

Distracted Employee

Q. We have an employee on our team who has a hard time paying attention and listening. They lose things, are easily distracted and restless, and worst of all, they interrupt people. Will the EAO be able to diagnose this behavior? Maybe it is ADHD.

A. Yes, a referral to the EAO may be helpful in this circumstance. The EAO will consider issues that explain the behavior you are seeing. Speak with EAO before referring to discuss your observations and documentation. This discussion could improve the outcome of an assessment later. Good communication is important to help your employee maintain appropriate conduct. Explain the impact of behavior in performance terms. Keep your focus on the issues that led to this referral when following up in the future.

Tips for managing harassment complaints

Q. When supervisors inquire about complaints regarding harassment in a work unit, what are some mistakes they make that cause bigger problems later for organizations?

A. A common mistake of supervisors investigating complaints of harassment is not working closely with their HR advisors or following instructions provided to them. Other missteps to avoid:

- Allowing one's misconceptions about harassment to interfere with or influence an investigation can contribute to larger problems. An example includes suggesting, even slightly, that some responsibility lies with the victim of the harassment.
- Deciding or suggesting that the complaint is not that serious if a long delay exists between the date of the incident and its first report.
- Making a judgment that the incident is not serious, or making a statement about how serious it appears.

Victims of harassment can feel powerless and traumatized when they experience a lack of empathy. Employees can benefit from a confidential and empathetic listener. Additionally, supervisors can benefit from EAO management consultation.

Assessing Attendance Issues

Q. An employee has been coming to work late. I finally sat down to discuss this with them. They opened up about problems at home and requested time off to deal with these problems. Should I ask the employee to visit the EAO too?

A. The seriousness of the attendance problems makes a referral to the EAO an appropriate step. Share the attendance pattern with the EAO to allow for a more

thorough assessment. The assessment could discover that the problems shared with you are not primary, but symptoms of larger issues that should be resolved before attendance issues will stop. Taking time off will need to be reviewed by HR/DDR. This scenario with your employee is a good example of how easy it can be to accept what you are hearing at face value from a troubled employee without knowing whether or not it will resolve the problem. Consider waiting to hear what HR/DDR recommends.

Substance Abuse Relapse

Q. One of our employees entered treatment after a positive drug test for an opioid. Things have been going well, but lately their attendance has been slipping. How many chances should we give them? Nothing is spelled out in the policy.

A. Those in recovery for addictive diseases are prone to relapse like other illnesses. Still, most people react emotionally to drug relapse, including employers. There are important issues to consider with relapse—impact on your organization, risk, productivity, and the value of your worker. Referring the employee back to the EAO and consulting with HR regarding attendance guidelines is often the best choice. Some employers have referred a worker who relapses back to treatment numerous times, but with each incident have made the decision in the best interest of the organization. Most employees do not want to lose their job. Therefore, strong leverage exists to maintain close communication with the EAO and create an agreement with the employee so they can follow through with its recommendations.

Employee with Mood Swings

Q. I supervise an employee with mood swings that range from pleasant to very grumpy and argumentative. Everyone complains about it, but I have not gotten to the point of taking some job action. After all, we all have some personality quirks. How do I decide that it is time to make a referral?

A. Although no one's perfect, be cautious about slowly adapting to dysfunctional communication and thereby promoting a poor work climate that interferes with productivity, adversely affects morale, causes turnover, and enables this behavior to grow worse. Contact the EAO to set up a management consultation to work on formulating an approach to this issue. If you are afraid of confronting this employee, discuss that possibility with the EAO because it could serve as a roadblock to change that would benefit everyone.