

Magazine

Program Helps Smaller Firms Fight Drug Use

By HAE CHUNG

THE CONNECTION

A branch manager at one of your stores is the backbone behind the success of your business.

He is an inspiration to the employees, the customers, and even to you, the owner. You know that without him, your store can suffer tremendously.

But what if he's an alcoholic? What do you do? Well, you can fire him and risk the loss his leadership provided, or you can keep him on and, again, risk a major mistake on his part?

That is a question faced by many small businesses in the area.

When an employee has a drug or an alcohol problem and this problem is affecting his or her work, many businesses suffer from the lack in quality and quantity of work that the worker is able to produce. But as small, private businesses, these companies are unable to fight the problem due to lack of money and time.

It's a problem a Tysons Corner real estate company faced just recently until Dan Feerst, manager of government and industrial services at the Arlington Hospital Addiction Treatment Program, came to the rescue.

In response to this growing problem, the Arlington Hospital has developed ASSIST, a free program designed for small business owners who need guidance in helping employees combat drug and/or alcohol problems.

Feerst has been conducting similar programs for a few years to the smaller businesses around the area. Now, the program has officially been named ASSIST.

"It was on request by the community. Businesses would call in asking for advise on what to do with an employee with a drug problem," Feerst said.

With the Arlington Hospital having the reputation for being the oldest hospital-based drug program in the area, ASSIST was inevitable.

Current statistics from the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism indicate one out of 11 employees have problems with drugs and alcohol.

Because of these figures, it is apparent that the cost to American businesses is great, and that smaller businesses are in worse shape.

ASSIST provides the trained professional help and insight at the business site. Feerst teaches business owners the step-by-step procedure in getting an impaired employee to seek the help he/she needs by using



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Dan Feerst, manager of Arlington Hospital's ASSIST program.

Performance Based Intervention.

Performance Based Intervention is a carefully structured confrontation with the employee, according to Dr. Charles Smith, medical director of the Arlington Hospital Addiction Treatment Program. It is taught to the owners so that they can deal with their employees in their own fashion.

In addition to the consultation and the training, ASSIST provides a free referral service.

By working with experienced people like Feerst, businesses are able to retain their employees and work out a plan beneficial to both the company and the worker.

With over 15,000 small businesses in Northern Virginia and a vast ma-

jority of them not having a professional counseling program, ASSIST has its work cut out for it.

"As far as I know, this kind of program does not exist anywhere else. It is totally unique," Feerst said.

For a confidential, convenient consultation, call ASSIST at 558-6536.