

## **Team Skills: Leadership**

Leadership and team building are integral to the effectiveness of any type of workplace health or related program, whether it is physical wellness, substance abuse prevention, or drug-free workplace policy. Supportive leadership and supervision are fundamental to the success of programs that seek to build team skills, communication, and a more proactive (rather than reactive) work climate. High-quality team leaders maintain a steady balance between the needs, interest and concerns of their team members and overarching corporate values and concerns. Most coursework in management and business schools highlight those leadership styles, competencies and behaviors that define and model effective, sound, or transformational leadership. These same criteria of effectiveness apply to drug-free workplace programs, where supervisors inspire team members, have high expectations with clear goals and objectives, and are able to get team members to focus beyond their individual self-interests to the “good” of the team, the corporate culture, and the operational goals of the workplace.

Most importantly, as regards substance abuse, and because of the climate they help to create, these supervisors are responsive to troubled or at-risk workers, rather than tolerating, enabling, or even stigmatizing workers with alcohol, drug, or mental health problems. These leaders bring a well-defined “team awareness” to all team members, thereby enhancing protective factors in the workplace “culture,” including a sense of belonging, motivation, caring, and achieving. Together, these factors increase substance abuse resiliency, while decreasing team member stress, injury and fear of reprisal (reducing substance abuse risk factors). Team members, along with leadership, need to be able to trust each other, rely on each other’s skills and decisions, and increase responsiveness/helping to each members needs and goals to work in common support of the entire team. The entire team includes those who are under stress because of behavioral health concerns they face personally or in a friend or family member.

Research and evaluation of effective team leadership that reduces risks for workplace substance abuse suggests several competencies such as: empathy, assertiveness, supportive, acknowledgement of good decision-making, and amiability. Leadership includes going beyond but also focusing on early intervention and treatment needs of employees. Responsive supervisors leverage various human resources to provide universal, selected and indicated prevention at the workplace.