

'Tough love' helps reform drinking employees

Although more than 40 years old, "tough love" therapy still seems to work best for rehabilitating drinkers in the workplace, according to University of Michigan experts.

Firing the employee is one solution. But a better and more cost-effective remedy has emerged in employee assistance programs, according to John C. Erfurt and Andrea Foote of the U-M's Institute for Labor and Industrial Relations.

Thousands of American employees have alcohol, drug or personal problems that interfere with work performance. Estimates for alcohol problems alone range from 5 to 20 percent of the work force, depending on the type of industry.

WITH BETTER training and standards, alcoholism prevention and control programs could reach 80 to 90 percent success rates, the researchers believe. Such rates were achieved with high blood pressure monitoring and control programs.

Most of the more than 3,000 employee assistance programs in the country use supervisors and union representatives to identify and refer workers with personal problems for treatment.

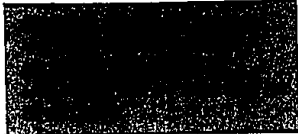
Forty years of experience shows that "constructive confrontation" works best, according to the U-M researchers.

"An alcohol, drug or personal problem almost certainly becomes a work problem," Erfurt and Foote explain. "The possibility of disciplinary action induces employees to get help before they are faced with actual job loss."

"THE WEDGE of job loss is the greatest motivator."

"Persistence also is important," they note. "Assistance programs must give clients multiple opportunities to participate. You can't write off a client who at first refuses treatment. If the disciplinary track remains in place, it will nudge the client into the program."

When successful, employee assistance programs offer double benefits: They save the employee's job, and they save the company the costs of absenteeism.



ism, inadequate work performance and the training of a new employee.

Erfurt and Foote have conducted research projects involving General Motors, Ford and other major industries, government and health agencies. They also are co-directors of the U-M Institute's Worker Health Program.

Recently they began a three-year study of methods to prevent relapse among employees with alcohol, drug or mental health problems, funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

THE RESEARCHERS, who have written two books about employee assistance programs, say a

good assistance set-up should have these characteristics:

• It must involve supervisors and union representatives in case-finding and referral.

• The supervisor or union representative must notify program staff when a formal referral of an employee is made, so the case doesn't fall through the cracks.

• Disciplinary regulations must remain in place, so employees are not encouraged to enter the program just to outwit company policy, or do not drop out of treatment prematurely.

• Follow-up must be carried out by the employee assistance program staff.

THE U-M RESEARCHERS compare the philosophy of an effective employee assistance program with that of the "tough love" concept of disciplining difficult children.

"The employee assistance program," Erfurt said, "is a combination of caring, consideration and firmness — of not allowing oneself to be conned by a pretense of rehabilitation. Today's substance abuser is tomorrow's systems abuser."

Effective treatment involves long-term follow-up. "The general belief is that an alcoholic must be kept well for three years," Foote said.

"Clients are encouraged to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and in-plant AA groups are common in large companies. Some programs do a good job at follow-up, but others do less well because they don't have enough time or staff."

"We believe these programs incorporate a life-saving set of events," they said. "We would like them viewed with the same seriousness that open heart surgery is. That means using a set of tested procedures that would send people out feeling better than they ever have and with a relatively small rate of failure."

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Zoo continues free kids day

For the fifth consecutive year, children receive free admission to the Detroit Zoo or Belle Isle Zoo on Mondays in July and August.

The free admission is good until Aug. 26 for children 12 years old and under who are accompanied by an adult.

All animal exhibits, demonstrations and feedings are included.

Regular admission at the Detroit Zoo is \$3.50 for adults and \$1.50 for children 5 to 12. Belle Isle Zoo admission is \$2 for adults and 50 cents for children 5 to 12.

Detroit Mayor Coleman Young said the adult admission to Belle Isle Zoo has been reduced to \$1 for July, in order to celebrate the zoo's accreditation by the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums.

"It is the only zoo in the country to make total use of a skywalk system, from which visitors can view the animals," said Young.

The zoo hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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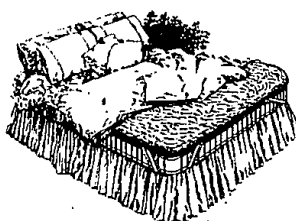
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