

Is Someone in the Office Regularly High or Hung-over?

Rick is still managing his full case load, but it is becoming clear that he is not at his best. His lunch hours are getting longer and his moods more difficult. His work is barely acceptable, but not up to the level he used to produce and certainly not at the quantity. The whole office is beginning to wonder what is wrong, and many are pretty sure they know. So, how long will it be before his clients find out – or do they already know?

It's not comfortable or easy to talk about alcohol or drug abuse issues with a partner or associate, but the issues rarely resolve themselves without intervention. Abuse continues with the person's own denial and the silence of their friends, family and colleagues; they may not initially want to hear you, but keeping quiet won't help anyone.

Here are a few quick hints.

Be straightforward. Approach the person with respect for both your and their needs. A solution will ultimately need their buy in and respecting their abilities may empower them to get started.

Don't use insulting labels or allow uninformed judgments to have a voice. Abuse and addiction are challenging issues based in neurobiology and genetics. These individuals experience the effects and pull of intoxicants differently than most people. So while self-awareness and self-regulation are a component of the solution, they are not the cause of the problem.

A good opening is to relax and describe how you're feeling. "This is difficult for me." "I've felt burdened lately." "I'm carrying too much of the firm's responsibility." "You've always brought in your share of the revenues but lately you've been way out of step. I can't keep carrying so much of the weight." "I've tried to cover for you but it's become embarrassing, too hard and I'm feeling resentful."

Describe the behaviors you see, don't get sidetracked by trying to guess motivations or reasons. Your job is to reflect reality – "Your moods are causing your colleagues to hesitate to involve you in important cases. You are canceling too many morning appointments. Your billable hours are way down."

State clearly what needs to change – more productivity, more even moods, shorter lunches, better quality of work, etc. Ask if they have an idea or if they would like you to help them find some resources that might help.

Set a time to meet again to evaluate how things are going. Each week for awhile is often enough to offer positive feedback but not allow things to slide any farther. These follow-up sessions are essential and quite often difficult. Don't hesitate to contact an addictions professional for a consultation, or even to sit in on a meeting with you.

We'll come back to this topic in future newsletters, but if you have a specific situation you'd like to discuss now, please call Szifra at 978-446-9600. Szifra is a Certified Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor.