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Modern Workforce

## TALKING ABOUT DRUGS, ALCOHOL

**W**hether it's the fault of the 1960s or Hollywood, drugs are now a part of our society. Employers, like parents talking to their children, are eventually going to have to address this issue with their workers.

I am afraid that in today's environment an employer cannot afford to avoid the issue and hope his employees behave responsibly on and off the job. Having an employee come to work under the influence of a controlled substance can expose the company to serious liabilities issues, in the event of a lawsuit.

Here are some points to remember:

- Drug test employees before they start work. This is a good way to weed out the drug users. It also sends a message to employees about how you feel about drug use.

- Establish a clear drug and alcohol policy. During employee orientation clearly state your drug and alcohol policy to new workers and have them sign a document that affirms they will remain drug and alcohol free while on the job. This covers you in the event that you have to take legal action against an employee. Also tell employees that the workplace is a drug-free zone.

- Be prepared for the marijuana argument. While marijuana is still considered to be a drug or a controlled substance, many people use it both recreationally and medically. Many marijuana users have prescriptions. However employers can still terminate employees for having marijuana in their system, even if they do have a doctor's note. A 2008 California Supreme Court ruling also states that employees who are fired for legal marijuana use cannot sue their employer for wrongful termination.

- Talk to your employees about prescription drug and alcohol abuse. Prescription drug use is one of the fastest growing areas of drug crimes. When people think of drug abuse, they usually think of marijuana or cocaine, but they don't think of prescription medications such as Xanax and Vicodin. However these drugs are increasingly being used recreationally and by people who may have become dependent on them. Employers should tell workers they need to have prescriptions for any medications they take. Many people do not see alcohol as a drug, but many substance abuse counselors would argue that alcohol is a legalized drug. Employers need to remind workers to be responsible if they choose to consume alcohol.

- Lead by example. Lastly, the best way to show your employees how you feel about drug use is to lead by example. A manager loses credibility if he punishes workers for drug use, but then shows up to work hung over. A good manager does not ask anything of his employees that he is not willing to do himself. In addition, if managers chose to have an after-hours drink with their employees, they should do it responsibly.

Ideally, all companies should have these policies spelled out in their employee manuals.

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