

Episode 72: Alcoholic employee - what should I do?

This week we look at what you should and should not do if you have an alcoholic employee.



1. How do you decide if someone is an alcoholic?

In the USA, alcoholism is protected under the Americans with Disability Act.

Basically, you don't decide. You need to get advice from someone who can.

My first step is to go to the HR team and tell them that I think someone may be an alcoholic.

They are going to ask you about three things: their behavior, their work output and whether others will corroborate. Remember, it's not your job to prove it but to report it and ask for help.

2. If there is a problem, what should I expect next?

The first thing you should expect is that HR will guide you. There are legal issues.

This is like putting someone on a PIP (performance improvement plan). 5 steps may come next:

1. You will need to sit down with HR and agree a plan and approach
2. You will need to sit down with the person, accompanied by HR
3. You will need to explain how you perceive the situation and the impact it's having
4. You will need to state the expectations of behavior and outputs
5. You will need to do a regular review and check progress

Of course I will have missed some things here and that's why you need HR's help.

3. What if the person refuses to admit the problem?

To be honest, I don't really understand alcoholism or what causes it - my advice is that you should not try.

You need to use professional advice and guidance here.

Your colleague may know they have a problem and may be looking to fix it.

This may be OK if their work output is not effected.

If not, don't play therapist, play boss and follow the rules.

Bottom Line: Whatever your personal opinion, you need to think about alcoholism as a disability and approach it as such; not as something you ignore, but as something you have to manage through.