

Grief in the Workplace

Loss is a fact of life. We experience it from the moment we are born and leave our mother's womb and then from that moment on we fight to not only understand losses in our life but then better learn how to cope with it. We fight anger, depression and then miraculously we are supposed to accept it. Well, what if you never learned how?

Grief will always and forever affect different people in different ways. Some of the more common symptoms include loss of pleasure, loss of appetite, decreased initiative and energy, sleep difficulties and tearfulness or crying. Emotional symptoms include depression and or anxiety, feelings of emptiness, irritability, anger, guilt, and finally hopelessness and lack of vision for the future.

How then can we best be of help to ourselves as well as others in the workplace? First we need to make a promise to ourselves that we will acknowledge and try to understand the loss, secondly, let yourself experience the pain and your reaction to it, and finally seek to best move adaptively into your new life and in turn not forget the old. Though the three things just mentioned are very general let them be a guide for you in your process of recovery from your loss.

In the event of a death in the workplace the employer needs to consider support for the co workers, support for the family, redistribution of workload, cleaning out the workstation if death of an employee (done not by co workers but perhaps others from a near department, preferably with the assistance of a family member present). You must allow a format for employees to talk about the death. Be aware that an employee death will change the way the workgroup operates, it will rearrange priorities and everyone will deal with it differently, and in most instances the surviving co workers will at least temporarily fulfill the different roles as their way of helping in the grief process.

When a grieving employee returns to work the employer should really do their best to meet with the employee before their return. Provide a temporary workload lightening. Offer shorter days if needed. Acknowledge that persons accomplishments and whatever you do don't hover.

Rachel Blythe Kodanaz, a local expert in grief and loss in the workplace notes that we all need to make an impact. I is for impelling a smile, M is for motivating a new thought, P is for providing encouragement, A is for adding tranquility, C is for calming the hurt and T is for touching the heart. The one in need and the one who supports together make and IMPACT.

As always please enlighten yourself with literature on grief such as anything by Elizabeth Kubler Ross. The Road Less Traveled by M. Scott Peck, MD. How to Cope with Grief by Judith Sara Schmidt. Dealing Creatively with Grief by Ernest Morgan. Finally, A Personal Guide to Living with Loss by Judy Tatelbaum.

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