

SUPERMEN and SUPERWOMEN

(Could Alcohol be Your Kryptonite)

Many top executives, especially CEOs are in trouble (double trouble actually). First, if they have a problem or a potential problem with alcohol abuse, they have to deal with that on a daily basis. Second, they are well insulated and often protected by their staff. The staff think they are helping their boss; but instead, they are contributing to the problem. Superman's staff often are acting like unhealthy co-dependent family members.

The business Superman usually has a very strong personality. He has a successful track record, a lot of autonomy, and a history of being able to figure things out, no matter how tough the challenges are. He surrounds himself with "can do" people, and he demands fierce loyalty. He is usually quite unapproachable concerning things he is against or is in denial about.

"Superman don't need no seatbelt," Muhammad Ali once told a flight attendant, who replied, "Superman doesn't need no airplane either." Ali fastened the belt.

Superwoman is on the job everyday, so it's easy for her to say, "I'm okay, what are you talking about?" Her attendance is good, but her competence declines. The staff do what they can to cover for her diminishing abilities. As you can see, this fosters a growing unhealthy culture.

A profoundly negative event must usually occur before an intervention can take place. Serious costly consequences always occur when the dysfunction is allowed to get to this point. The consequences may include, but are not limited to, huge financial mistakes in investments, misappropriations of funds, broken agreements with clients, vendors and lenders, alienation of department heads, and mistrust amongst employees. Why wait for a catastrophe to happen?

There are Solutions

Board Chairs, Board members, HR departments, EAP departments, and staff members who work directly with Superman need to be more proactive. This requires courage and a culture that encourages authenticity and transparency. This is easy to say, but hard to do.

First determine if Superman is approachable and who is the best person to talk with him. If the afflicted person is willing to have a discussion, the advisor should listen deeply and then refer him to the resource that has the expertise to deal with the problem.

If Superwoman is unapproachable, consider bringing in an outside expert who can work with her to formulate the best solution for her situation. This could include an intervention team, a counselor from a treatment facility or an independent expert who has all the pertinent resources and can recommend the best solution for the CEO without having a personal agenda.

Some of the solutions available include residential treatment programs, out-patient treatment, programs like Alcoholics Anonymous, or one on one counseling with a trusted advisor. Whatever solution the CEO chooses, I recommend a minimum twelve-month mentor/sponsor relationship after the recovery process to insure long-term recovery.

The encouraging fact is that CEOs that enter some kind of treatment have a recovery rate of close to 90%.

My last piece of advice is to do something **today**. Alcohol related problems will not get better, they only will get worse.

Do These Things Today:

1. Talk to a couple of trustworthy people who are close to Superman (the executive with the problem) to determine the extent of the progression.
2. Choose the best options to proceed (either two or three options are best).
3. Meet with Superman, present the options and work together choosing the best option.
4. Implement the agreed upon solution.



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