People whose performance or behaviour on the job is unsatisfactory may be considered problem employees. Many of them have good potential, but function far below their capabilities. Poor job performance may be an indicator of some problem which the employee is facing, which is turn, means problem to you, since you happen to be his supervisor.

What are the problems you generally face?

- Unpredictable absenteeism upsetting production plans
- Deteriorating discipline in the department
- Accident leaving an unpleasant impact
- Constant worry over product quality

Why do these problems arise?

- Possibly due to a variety of reasons. Alcoholism can be the cause behind most of these problems.

Who is an alcoholic?

An alcoholic is one whose uncontrolled drinking leads to continuing problems in any area of his life including the workplace and in spite of such problems, he does not stop drinking. He cannot stop it because he has become physically and psychologically dependent on alcohol.

Can we do something about such an employee?

Yes, we can.

Medical research has now established that alcoholism is a disease. So, an alcoholic is a sick person who needs treatment. Specialized treatment (physical and psychological) will help him give up drinking and become productive in his job.

How do we identify an alcoholic employee?

Recurrent poor job performance is often the first evidence of an employee’s increasing loss of control over drinking. Here is a list of symptoms by which you can identify alcoholic employees.

Poor job performance indicators

Absenteism

- Frequent unscheduled absence for 4 to 5 days
  - Absence on Mondays, Fridays; continued absence immediately following festivals, holidays
- Difficulty in giving reasons for absence
- Higher absenteeism rate then other employees for fever, stomach ache etc.
- Excessive sick leave

‘On-the-job’ absenteeism

- Coming to work late
- Leaving work place early
- Frequent visits to toilet
- Complaining frequently of headache, stomach pain, inability to work (frequent visits to dispensary)
- Unable to keep awake during night shifts

Lowered job efficiency

- Decreasing efficiency compared to past performance
- Missing deadlines
- Frequent mistakes due to poor judgment
- Complaints from customers or other co-workers for being irritable
- Erratic job performance

High accident rate

- Accidents on-the-job
- Accidents off-the-job (but affecting job performance)

Difficulty in concentration

- Unable to remain alert, functions in a sloppy manner
- Takes more time and effort to perform due to increased fatigue
- Difficulty in recalling instructions / details

Poor inter-personal relationships

- Defies authority
- Overreacts to criticism
- Complaints from colleagues – ‘difficult to get along with’
- Begins to avoid colleagues

Other indicators

- Shabby appearance
- Highly irritable
- Withdrawn and preoccupied
- Taking all loans / borrows money from other employees
- Ignores rules and regulations. For example, the alcoholic employee does not wear safety equipment like eye mask, helmet
- Does not take care of machinery, tools
Guidelines for supervisors and managers

It is important to keep certain guidelines in mind while dealing with alcoholic employees.

You should

- Avoid diagnosing the problem. Focus attention only on poor job performance. Do not state that drinking could be the problem.
- Talk about his drinking only if it happens on the job or he reports to work obviously drunk.
- Avoid giving advice. The employee will not generally accept that he has a problem. Understand that alcoholism is a disease and help has to be given in the form of treatment.
- Avoid covering up as a friend. Do not take over employee’s responsibilities. This will lead to delay in his seeking help.
- Avoid being ‘trapped’ by the alcoholic employee’s sympathy evoking tactics.
- Avoid losing temper. It does not help. It only leads to deterioration in relationship.
- Avoid publicizing about the alcoholic employee. Maintain all details in strict confidence.

Take action - He needs treatment

Specific methods to deal with an alcoholic employee

i) Describe the problem

Prepare a detailed report on employee’s job performance deficiencies. This should include:

- Specific dates absent or leave taken
- Specific deadlines missed
- Errors in work

ii) Discuss the situation with employee - To focus only on employee’s deteriorating job performance and your feelings about it.

iii) State your expectations clearly.

iv) Watch for changes - If his job performance improves, no further action needs to be taken. If job performance continues to be poor on an ongoing basis, you may direct him to the Personnel / Welfare department for further assessment. They, in turn, could have a
talk with the concerned employee and later refer him to a specialized treatment center. If employee does not avail the help, you may proceed with disciplinary action for poor job performance.

Benefits to you as a manager / supervisor

Instead of terminating the employee, referring an alcoholic employee to an addiction treatment center and making him a productive employee again, benefits everyone.

There are several benefits to you

- You need not tolerate or put up with such problems
- You can make alcoholic employees become productive employees
- You can shift your focus from alcoholic employees and concentrate on productive issues in your department which would **improve your promotion and career possibilities.**
- You can experience improved morale of the entire department. So you can enjoy work environment

Getting the best out of employees returning after treatment

Once an alcoholic employee returns from the treatment center, he should be integrated smoothly into the work environment.

Here are some guidelines to help you get the best out of him

- Encourage and ensure that the employee goes regularly for follow-up with the treatment center
- If job performance continues to be poor or declines after awhile, contact the treatment center immediately.

Several doubts may come your way

Here are a few of them

1. How should I treat the employee on his return from the treatment center?
   
   Treat him just as you would treat any other employee recovering from any other disease. Allow him to perform his duties, as expected of him

2. Should I monitor the employee always?
   
   No. Monitor only his job performance, not his movements

3. How would I know if the employee is doing well?
   
   If the employee gives up alcohol completely, his performance will improve. If he goes back to drinking, it will deteriorate again.
4. What kind of an environment is needed to promote recovery of the alcoholic employee?

Provide support and encouragement. Avoid making references to the past and focus on the present. Discourage his co-workers from making derogatory comments about him.

5. What do I do if the employee starts drinking again?

Initially, refer him to the Personnel Department, who in turn, will refer him back to the treatment center. If relapse continues to occur, follow company policy to deal with continued poor job performance.

6. What about supervisors? Don’t we have such problem persons amongst supervisors?

Alcoholism can develop in any person at any level.

Here are some tips for you to identify problems among supervisors.

**Deteriorating pattern of job performance in the supervisor**

- Often issues conflicting instruction to employees
- Fails to coordinate schedules
- Gets subordinates to fill in and cover responsibilities
- Submits incomplete reports and data
- Uses employee’s time and skills inefficiently

**A treatment center for addiction**

TTK Hospital of T T Ranganathan Clinical Research Foundation is a pioneer, voluntary, non-profit organization dedicated to the treatment and rehabilitation of people addicted to alcohol and other drugs.

The hospital offers a comprehensive one month in-patient treatment programme wherein both medical and psychological therapy are provided by a team of professionals.

The treatment programme includes

- Detoxification
- Intensive psychological therapy and family therapy programme.
- Follow-up

Chronic health problems associated with addiction, withdrawal symptoms due to sudden stoppage of alcohol are dealt with during detoxification. Detoxification is for a period of 3 - 5 days.
After detoxification, the patient undergoes a three week psychological therapy programme that includes individual counseling, lectures, group therapy, relaxation techniques and other supportive efforts. Individual attention is given to each patient.

Follow-up for a period of two years is provided after treatment. It includes medical check up and counseling sessions. By maintaining regular follow-up, the patients are able to sustain their recovery. We conduct a seven day programme once a month for relapsed patients.

Apart from treatment, we offer several programmes to deal with alcoholism in industries.

They are

- **Programme for Management and Union Members**: Information on alcohol use, alcoholism, problems faced in work places and the need to develop a policy to deal with alcoholism are discussed.

  Duration – Half-a-day

- **Solve Programme**: This ILO (International Labour Organisation) developed programme deals with five issues – alcohol and drugs, tobacco, HIV-AIDS, Stress and psychological violence.

  Duration: One to Four days

- **Training programme for Supervisors**: Information on alcoholism, early identification of alcoholic employees and guidelines for supervisors to handle these issues are provided.

  Duration – Half-a-day

- **Prevention and awareness programmes for employees**: Through this, employees are helped to review their alcohol use pattern and make changes. It also helps them seek help if needed.

  Duration – Two and half hours

**For further information**

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