

Foreman's lax attitude should be reported

By Lindsey Novak
Tribune Media

Q: Our department foreman has forced management into thinking he is qualified and in control of his workers. In reality, he surrounds himself with people who kiss up to him, but are lacking in skill. He also allows a few of his people to drink on the premises, which, because of the machinery, could easily cause someone to be injured. It was one reported to his supervisor, who initially acted with great concern; but with only five years to retirement, he doesn't want to deal with the problem. If I quit because of the situation, I will have thrown away all the time I have put into this company. What can be done?

A: I understand not wanting to

be put in a dangerous position, but don't quit because of someone else's incompetence. Driving machinery too soon to ignore. And five years to retirement is no excuse or your boss not to get involved. He's being paid as a supervisor and should act like one.

Because the drinking continued after it was reported, must it be reported again (either directly or anonymously), but during a time when the top managers can catch their employees in the act. They will certainly take it seriously, since the company will be held legally responsible for any injuries that occur. If that happens, your boss may be out of a job before his retirement date.

LIVING A LIE IS NO WAY TO START A NEW JOB

Q: When my parents died together five years ago, I left the work force and lived on the money I was left. I'm in my 30s, have an excellent education and work record, but will I explain my leaving the workforce. I'm afraid employers will think I'm flaky for what I did.

My friends say to make up some story about being divorced with children that now live with their father, or having a failed business. I'd like to be honest, because the truth comes out easier. Any advice?

A: Not only would the truth serve you better, but more importantly, could you continue living a lie? If you feel better telling the

truth, your sincerity will come through in an interview. But remember, being honest doesn't mean reporting all the personal details of the situation. In short, be open while using good judgment.

Taking time off to grieve is understandable, especially after losing both your parents at once. Living off inherited money until it runs out is a bit short-sighted.

Depending on how you present the situation, some interviewers may still feel that you acted irresponsibly. But if you persist in your job search no matter how people respond, chances are you'll find someone who is willing to give you a chance.

NEW JOB SEEKER CRIES OUT, GIVE ME A CHANCE

Q: I graduated from high school in 1993 and could only afford one semester of college. Since then, I've been looking for jobs at airports, retail stores and data entry, but no one will hire me. I have filled out many applications, but everyone wants experienced workers and I haven't worked in two years. How do I get a job with no experience?

A: There are many jobs available for people who did not attend college - waitresses, telemarketers, retail store sales clerks, and cashiers at grocery stores, gas stations, movie houses, etc.

If you have not been hired by anyone for two years, the reason is probably not due to lack of experience. It might be the way you show

up for interviews. Even if a job does not require that you dress up, applicants should arrive neatly dressed and clean when they are interviewing. This does not mean you have to buy a designer suit, but you are going to be judged on how you present yourself, physically and verbally.

Also, don't chow down, don't carry food with you to much on as you go from one employer to the next and don't walk in listing to music on headphones.

Having problems on the job? Write to Lindsey Novak in care of Tribune Media Services, Inc., 436 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1500, Chicago, Ill. 60611. She can also be contacted at AtWorkByLNO@aol.com.

Keep Out: Separate private life from office space

By Alice Bredin
Tribune Media

I have been slipping into bad habits in my home office recently. Namely, going back to my desk at about 8:30 or 9 p.m. and working until midnight or 1 a.m. Nothing is wrong with putting in some nighttime hours when you work at home. One of the pleasures of working at home is having a flexible schedule that enables you to work when it suits your time frame. Summer is a particularly great time for this kind of schedule, if it frees you up to enjoy being outside on beautiful summer days.

The kind of pattern I have slipped into, however, is not so positive. The dangerous thing is that I am starting to count on the nighttime hours to stay up to date with my work. I am semi-productive during the day, but

often save proposal writing and other work for nighttime.

The downside of this habit is that it gradually trains you to be less productive during your weekdays because you count on the night or weekend to get loads of work done.

If you find yourself slipping into the same kind of pattern, you need to reclaim your workdays for your own. If you doubt the feasibility of cutting out your nighttime work, keep in mind that you usually finished most of your work before a vacation, a long weekend or your honeymoon.

The following steps are my plans for taking back my private time. I hope they help you do the same.

*Sketch out your day. Nighttime work is often a result of bad planning. Before you

know it, the day has evaporated and you still have important items to complete. Each morning, make a short list of the items you must accomplish that day. Start on those first.

*Take control of interruptions. If you let phone calls, staff or other distractions keep you from completing tasks during the day, start to control when they impinge on your work time. For example, tell staff that you are unavailable for the morning and ask them to save all questions for later in the day. Turn off the ringer on your phone and return calls every few hours.

*Ignore your house. Taking care of errands during the day is fine, but if they have become a larger and larger part of your work day, you need to curtail them.

Make a conscious effort to go

for a few weeks without doing and personal errands or tasks during the day. This will break you of the habit. Once you have learned to handle these chores again, you can slowly reintroduce them into your routine.

*Start earlier. The problem with working late is that then you sleep late and a vicious cycle is created. I broke it this week by forcing myself up early. Day one was tough, but it gets a little easier each day.

*Pull your personal life out of your office. If you keep your flight reservation for your weekend away, your personal phone numbers and items you are likely to need in the evening in your office, you will be lured back to your work area and may start burning the midnight oil.

Instead, have a place for writing thank-you notes, storing personal phone numbers and keeping other personal items organized that is separate from your office.

*Put e-mail in its place. E-mail is a great productivity tool, and I rely heavily on it. However, it can also be a time sink if you let it run you, rather than the other way around.

Have a few times of the day when you check e-mail, rather than logging on every hour to see who is trying to reach you. Answer only essential e-mails during work hours, save social messages for the end of the day when you are winding down.

*Check your priorities. If you simply cannot accomplish all of your work without regularly

working night and weekends for months on end, you may want to check your focus. Clearly, defined goals will enable you to focus on specific items and take extraneous stuff off your to-do list.

I have created an A-list and a B-list. A is for items I want to get to; B is for items that have to be done soon.

The difference? B doesn't keep me at my desk at night.

Alice Bredin is author of the "Virtual Office Survival Handbook" (John Wiley & Sons) and host of The American Express Small Business Exchange Web site <http://www.americanexpress.com/smallbusiness>. You can write to her at Tribune Media Services, 436 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611, or e-mail her at BredinA@aol.com.

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