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THE DISTRESSED EMPLOYEE VS. RECREATION AND LEISURE TIME

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ABSTRACT

This article presents another means of justification and validity for employee services programs through their involvement in an employee assistance program.

THE DISTRESSED EMPLOYEE VS. RECREATION AND LEISURE TIME

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that there are 70 million responsible drinkers and 50 million irresponsible drinkers in the United States. The deviants from these two areas produces 12 to 15 million alcoholics of which more than 90% are employed.

Society for years has diagnosed alcoholism as a psychiatric disorder. Prolonged research and studies have proven that alcoholics are individuals who are susceptible to physical adaptation. Therefore any person who drinks may unknowingly become alcoholic. (1)

With this in mind it makes good sense for employers to face reality and to deal with the problem. From a humane standpoint, the broken families, loss of jobs and physical problems are incalculable. Economically the loss to industry is above the 50 billion dollar mark each year in loss time, absenteeism, poor productivity, etc.

RECREATION AND PHYSICAL FITNESS MEETING THE NEEDS OF AN ILLNESS

How can recreation programs that deal with the employee's leisure time be of value to those who are recovering from their addiction? It has been said that "Americans drink in their leisure time." Let us examine the thoughts and reasons that one commonly hears in a counseling office as to why the addicted think they drink. Almost without exception the alcoholic will respond with one or more of the following statements.

1. It reduces anxiety.
2. It relieves social and/or inner tension.
3. It is an escape from pressure and life problems.
4. It is used to relax, unwind or to help sleep.
5. It is used to "lift" depression.
6. It uninhibits.

Although recreation is not a cure for alcoholism, and is certainly not as immediate both in effect and availability, it can become a positive substitute means of satisfaction for the alcoholic. Although not exactly paralleled, one might consider the following similarities between the effects of alcohol and recreation:

1. Socializing with a minimum of tension and anxiety.
2. An alternative method of dealing with feelings of frustration, anxiety, anger, depression, etc.
3. Fun or escape from life situations which cause tension.
4. Relaxation.
5. Adventure, and the opportunity for creative expression.

As a general rule the alcoholic is a very lonely and guilty person. When a person becomes involved in a leisure activity involving other participants, he learns to work with them toward a mutual goal. This group situation can minimize anxiety and remove the loneliness. This is one of the reasons Alcoholics Anonymous programs are successful. There is a comradeship established between the alcoholics who discuss their problems together.

Recreation for the alcoholic should contain psychologically sound programs to deal with his negative feelings. It should also be fun, so that the alcoholic can find freedom from guilt, as well as enabling him to become uninhibited. Recreation has the ability to provide an atmosphere and opportunity for the alcoholic to express himself in a positive manner. For the alcoholic who has spent hundreds of hours in misuse of his leisure time, it is of greatest importance that he receive counseling regarding his constructive use of leisure time.

Recreation and physical fitness programs can now justify their existence with dollars and cents when they become part of an overall company structure. Statistics have indicated that an employee involved in alcohol, drugs, and other substance abuses will cost a corporation anywhere from 25-40% of his salary.

If statistics are true and we take a hypothetical case of a employee involved in alcohol abuse who earns \$20,000 a year, then approximately \$8,000 of his salary will be wasted. This does not include the medical

and health costs that are usually incurred on an afflicted employee.

A corporation who employs 10,000 people could roughly estimate that 800-1000 people fall into this category. If 80% of these employees are rehabilitated, and become continually involved in a directed rehabilitation program over one million dollars in wages alone would be realized by a corporation, as well as the tremendous savings saved in health costs.

I firmly believe that those who remain free from substance abuse have found something more meaningful and enjoyable to them and they have discovered a way of life that provides more pleasure than to live in a continued alcoholic world.

In summary, it is essential that the alcoholic becomes familiar with as many alternatives to drinking as possible. Recreation programs can now use this as a means of justification because they are playing an important role in the corporation's overall structure. Through rehabilitation they are contributing to the corporation's savings by returning employees to productive status.

REFERENCES

1. James R. Milam, The Emergent Comprehensive Concept of Alcoholism, Alcoholism Center Associates, Inc., 1974.
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COMMENTS

Planning is difficult because it leads to the formation of rules and regulations. Human responses are inherently unpredictable and, therefore, the planning does not usually accommodate the diversity of possible responses. This process must allow for flexibility, not rigidity to be effective.