

The Frontline Supervisor



Quality Employee Assistance Programs.

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Q. Does marijuana cause employees to be slow, not show initiative, or be less engaged in the workplace? I have a few employees I know use pot off duty, and I think I would describe them this way. Is this “amotivational syndrome”?

A. First, you can’t diagnose your employees’ performance issues. This requires a referral to the EAP to learn more. For decades, pro-marijuana advocacy groups have insisted there is no such thing as cannabis use causing “amotivational syndrome.” They’ve insisted that anecdotal reports or studies have been flawed. However, evidence published in February 2018 appears to show cannabis-caused amotivational syndrome is quite real. Over 500 college students who used marijuana were studied. Marijuana use, demographics (age, gender, and race), personality (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism), other substance use (alcohol and tobacco), and general personal assessments of initiative, effort, and persistence were examined closely. Research showed that marijuana use forecasted lower initiative and persistence (amotivational syndrome) even after accounting for and ruling out other factors. Only marijuana (but not alcohol or tobacco) significantly and longitudinally prompts lower initiative and persistence. See the report: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28620722.

Q. My employee has a psychiatrist who has treated him for depression for many years. He’s never been to the EAP, and I have not considered a referral until now. Currently he is not coming to work often, and yet the doctor keeps writing notes to excuse absences. Can the EAP help?

A. Consult with your organization’s human resources advisor regarding sick leave issues and how to manage these absences and record the leave status. Realize that EAPs accept formal referrals from supervisors when employees have job performance issues, quality of work problems, conduct and behavioral issues, and attendance problems. So, consider referring your employee. Make it a formal referral. Is the employee unable to adequately perform his duties because of the absenteeism? If so, make note of it. It makes no difference whether the employee is being seen by a psychiatrist. This fact does not preclude a referral. Many issues could exist in this situation, including improper treatment, a problematic relationship with the doctor, poor medication compliance, sudden loss of medication effectiveness, and a host of other factors. The EAP will obtain a release to communicate directly with the doctor and assess what’s going on. If the employee is reluctant to accept a referral, discuss next steps with the EAP.

Q. I want to do everything I can to help my employees perform well. What is the most important task to accomplish in order to make this possible?

A. Form good working relationships. Supervisors can learn many different skills and tactics, but few will be effective without positive relationships. Understand the concept of “essential attitudes” for a supervisor. Essential attitudes for success exist in every profession, whether you are a teacher, scientist, minister, pilot, or supervisor. Here’s one: Assume your employees are doing the best job they can from their point of view. This attitude will affect the way you speak, act, nurture, and support them. It might even help you remember to use the EAP more often as a resource to improve performance. Another: Spell out for employees what they need to do in order to succeed and then give them the ability to do it. Imagine how these essential attitudes influence a positive relationship, and how lacking they are with many managers. Can you think of more essential attitudes critical to relationship success?

Q. What do supervisors and managers need to know about the “Generation Z”? I have been hearing more about them recently.

A. You will hear a lot more about Generation Z as these employees enter the workforce. Gen Z are those born between approximately 1995-96 and 2010-14. (Sociologists disagree on the dates.) This is the group following the millennials. Generation Z is more influenced by concepts like “finding my true purpose” and “making an impact.” They want to be independent and are highly attracted to learning new things. They are confident and respond positively to companies that are engaged in resolving social problems. They are entrepreneurial, realistic, and hungry for experiences and want to see the world. Gen Z employees want to be experts and may accept challenges more readily than prior generations. When writing the essential functions of job descriptions, consider the above values and employee traits to help you maximize productivity and employee job satisfaction. Gen Z employees are less put off by the idea of getting counseling and more likely to use supports like an EAP to improve their lives. Learn more from the book “Meet Generation Z” (2017).

Q. Why can’t employees monitor themselves and use peer influence to ensure a respectful workplace? It seems as though supervisors or managers must still take the lead and play a large role in supporting a positive workplace and discouraging disrespect.

A. Employees are certainly capable of exerting peer pressure on fellow workers and helping maintain a respectful workplace, but they need your help. When management (supervisors) don’t act or step in when witnessing bad behavior, this is tantamount to excusing it. This then undermines employee peer pressure dynamics and group influence. Managers represent “punitive authority” within the employment setting. This doesn’t mean punishment. Instead, this means the ability or potential of the employer to impose penalties for fault, offence, or violation of rules. All employment settings possess this natural dynamic. When undermined, employees toss self-discipline to the wind and experience far less urgency to respond to positive peer pressure.

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