



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Peer-to-Peer Intervention Program

Employees with personal problems respond easily to counseling from a trained peer rather than from an authority figure. It is nobody's fault if a supervisor has a drinking problem, an emotionally fragile technician goofs up a project or an erratic employee decides to lie low for a week, fooling around at home. Time and again, it has been noticed that the blighted person is ready to open his heart to a peer who has a lot more in common than a superior.

Peer Helping Program

One forest products company has been using trained peer "helpers", since 1997. The program is intended to intervene at a very early stage in work stress, alcohol and drug impairment problems.

Peer helpers are attached to the company's team-based management and act as listeners, coaches and mentors. They primarily identify and intervene with disturbed colleagues at the first sign of trouble and refer them to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Peer helpers are given basic training in listening, counseling, and other skills to recognize work stress, return-to-work and substance abuse.

The Peer Helping program has traveled beyond its founding mission. It is now an effective organizational development tool and talent mine. Peer helpers have become crisis managers who spot trouble instantly and help their colleagues enroll for EAP. The best part of the program is that it is cost-effective.

Peer-to-peer interventions can be effective in any work setting. Here are a few pointers to develop an effective Peer Helping program:

- Be clear about the peer's role. Specify whether the peer's role is that of an intervening and referring professional or that of a paraprofessional.
- Empower the peer helpers to intervene. The company and union policies need modification to this extent.
- Employees have a right to choose their peer counselors and must be allowed to do so.
- Vision, mission and goals need to be defined.
- Periodic review and evaluation of the outcomes is critical.
- The efforts of the peer-to-peer program need to be in sync with that of the EAP's.
- Training is the key to the success of the program. Full day classes, monthly skill building meetings and annual conferences keep peer helpers on their toes.
- To rule out any kind of management maneuvering, a third-party resource needs to be used for implementation.

A word of caution



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- Peer helpers must realize their boundaries.
- Do not expect peer helpers to tattle on their co-workers.
- Ensure that peer helpers do not become unfortunate victims of self-pity.
- Do not let the program end abruptly.