Reasonable Suspicion

Excuses and Missteps

Ten for the Road



1 "I haven't had a drink since last night!"

An employee with a high tolerance to alcohol could have their last drink late at night and still be under the influence well into the next morning. They don't have to drink just before coming to work or first thing in the morning. Don't let this statement convince you that a test is unnecessary.

2 "It's mouthwash."

If the smell of alcohol is on the breath, then you can document it to support a test for reasonable suspicion. It might be mouthwash, or maybe not. Some alcoholics in the later stages of the disease have consumed mouthwash in quantities large enough to induce intoxication—some mouthwashes are 50 proof or

3 "It's medicine!" Same as #2. It might be medicine. It might be alcohol. It might be both. If it smells like alcohol, you can support your documentation. What the employee states that you are smelling is not part of the "screening out" process.

4 "I have used."

It happens. An employee who admits to using drugs or alcohol should be tested. Their honesty means "I need help."

5 "You'll ruin my career."

Allowing an employee to convince you that a drug test will be harmful to their career and their life is called enabling. Most companies have policies that support employees getting treatment and remaining employed. If this not the case, testing still saves lives—the employee's life, and others.

6 "Who me?! Do I look drunk to you?"

An employee with a drug or alcohol problem characteristically has high tolerance—the ability to consume large quantities of alcohol or drugs and not appear intoxicated. An alcoholic employee with alcohol on the breath could be two to three times over the "legal" limit, but could appear unaffected.

7 "It's okay, I'm back in treatment."

Employees with unmanaged or untreated alcohol or drug problems frequently know more about their problem than others around them. They know exactly what they should be doing to treat their illness—but don't. Motivational presentations and demonstrations of sudden insight are usually manipulative nature. They can sway unwitting supervisors from acting on the drug testing

8 "Let's wait and see."

If you decide to "wait and see if it happens again" before acting on your drug testing policy, chances are you are simply procrastinating. And you're enabling. If injury or death on the job—or off the job—occurs, you'll be kicking yourself and wondering why you didn't act when you had the chance.

9 "Let's keep it between ourselves."

Don't become your employee's confidant. It is a mixing of roles, and simply does not work. If your employee has an alcohol or drug problem, your life experience, counseling ability, or understanding of human nature is not enough to tackle his or her alcohol or drug prob-

10 "But we're friends!"

If you are friends with your employee, you will face a challenge in recommending a drug test. If you socialize and drink with your employee, this challenge is made even more difficult. Consider this: Most supervisors will put their own job security ahead of such friendships when drinking or drug use facilitates a crisis at work. Testing will not hurt a true friendship, and it may prevent a crisis that forces you to make a choice.

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