**Employees With Addictions**

SCORE mentors work with small business owners on a wide range of issues. But, one of the most difficult concerns is when a CEO says “I think I have an employee that has an addiction, what do I do?”

Alcohol abuse and drug addictions cost companies billions of dollars per year in absenteeism, workplace accidents, errors in judgment, and even embezzlement or theft to feed addictions. Some studies indicate that nearly 10 percent of the working-age population has some sort of substance-abuse problem. Yet when it comes to treatment for addictions, many employers and insurers shy away from lending a helping hand. All too often, an addicted employee is simply fired.

It would be unthinkable to fire an employee who was diagnosed with cancer, diabetes or some other chronic physical disease. But the social stigma attached to addictions is great. Addiction is often viewed as a “bad choice”, when in reality, it is a disease like any other.

Part of the reason that few companies provide help to addicted employees is that relatively few managers recognize the signs of addiction. And then, the next logical issue is OK, now what do I do about it?

We certainly encourage employers to be aware of how to identify addiction and recognize the extent of addictions in your workplace. You may think that you know everybody and that your employees are addiction-free, but that is a naive delusion given the prevalence of addictions in the general population.

When deciding what steps to take to lead an addicted employee toward treatment and rehabilitation instead of termination, you need to ask yourself some difficult questions. Should you confront an employee about a suspected addiction, which could very likely be an awkward situation? Should you simply publicize available community resources to help addicts seek help on their own? Does your business have an employee-assistance program that includes confidential addiction-treatment options?

The Southeast Minnesota SCORE Chapter has identified this issue as a prime topic for small business CEOs and therefore has decided to include “Addiction Issues for Small Business Owners” as a part of its ongoing educational business seminars.
The first offering of this new class will be on Tuesday, November 19th.

This class will cover how to recognize various types of addiction issues which you might encounter in the workplace. It will examine addiction as a whole and how the individual is affected by the disease. Also, it will explore the warning signs of an employee who may be struggling with addiction issues and how the employer can best address and assist the employee to succeed from struggle to success.

There are obvious effects of addiction; however the class will also explore some not so obvious signs. It will include some methods the employer may use to provide opportunities for the employee to succeed and get back into the workplace as a supported and recovering employee. After the problem has been identified it will be very important to establish when to address the concern with the employee.

I encourage small business CEOs to get more information and attend this new workshop. To register, go to the SCORE website http://semnnesota.score.org/go to local workshops.

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