

Problem Gambling: Tips and Tools for Managers and Employers

Problem gambling in the workplace is a double-edged sword. On the one side, it cuts into an employee's ability to contribute to the company's success. And it also cuts into a company's profitability as lower productivity, reduced product quality, increased absenteeism and higher health care costs take their toll.

If you believe one of your employees is a problem gambler, you can take steps to identify the problem, express your concerns and help ensure the employee gets the help he or she needs.

How to Identify a Worker with a Gambling Problem

Most people who gamble do not develop gambling problems, but about five per cent of adults do. The negative effects of problem gambling can easily spill over into the workplace. Problem gamblers can exhibit any of the following traits in the workplace. Consider if your employee or co-worker is:

- Often late for work
- Often leaving work early
- Too distracted to focus on work
- Excessive or secretive about personal phone use
- An initiator of sports pools or in-office betting
- Absent from work without explanation
- Taking money from staff funds to gamble or cover debts
- Borrowing money frequently
- Continually boasting about their earnings
- Complaining about debts more than usual
- Experiencing drastic mood swings
- Using excessive sick time, especially half days
- Spending an increasing amount of time gambling during lunch hours and after work
- Allowing his or her work performance to deteriorate, and missing deadlines
- Experiencing personality changes – irritability, secrecy, lying
- Receiving credit card or loan bills at work rather than home
- Making false claims against expense accounts

How to Express Your Concerns

If you suspect that your employee or co-worker is exhibiting signs of a gambling problem, it's important that you refrain from diagnosing the problem or telling the individual what to do. Instead, consider the following:

- Be clear, non-judgmental and speak only for yourself.
- Use work-related observations.
- Be positive about the employee's usual work standards.
- Explain how the problem affects you, i.e. having to take on an extra workload.
- Be clear about your position.
- Respect personal boundaries.
- Provide information, such as available problem gambling resources, rather than personal advice.
- Be prepared for denial or a hostile reaction.

Help for Gambling Employees and Your Company

Organizations should take proactive steps to help reduce the negative impact that problem gambling can have in a workplace. These could include:

- Developing policy statements. Most companies have policies governing the use of alcohol and drugs. Gambling should be given the same attention.
- Providing awareness training. This can help employees and employers to identify and assist the problem gambler.
- Providing financial counselling for employees who are in a fiscal crisis.
- Monitoring the money stream of the company. Some occupations involve direct contact with money, while other occupations allow the money to be easily moved. These occupations could be considered high risk for the problem gambler.
- Knowing and using local aid resources. Every province has agencies and services in place to counsel problem gamblers. The Internet makes it easy to search for such resources. Be sure to have numbers and contacts handy.

Although problem gambling has the potential to greatly affect an employee's performance as well as the company as a whole, know that resources are available to deal with such issues. Contact your EAP for some additional advice on how to express your concerns and seek professional help.

If you require support to deal with a sensitive employee situation, contact Shepell·fgi to find out more about the consultation and training services your Employee Assistance Program provides.

Call 1 866 833-7690