

Anger And Stress in Casinos

Casino employees are often vulnerable to a range of physical and emotional problems. Employees who work in casinos are expected to always treat customers with respect, smiles and dignity. Shelly Field, who counts "100 Best Careers in Casinos and Casino Hotels" among the 20 books she has written, said the 24-hour go-go atmosphere found in casinos piles stress on workers. "In the casino business you always have to be 'on,' and that adds to stress. Having to smile and be customer-service oriented on a constant basis becomes stressful in some instances," said Field. The primary goal is to keep customers in the casino happy in spite of their attitude or behavior. Customers may often be intoxicated or angry over gambling losses. Employees are expected to tolerate rude and often insulting behavior. This can lead to stress, depression, hypertension, heart disease and anger. Since anger is a secondary emotion it is almost always preceded by frustration, stress or some other intense emotion.

Unrecognized and/or untreated workplace stress and anger can lead to an increase in sick day usage, accidents, interpersonal conflicts and poor morale. The resulting frustration experienced by the employee can trigger an angry outburst or employee burnout. According to an article published in CasinoDealers.net. Stress is extremely problematic among casino workers: 75% of casino workers identified stress as a significant cause of job dissatisfaction. 50% of surveyed casino workers reported "a lot" to moderate stress. 15% of medical claims among casino workers are reported to be stress related. Medical providers report that stress is a major contributor to most physical and mental health problems. Substance abuse, excessive eating and gambling are the principle occupational injuries of white collar and customer service workers. Stress indirectly costs employers \$150 billion annually. Unfortunately, 25% of all surveyed managers believe that anger is an acceptable management strategy oblivious to the cost to the company as well as to employee morale. Stress is expensive emotionally, physically and financially for both employees and their employer.

Enlightened risk management and human resource consultants are aware of the business and legal exposure to organizations that ignore the need to address workplace stress, interpersonal conflicts, anger and person directed aggression. The average cost to an organization to defend itself against litigation charging workplace abuse, is \$700,000. The introduction of anger management courses which include techniques for recognizing and managing stress, managing anger, improving communication and increasing empathy have been shown to effectively address workplace stress and interpersonal conflicts.

Research conducted at the University of South Florida, demonstrated that when an anger management program was introduced to students in one class, the entire school benefited. Similarly, a twelve month study conducted in one unit consisting of 16,000 employees in the U.S. Postal Service resulted in a savings of 1.7 million dollars. There was an increase in morale, increase in workplace performance, and reduction of sick day usage, a reduction in accidents and a dramatic decrease in workplace conflicts.

In addition to offering anger management to employees who exhibit problems managing stress, communicating effectively and demonstrating emotional intelligence; anger management classes can be a cost saving intervention relative to preventing workplace conflict and improving employee morale.

A typical program can be implemented by providing brochures, or pamphlets explaining what an anger management class is and is not. Often, employees are reluctant to attend any program which may imply mental or emotional disturbance. Therefore, it is essential that the course be explained in simple language as a class designed to teach skills in managing stress, anger and improving communication and increasing empathy.

In order to address the stress and frustration often found among casino workers a good anger management program can provide the workers strategies to manage their stress and anger. In addition the essential components of a good anger management program should include skills to improve communication and increase empathy. This is not a program to deal with severe emotional problems and therefore employees should not experience any stigma associated with attending such a class. These courses are generally taught in small groups with approximately 20 employees with separate groups for management and line staff so that each can feel free to express themselves openly. Management staff often benefit from additional training on how to recognize signs of employee stress or depression in their work units.

Conclusion

Casino workers experience a high degree of workplace stress and anger based on the unique nature of their work environment. Like doctors, firemen and law enforcement officers, the stressful nature of the work is not likely to change. Instead, it is the employee who must be taught skills to manage his or her stress in ways that increase rather than decrease his job performance and team morale. The introduction of anger management courses are a cost saving intervention for business and industry.

George Anderson, MSW, LCSW, BCD

<http://www.andersonservices.com>

Diplomate, American Association of Anger Management Providers

Fellow, American Orthopsychiatry Association