You know you’ve been drinking too much. Friends have said it may be time to get help. You’re ready to take that step. Should you tell your employer?

The answer isn’t black and white, says Denise Hellekson, a Clinical Associate with The Village Employee Assistance Program.

“If your work performance or working relationships are not negatively affected, and you are getting the assistance you need to regain your sobriety, you do not need to feel obligated to disclose your personal struggle,” Hellekson says.

Hellekson compares it to other personal health issues that don’t impact the person’s work, such as a diagnosis of high cholesterol. You need to seek medical attention and follow the treatment protocol, but does your employer need to know that?

“Over-disclosing doesn’t necessarily benefit the company or the employee,” Hellekson says.

It would be important to consider why your employer may need to know, or what your intention is for telling them, she says. Will you need time off to attend treatment? Do you work in a safety-sensitive position, or is there a risk of creating an unsafe environment due to your use? Are you unsure where to go for help or how to look for assistance? There are times when it is necessary to disclose, she says.

Hellekson encourages employees to do their research and find the best and most helpful resources to support their sobriety.

“Keeping in Touch” is a monthly publication for employees covered by The Village Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through their employer’s benefit package. If you have questions about your EAP benefit, or if you would like to access services, call 1-800-627-8220.

Concerns, on Back
appropriate to discuss this with your employer, but you first need to consider what your purpose is in telling them.

Reading your company’s drug-free workplace policy may provide guidance on self-disclosure, Hellekson says. Employees are also encouraged to use their EAP benefit for assistance.

“We can assist employees in addressing their concerns and refer them to appropriate services for continued success,” Hellekson says. The EAP services are confidential and can be a good place to start if employees are unsure about seeking help.

“Taking ownership is the first step, and seeking help is important in reaching success,” she adds.

Tina DeLaCruz, EAP Client Services Associate, agrees that being proactive and honest is important.

“It’s usually worse if it’s something that starts to affect job performance and the supervisor has to bring it up,” DeLaCruz says.

When it gets to the point of a formal referral, where the company requires you to seek help, your job might be in jeopardy, DeLaCruz says.

If an employee feels like he or she needs to let the employer know of the situation, starting with the Human Resources Generalist or HR Manager is likely the best plan. The employee may feel he or she can be more forthcoming than when talking to an immediate supervisor, because of the separation from peers and confidentiality that HR professional provides.

Many employees think of human resources as a department that “polices” behavior and enforces policies, DeLaCruz says. “What people forget about is that we actually want to help people. We want people to be successful. We want to give people resources.

“Remember, they’re there to help you and be an advocate,” she adds. “That’s the ‘human’ part of human resources.”

The HR staff person will likely point you to your EAP, and should be able to provide program brochures and the phone number to call.

Through your EAP, you can talk to a mental health professional at no cost. This individual may refer you for a chemical dependency evaluation, which also is covered by the EAP. These steps can get you started in the right direction, whether the recommendation that follows be education or treatment.

If treatment is recommended and will interfere with your work schedule, then it would be a good idea to go to human resources.

In general, DeLaCruz encourages anyone who thinks they may have a problem to be proactive. “Seek help and resources before it gets to the point where you may lose your job.”

If you’re concerned about your or a family member’s alcohol or drug use, job stress, family or marriage relationships or financial concerns, help is available. Call 1-800-627-8220 to access services through your EAP.

Remember, HR is there to help you and be an advocate...

Counselor Column, From Front

moderate their use, it is a serious sign that a person has possibly developed what is termed a “Substance Use Disorder.” Past definitions have included: alcoholism, alcohol or drug addiction, or chemically dependent. Some of the symptoms of an Alcohol Use Disorder are:

• Drinking more or longer than intended.
• Inability to cut down or stop drinking.
• Continued alcohol use despite it causing problems with family, job, mood, or medical issues.
• Important activities are reduced because of alcohol use.
• Withdrawal symptoms that can include: tremors, sweats, insomnia, vomiting, and anxiety.

At the treatment and recovery center where I work, we recommend that if the individual with the alcohol or drug problem isn’t interested in getting help or assessed, that the spouse or family member set up an informational session to gain support as well as develop a plan of how to proceed to help their loved one. Alcohol Use Disorders are a medical issue and need intervention or they will get worse. In 1959 the American Medical Association determined that alcoholism was a disease that had symptoms similar to many other disease states and needed to be treated otherwise could progress and be life threatening.

Help is available through your Employee Assistance Program by calling 1-800-627-8220.

WORRIED ABOUT MONEY?

We can help! Financial counseling is part of your EAP. Call 1-800-627-8220 for more info.

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