

Handling the Alcoholic Employee

a supervisor's training program

Paul W. Cummings

How does your line supervision handle the employee suffering from alcoholic illness?

The use of alcohol is widespread and generally acceptable in our society. Thus, no employer is immune to the possibility of alcoholism developing among employees. Consider these statistics: Nearly three-fourths (71%) of the adult population drink in varying degrees and one out of 15 who drinks will develop alcoholism.¹

Have your supervisors (both production and staff) been trained to know what employee behavior patterns to look for when dealing with the alcoholic employee?

Employees having alcoholism (sometimes called the "half-man" in business and industry, and now estimated by the National Council

on Alcoholism to be not less than 2.6 million untreated cases in the USA) are adept at retaining their jobs by camouflaging the effect of their condition.²

Consider the fact that the average number of employees a line supervisor will normally supervise is about 10. The range of subordinates may vary from five to 30, and in some extreme cases, a line supervisor may be directly or indirectly responsible for upwards of 50 subordinates or more

"Half-Man" Subordinate

As an example, a plant or mill, or a department within a plant having 150 hourly-paid or "blue collar" employees could well have 10 employees in various stages of alcoholism. Even with the addition of a superintendent, general

supervisor, and four line foremen, the ratio of blue collar employees to supervision would be 25 to one. The point remains that a large number of our first line supervisors are constantly confronted with the "half-man" subordinate, and more pathetically have had little or no training in dealing with this problem.

Various approaches in various companies in handling the "half-man" employee are outright dismissals, prolonged or delayed action (many times supervisors cover up for the employee), or the establishment of a progressive training and educational program given to line management which is aimed at meeting the problem head on. Dismissal may unfortunately be the final solution, but

it need not be the first and only approach.

"We don't have a problem," an executive of a huge industrial company told a field representative from the Texas Commission on Alcoholism. "We fire our drunks!" Six months later, says a commission staff member, the ex-employee (an executive) died of acute alcoholism. The local newspapers reported heart failure as the cause of death.³

This article is not intended to be a dissertation on the "social work approach" of industry, nor is it meant to be a sympathetic appeal asking for your mercy and consideration of the "half-man" employee. Rather, it is an attempt to present to industrial training personnel a brief outline concerning a logical, systematic and realistic training tool to be incorporated in your total management development training program.

Many times, we, in the field of industrial training are hard pressed to justify our salaries and existence on a management staff, simply because it is difficult to measure the results of our work. Here then, is an area you might consider, since the estimated annual cost to all employers in the United States of untreated alcoholic cases varies from two billion (that's with a B), to over four billions of dollars annually!

In a March 19, 1968, report by the National Council on Alcoholism, Industrial Services Department, New York, the estimated annual cost to employers of untreated alcoholism cases was \$4,276,033,000!⁴

The Outline

This outline is intended to be flexible enough so that small, medium, and large size companies can use it as a guide. It certainly is not the last word, nor is it intended to be.

1. Statement of Company Policy

Simply stated, your company re-

gards alcoholism among its employees as an illness which is treatable. Define alcoholism and explain the purpose of the policy.

1A. Supervisors Responsibility

Since the company's concern with alcoholism is strictly limited to its effects on the *employee's performance of his or her job*, the supervisor or line management must be held responsible for the implementation of the policy, by following a set of pre-determined procedures.

1B. Employees Responsibility

Employees will be encouraged to seek diagnosis, comply with diagnostic referrals, and cooperate with prescribed therapy. This illness will be handled in the same manner as any other non-alcoholic illness. All cases will be handled in confidence, and the implementation of the policy requires no special regulations, privileges or exemptions from the standard administrative practices now in existence and applicable to any employee's normal job performance requirements.

2. Administration

This spells out by job title, who in the company will have the total responsibility for the operation of the program.

3. Procedure

This focuses on certain pre-treatment functions through coordinated efforts of management and union personnel. These functions include:

A. Creation of a plant wide climate through generalized education processes — the distribution of free literature to attempt to reduce the social stigma associated with alcoholism.

B. Enlisting the cooperation and support of the local union organization.

C. Identify and motivate to treatment possible alcoholic cases where poor job performance is concerned.

D. Develop a follow-up program

to assure procedures are being followed.

E. Schedule initial and follow-up training meetings, pointing out the necessity of keeping records, observing behavior patterns, and formal and informal discipline action to be taken.

4. Personnel Administration

This outlines the basic role the Personnel Department will plan, including labor relations involvement, cooperation with the union, and the fact that standard administrative procedures will be used.

5. The Supervisor's Role

A. Supervisors need to be alert and observe employee work performance especially when it fails to meet established work standards.

B. Supervisors will document all specific instances of employees behavior failing to meet these standards.

C. Supervisors will conduct cor-

Training Problem no. 73

OFFICE CONFLICTS

You're the trainer in a medium-size corporation. Two of the assistant managers are so competitive they are having trouble working together on a special project. Bad feelings are spreading among other employees.

SOLUTION

You organize a training workshop for everyone in the department and use Addison-Wesley's *Interpersonal Relations Cassette Program* and *The Supervisor and Interpersonal Relations Filmstrip Series* to show how people can work together without conflicts.

RESULTS

The two assistant managers are going out of their way to help each other. The whole department is happier.

GOT A TRAINING PROBLEM? GET A SOLUTION FROM ADDISON-WESLEY. Call Charles Peers (Area Code: 617, 944-3700, Xt. 387) or circle the reader service number below.



Business & Professional Division
ADDISON-WESLEY
PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.
Reading, Massachusetts 01867

Circle No. 524
on Reader Service Card

rective interviews when sub-standard performance is warranted, and tell the employee the company is willing to offer counseling or diagnostic services to assist him. If the employee accepts he or she will be referred to professional sources. In some cases this might be active members of Alcoholics Anonymous as well as certain local community agency resources.

D. If the employee refuses help, and his or her performance continues unsatisfactorily, he or she is given a firm choice between professional diagnosis once again, or accepting existing disciplinary procedures usually exercised for all cases of unsatisfactory job performance.

E. Supervisors should not "play

doctor" by attempting to diagnose the cause, nor should they discuss "drinking problems" with employees under their direction. Supervisors should refrain from writing the diagnosis or supposition that an employee has alcoholism on any company forms. Finally, a supervisor should not terminate a previously satisfactory employee for unsatisfactory performance before giving the employee appropriate opportunities to seek assistance.

6. The Role of Training

This program is based entirely on employee job performance. It requires keeping records and data by supervision when evaluating employees, as well as a knowledge of interviewing techniques when appraising the employee in private. The line formman must be instructed to keep the channels of communication open between him or herself and his or her superiors, as well as certain staff individuals.

The number of times a supervisor is required to schedule a job performance appraisal interview in private is dependent upon the employee and his or her behavior, his or her acceptance or rejection of assistance, the nature of his or her job, advice of his or her superiors, etc. Thus role-playing, "buzz" sessions, interpersonal grievance procedure reviews are excellent subject matters for supervisory conferences related to alcoholism.

Each supervisor should be given a list of on-the-job signs of progressive alcoholism, since once drinking is unmistakably identified and related to the performance problem, the illness has usually reached a middle stage, especially among the blue collar employee. A brief review of treatment and recovery services provided by local community agencies will enlarge the supervisor's understanding of the totality of this problem.

Finally, the supervisor should be made aware of labor and management's coordinated efforts

to achieve their mutual objective, the employee's restoration to good health and productivity. This is necessary and vital to the success of a program of this nature.

References

1. "What To Do About the Employee With a Drinking Problem," by Kenneth A. Rouse. A Kemper Insurance Company Publication. Fifth Edition. 4750 N. Sheridan Road, Chicago, Illinois 60640.
2. "A Management Guide on Alcoholism and Other Behavioral Problems," a Kemper Insurance Company Publication.
3. "Detour — Alcoholism Ahead," a Kemper Insurance Company Publication.
4. "Prevalence of Alcoholism Among Employees," a special report by the National Council of Alcoholism, Industrial Services Department, New York, March 19, 1968. Address: National Council on Alcoholism, 2 East 103 Street, New York, New York 10029.

Paul W. Cummings is director of safety and training, Shenango, Inc., Pittsburgh, Penn. He has more than 20 years of experience in blue and white collar supervisory and managerial positions in steel, carbon and chemical manufacturing. He has presented papers at the 1972 and 1973 ASTD National Conferences and has published over 40 articles in many leading magazines and journals. He is a part time instructor at Pennsylvania State University and Community College of Allegheny County. In 1974 he was awarded the National ASTD Individual Award for publications outstanding to the training and development profession. He holds a masters degree from the University of Pittsburgh and was former editor of the Pittsburgh Newsletter, the monthly publication of the Pittsburgh Chapter, ASTD.

IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY WITH IN-PLANT TRAINING PROGRAMS

Completely coordinated:
audio/visuals, workbooks
and training guides.

Easy to Use • Proven Effective
• Low Cost

Programs include:

- Habit of Selling Mark II™
- Speak Up and Sell™
- Action-Oriented Supervision™
- All Employee Training™
- Psychology for Women in Business™
- Train the Trainer™

BUTLER LEARNING CENTERS
In United States & Canada

Offer Multi-Media Seminars Including
The Sales Professional™ A New
Dynamic, Multi-Image Seminar.

BUTLER
learning
systems

1375 W. DOROTHY LANE
DAYTON OHIO 45409
PHONE 513-298-7462

DISTRIBUTORS NEEDED

