The employer should continue to be supportive of employees who have been referred for assistance because of problems related to alcohol or other drugs.

### **7. Reintegrate**

Recovery from alcohol or other drug problems can be a gradual, complex process.<sup>18</sup> To prevent relapse and to promote sustained recovery, follow-up and supportive reentry are key. An ideal situation would be one in which a specialist is assigned to deliver supportive follow-up to the employee at the workplace for 36 months or longer.<sup>19</sup>

### **How Should a Supervisor Handle a Crisis in the Workplace?**

All supervisors should be prepared to deal with a crisis. These situations are not common, but it is important to know what to do in case of emergency. Such highly charged situations might involve alcohol and drugs, so it is important to remember that an impaired person is not a rational one. Some crisis situations that organizations have had to face include

- Violent, unpredictable behavior
- Threatening words and actions
- Illegal activity
- Possession of alcohol or other drugs

### **How to Approach an Employee in a Possible Drug or Alcohol Crisis Situation**

1. Ask the employee to come to a private area with another supervisor, an HR representative, or security—or some combination of these.
2. Inquire, in a nonjudgmental tone, about the behavior, rumor, or report. Stick to the facts and do not involve the names of other employees.

3. Express concern. Keep in mind that this is about a specific employee and his or her behaviors related to the workplace.
4. Actively listen to the explanation, and repeat the employee's explanation to ensure that nothing is misunderstood.
5. If there is reason to believe that there may have been a violation, notify a department head or labor relations representative as appropriate.
6. If there is evidence or suspicion of recent use, follow the guidelines of the drug-free workplace policy, which will detail how to handle the event.

Some approaches include

- A. Referring the employee to the EAP
- B. Placing the employee on suspension pending an investigation
- C. Providing for the employee to be escorted home
- D. Escorting the employee to a laboratory for analysis
- E. Calling local law enforcement if the situation is dangerous or illegal activity (such as distribution, possession, sale, or transportation of illegal substances) has been witnessed

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