

Drug Education in Professional Training Business and Economics

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Business and economics are two professional areas often overlooked when the subjects of drugs and drug education are considered. Yet these two areas are critically involved in the whole drug issue, and therefore the need for drug education. At the same time, they offer the opportunity for effective drug education which does not dwell on medical facts, scare tactics, or "how to" material but allows for examination of drug behavior in a realistic setting, a setting where motivation, courses of treatment, and alternatives can be explored in a meaningful way.

Drug use and abuse, when viewed from an economic standpoint, include many factors. The amount of money spent on drugs, the costs and profits involved in the transportation of drugs from their source to final buyer, and the theft involved to obtain money for drugs, attribute to an economic effect throughout the world that is without a doubt impossible to measure. The concepts of supply and demand affect the quality and price of drugs from their initial entry into a country to their final sale. Drugs have found their way into every facet of the economic system while the interactions among these factors intensify and make the economic effect more staggering.

The world of business has also been directly affected by the drug problem. Drugs have moved into the working world as a result of employee use both on and off the job. The abuse of drugs has been an employee problem throughout history. Today the problem's complexity has changed as new drugs become involved and differences thought to exist between sexes or levels within a company disappear. In the United States, it has been estimated that employee drug use costs business and industry 15 billion dollars annually in losses that are traceable to absenteeism, theft, poor morale, accidents, and substandard production.

Yet business schools, certainly those in the United States, have ignored these relationships and failed to consider how curriculum might be changed to effectively confront the problems of drug education. The relationships are clear, drugs are involved in the economic structures and systems of the world and the abuse of drugs within the business world includes the problems of why drugs are used, how is the drug using employee confronted, and how can drug use on the job be stopped and prevented.

These issues should be serious consideration for people concerned with drug education.

Relevance and student interest are two very important factors to be considered for any educational effort, certainly for drug education. The relationship between the drug issue and business education is clear; student interest has been found to be strong. Student interest was measured by a survey of 1116 business students representing a private university, a liberal arts college, a public university, and a two-year technical institute. The students taking the survey showed a high interest in taking a drug-related course within the business curriculum. 90% of the respondents felt that a course of this nature should be offered and 67% indicated they would personally be interested in taking such a course. The students also felt that additional information on drugs could be included in other courses where it was related to specific course content.

Student response to the survey, which included questions on their attitude toward drugs and how they would react to drug problems on the job, showed that they possess a high degree of concern for dealing with the problem in an effective manner which helps the company, and more importantly, which helps the employee as a human being. This element of student interest more than justifies the consideration of course material as it relates to drugs.

Implementation of these ideas is not as simple as the development of a justification for them. Published materials on drugs appear only infrequently in business journals and textbooks so that efforts in this area are very exploratory. However, there are some criteria which can be established, and there are some very basic ideas which might be developed for use in the business classroom.

Drug education in business and economics should explore several aspects that can best be examined as goals for professional drug education in business. This drug education should clearly explore the relationships between the drug problem in general and the particular subject matter. The material should allow for examination of the reasons for drug use, ways of dealing with people who use and abuse drugs in the working situation, the alternatives to drug use, and ways of treating the drug user. The opportunity should be provided to study the pharmacology of drugs when students are motivated to do so. This material, however, should not be forced upon the students to any detailed extent unless introductory information is necessary for the understanding of other material.

If these criteria are used, and they do not all apply to every possible situation, drug education in business and economics can take a variety of forms. Drug education for business can be effective with the use of short cases to make the students aware of the relationships between drug use and the working scene. Two very simple situations, presented at any level in most business subjects, provide a setting for active discussion of the effects of different drugs in the work setting, the various ways management might react to a drug incident, and the different alternatives management faces in deciding the issue. The cases can be varied by considering different types of drugs, for example: marijuana, alcohol, barbiturates, amphetamines, and heroin; and by presenting various alternatives for action, for example: ignore the incident, warn the employee, fire the employee, and/or inform the police. Students can also be asked to consider their action on a first or second offense.

Case 1: As the owner or top-level manager of an organization, you have been informed that a significant loss (\$, time, etc.) has occurred because of an employee's inability to perform his job. The inability was caused by the employee being under the influence of a drug determined to be... What would your reaction be?

Case 2: In the same position you have been notified that an employee is under the influence of some drug, however no direct loss has been suffered. What would your reaction be?

For more intense study of the drug problem in business, students might be presented with the task of writing a company policy on drug use to include a definition of drug use, attitude of the policy, goals, implementation procedures, and organization. This type of project would be more suitable to the college curriculum while the shorter cases are suitable for use in both high schools and colleges.

The drug issue can be studied in a number of other subjects as part of a business curriculum. In economics all of economic theory could feasibly be studied in terms of drugs, their movement within the economy, their own economic structure, or the way they affect other segments of the economy.

A simple presentation, or the encouragement of student projects and papers, could be devoted to how drugs interact in the economic system of a particular country, or the world as a whole.

In classes concerned with insurance, drugs can be studied as they affect insurance rates, life expectancies, and insurability. In business law, drugs in the working scene can be explored from a legal viewpoint in addition to the possibility of examining the general questions of drugs and the law. Here a single question, does an employer have a legal obligation to notify the authorities when a drug user is discovered, can open a discussion of legal responsibility and the treatment of employees.

Courses dealing with social responsibility of corporations and social problems in general are becoming more and more popular in business. Drugs, their use and abuse, is an excellent topic to be considered here because it fits directly with other problems, i.e. pollution. And it emphasizes the relationship between drug abuse and social responsibility which has not received much attention. Here this particular aspect of management, the organization's responsibility to its employees, can be explored. What should a company do for employees who are suffering from drug abuse problems? Are company practices in any way responsible for employees using drugs?

There are many more relationships between the problems of drug abuse and courses normally taught in a business curriculum. However, a movement of drug education in this direction will require the creative thought of many people as they examine these relationships and develop materials for use in the classroom. There is little published material although several cases do exist and mention of the drug problem is being included in some new and revised textbooks. While efforts are made to develop more material for classroom use and others are being encouraged to examine the relationship between business and the need for drug education, the ideas and material contained here are adequate for a beginning.

Student involvement in case discussions concerning employee drug use or company policy find themselves learning more about the management process, more about the drug problem in business and industry, more about how the drug problem in general affects the whole economic system, and more about their own feelings toward drugs. It is an excellent vehicle for meaningful drug education.