

How Managers Can Support Employees Through Addiction Recovery



Addiction recovery is a sensitive issue which requires a balanced and empathetic approach from senior managers throughout an organization. Addiction impacts employees at all levels, affecting both their personal and professional lives. Senior managers can play a pivotal role in creating a supportive environment for employees facing addiction challenges. By fostering an understanding, compassionate, and practical workplace climate that provides full support, senior managers can help individuals on their recovery journey while maintaining overall workplace productivity and morale.

Understanding the Impact of Addiction in the Workplace

Addiction is a complex condition that often remains hidden, but its effects are visible in areas such as declining performance, strained relationships, and overall workplace disruption. Awareness is the first step to supporting employees struggling with this problem.

Recognizing the Signs of Addiction

Employees struggling with an addiction often exhibit several behavioural and performance-related changes. These can vary depending on the type of addiction, but common signs include:

- **Sudden mood swings**, resulting in a withdrawal from social interactions and irritability.
- **A decline in work quality or consistency** which often is shown by missed deadlines, frequent errors, or a noticeable drop in the standard of their work.
- **Increased absenteeism**, including frequent or unexplained absences, especially after weekends or holidays.

Recognizing these signs helps senior managers to intervene before the situation escalates further. It's essential to approach this conversation with sensitivity, ensuring that employees feel supported rather than judged. Never jump to conclusions; rather, open the door for honest conversation and empathy.

The Cost of Addiction to the Workplace

Not only can addiction have an immediate and lasting impact on the individual suffering from this condition, but it also can create a ripple effect throughout the workplace. For example, addiction can lead to reduced productivity, increased accidents, and higher healthcare costs. A 2018 study by [Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms](#) showed that substance use issues cost Canadian employers approximately \$22.4 billion annually in lost productivity.

Addiction can also create tension and resentment amongst coworkers who may feel burdened by increased workloads or strained relationships with the affected employee.

Fostering a Supportive and Compassionate Environment

The sooner a senior manager acts, the greater the chance of supporting the employee on the road to recovery. When supervisors and HR managers offer this support early, they can also prevent the long-term consequences that prolonged addiction can have on an employee's health and career.

Open Communication and Confidentiality

It is essential to create an environment where employees feel safe discussing their problems and seeking help. This can be achieved in many ways, such as:

- **Respecting employee privacy:** When employees share their struggles, senior managers should respect their confidentiality.
- **Encouraging honest conversations:** Senior managers should create a culture of open communication where employees feel comfortable discussing personal challenges, especially their mental struggles.
- **Balancing transparency with confidentiality:** Senior managers must be careful to balance the need to keep their team informed with the importance of maintaining their employee's privacy.

Offering Flexible Support

Support must go beyond just conversations. Senior managers should take concrete steps to accommodate their employees' needs for recovery. Consider offering flexible deadlines or redistributing tasks to relieve stress and allow an employee the time they need to focus on their recovery.

Employees in recovery often need time off for counseling, medical treatment, or therapy sessions. Flexible work schedules or paid time off for such appointments demonstrate that the company is genuinely invested in the employee's recovery and future well-being.

Implementing Policies and Resources for Addiction Recovery

Senior managers should also be proactive in offering resources and implementing policies that support their employees' long-term recovery. Establishing clear guidelines and providing access to helpful tools can significantly aid in the recovery process.

Access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are an excellent resource for employees seeking

help with addiction. Senior managers should actively promote the use of EAPs and other internal resources, and ensure employees are aware of the assistance available to them.

In addition, partnering with a specialized addiction rehab and treatment centre can provide employees with comprehensive care that is both compassionate and structured to aid in the various stages of their recovery.

Training and Education

Training programs can help all managers better understand addiction, how to spot the signs of addiction in the workplace, and the appropriate steps to take to prevent and address an employee's struggle with addiction. This ensures that managers respond to addiction issues with empathy and without overstepping personal boundaries.

Implementing training for the entire team can help reduce the stigma around addiction and promote a workplace culture that supports mental health and recovery. This can include regular wellness seminars, access to mental health professionals, and team-building exercises focused on inclusivity and support. Fostering a workplace culture of open communication makes it easier for employees struggling in any regard to come forward sooner rather than later.

The Long-Term Benefits of Supporting Employees Through Recovery

Supporting employees through addiction recovery is not just about addressing a problem – it's about investing in their long-term wellbeing and workplace success. Employees who receive the help they need are more likely to remain loyal, productive members of the team. Moreover, when organizations foster a compassionate culture, they build a reputation as an employer that really values and respects their employees – two qualities that will go a long way to helping them attract and retain talent.

By understanding addiction in the workplace and providing employees with the necessary support, senior managers can foster a healthy, positive, and productive environment. This proactive approach not only benefits the employee but also strengthens the organization.

About the Author

Peter Kunst is the Executive Director of [Newgate 180](#), one of Canada's leading private addiction treatment centres. As the co-founder of Newgate 180, Peter's extensive experience includes more than 36 years in residential treatment of addictions. A graduate of Algonquin College's Substance Abuse Counseling program, Peter has designed and implemented many successful programs to meet the specific needs of individual clients. Peter played a lead role at the James Street Recovery Program, where he developed the relapse prevention process with continuing care components. He has also worked with Ottawa's Rideauwood Institute in their Parent and Teen program. Bringing awareness and transparency to addiction in the workplace has been a passionate quest for Peter. He has also created and delivered addiction education and training programs to both public and private sector companies throughout Ontario.