



Case Study

The Value of a Successful Back on Track Program

How one of the nation's largest retailers is retaining employees and realizing substantial financial savings

While the retailer has strong beliefs in the concept of rehabilitation, they are determined to maintain a drug-free and safe workplace.

With more than 260,000 employees in stores throughout the US, one of the nation's largest retailers reached out to First Advantage for a comprehensive substance abuse assessment and monitoring program. The majority of their employees work in safety sensitive positions, ranging from pharmacists to distribution center positions, and the retailer required a program that not only identified employees that tested positive for drugs and alcohol, but also provided them with assistance to correct addiction.

After the retailer instituted their drug testing program, which included pre-employment, random, for-cause and follow-up testing, they decided to add First Advantage's Back on Track program to offer long-term employees the opportunity to sign a "Last Chance Agreement" (LCA) rather than be terminated for a positive drug and/or alcohol test or self-identifying a substance abuse problem. While the retailer has strong beliefs in the concept of rehabilitation, they are determined to maintain a drug-free and safe workplace.

Initially, First Advantage and the retailer worked together to develop a comprehensive drug and alcohol policy. Developing the Back on Track program was also a joint effort to customize the program to meet the company's specific needs: designing different procedures for safety sensitive employees and non-safety sensitive positions, and delineating the timeframes and types of communication required between managers and First Advantage so the retailer would have a good understanding of the progress of each employee referred to the program. In addition, First Advantage identified what types of reports would enable the employer to clearly realize the program's benefits and cost savings.

The Program

First Advantage kicked off the Back on Track program with a significant amount of training for the organization's senior management. The training improved company-wide program acceptance by revealing the financial benefits of retaining employees and eliminated preconceived notions that employees who failed drug tests were generally 'lost causes.'

When an employee has a positive drug test result or self-identifies to a company representative, they are asked to sign a "Last Chance Agreement" or be terminated. If the LCA is signed, the First Advantage program takes over, beginning with a series of employee communications, referral to qualified mental health and substance abuse assessments, followed by a level-of-care recommendation with resources provided.

Strict compliance with the recommendations is required, including a post-program evaluation. Based on successful program completion and reassessment, the employee is provided a 'Readiness to Return to Work' letter and is required to keep in daily contact with First Advantage for notification of random testing.

The employee is then required to comply with random testing over the next four years. All aspects of the program are monitored, and employees may be reported as non-compliant for not completing tasks in a timely manner or due to a second positive test.

The Results

Since program inception, 2,460 of the retailer's employees have participated in the Back on Track program and 1,056 employees have successfully completed it. By retaining these employees rather than recruiting and training new workers, the organization has saved more than \$8.4 million over just three years.

Program results also reveal that the successful completion rate is increasing year over year. Of the 357 who entered the program at the beginning of fiscal year 2008, 51% were compliant or successfully completed the program, compared to 25% from the first year of the program (1999). Employees who entered the program during fiscal year 2009 currently have a 66% completion rate and are on track to continue this positive trend.

The chart below shows the most recent three-year comparison of data and includes increased compliance rates, types of referrals and the number of those who left the program due to non-compliance.

	FY09		FY08		FY07	
Total Number of Cases	461	100%	357	100%	338	100%
Case Status						
– Successful/Compliant	305	66%	183	51%	122	36%
– Complete	0	0%	87	24%	66	20%
– Random Testing	0	0%	62	17%	56	17%
– Active	305	66%	34	10%	N/A	
– Non-Compliant*	156	34%	174	49%	216	64%
Referred due to						
– Self-Identification	159	34%	114	32%	132	39%
– Non-negative test	302	66%	243	68%	206	61%

*Non-compliance includes employees who terminated their jobs, as well as those who did not follow the Substance Abuse Professional's recommendations

Summary

The financial and employer good-will gains are considerable. Over the last few years, the retailer did not have to spend the time and effort to hire and train 1,056 new employees. In addition, the rehabilitation of this employee group has had a considerable impact on health care costs, as unidentified substance abuse problems can cause a considerable increase in health care expenses.

There is also a benefit to the community in which these employees live, as this employer has given experienced employees with substance abuse problems the chance to get back on track and remain employed. The rehabilitated employees can continue to be productive members of society and not a strain on community resources.

Moving forward the retailer plans to maintain the program, expand training to include drug and alcohol education and further promote the self-identification program.

*Psychiatric Services, December 2008



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