

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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Gambling: Fun or Addiction?

Gambling isn't a big deal is it? After all, what's wrong with getting in on an office pool that includes your favorite team? Or what about buying a lottery ticket or visiting a local casino? That's pretty harmless stuff isn't it? Certainly gambling — also referred to as gaming — doesn't pose any problems for many people. However, for an estimated one in 20 persons, gambling leads to a host of personal and economic problems that weave a path of personal and economic destruction. Consider:

➤ The National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) estimates that 2 million (1%) of adults in the U.S. meet the criteria for pathological (i.e. compulsive) gambling in a given year. Another 4-6 million (2-3%) would be considered problem gamblers; that is, they do not meet the full diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling, but they do meet one or more criteria and are experiencing problems due to their gambling behavior.

➤ The National Gambling Impact Study Commission points out that for every compulsive gambler, five additional people are affected by the addiction.

➤ The NCPG estimates that compulsive gamblers annually cost businesses \$40 billion in lost



wages and insurance claims.

➤ One third of the U.S. prison population is considered compulsive gamblers.

➤ One out of every five compulsive gamblers attempts suicide.

Traits of a Problem Gambler

According to the NCPG, the essential characteristics (i.e. traits) of problem gambling are: an increasing preoccupation with gambling; a need to bet more money more frequently; restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop; "chasing" losses; and continuing gambling behavior in spite of mounting, serious consequences affecting finances, work, and/or personal relationships.

An inability and unwillingness to accept reality (hence an escape into a "dream world") is another characteristic of a problem gambler. A compulsive gambler also seems to have a strong inner urge to be a "big shot" and a feeling of being powerful. A compulsive gambler is willing to do anything

(often of an antisocial nature) to maintain the image that he or she wants others to see.

"If the gambler is seeking a 'bail-out,' it's a sure sign that there is a compulsive gambling problem," adds Terri Ohlms, counselor, interventionist, and executive director of the Ohlms Institute (<http://ohlms-institute.com>).

Defining 'Chasing'

As the term implies, "chasing" means that a gambler often "chas-

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Build Performance Through Individual Meetings

By Joe Takash

People are complex. If you've ever taken a personality assessment test, you that we all have different propensities, values, drivers, and motivations.

Knowing this, how can managers and leaders get the most out of these diverse personalities in the workplace? One highly controllable component is to have individual meetings. They allow you to connect with employees and build a stronger team, one person at a time.

Consider the following recommendations to either conduct individual meetings — or make the ones you're already holding more effective.

Designate time on your calendar. Yes, schedules can be challenging. However, the designation of time and commitment to schedules can instantly build morale and loyalty simply by valuing the development of staff and understanding their challenges and needs.

Watch out for backfire. Bruce is a senior manager at a successful healthcare company. In a leadership program my firm was conducting, he mentioned that his staff would always bet whether or not he would make their meetings. After a while they stopped betting because they knew the answer: Bruce's message and impact was clear: "Meeting with you is not a

priority. Therefore you are not a priority."

Designating time to staff should be as important as a client presentation. By booking it on your calendar regularly, you can learn, teach, and mutually benefit in a non-distracted atmosphere.

Be mutually prepared. To save time and increase productivity, have a checklist to follow so the meeting doesn't drag, and it remains results-focused. Everyone needs a roadmap.

Make personal connections every few meetings. Too often, the only issues discussed in meetings are processes, procedures, and quotas. This is understandable — but only to a certain extent. Meetings are attended by *people* who are driven by personal goals, values and passions. They have a right to be asked how they are doing.

Once every three or four meetings, ask staff questions like "What are you motivated by?" and "What's the biggest challenge you're facing?"

In smaller gatherings, staff members have a chance to open up, be heard — while management gains greater insights into ways to maximize the individual's performance.

Document and follow up. When staff members bring an idea or ask for support on issues and there is no follow through, trust is eroded and team dynamics negatively impacted.

Many leaders don't do this intentionally — but they fail to communicate, confirm, and clarify what was exchanged. "Do what you say you're going to do, when you say you're going to do it."

Leaders need feedback, too. It's funny how annual reviews offer the boss authorization to evaluate, but it doesn't seem to apply to them. Many leaders will object: "Employees won't be honest because they fear retribution." This may be somewhat true, but it depends on how the message is delivered. If I say, "John, give me honest feedback on what I should do better," in an aggressive tone, sitting inches away, I'm unlikely to get helpful feedback.

However, if I speak in a friendly tone and say, "John, I was hoping you could provide me some feedback on how I can be a more effective team leader," wouldn't this situation be more conducive to open honesty? Great leaders check their ego at the door several times a year because they know how valuable feedback is.

Summary

Individual meetings are a phenomenal opportunity. Make time for the one on one. The outcomes will include greater communication, confidence, loyalty, and inspired performance. ■

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