

*Over \$100 Billion in Annual Business Revenue Loss*

# GRIEF

## IN THE WORKPLACE

RECOVER HIDDEN REVENUE AND  
PRODUCTIVITY LOSS DRIVEN BY  
EMPLOYEE BEREAVEMENT AND GRIEF

EMPLOYER EDITION



Mitigate Revenue Loss and Improve Workforce Morale & Safety

# R. GLENN KELLY

*Award Winning Author, Speaker, Business Coach, and Bereaved Father*

# GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE

RECOVER HIDDEN REVENUE AND PRODUCTIVITY LOSS DRIVEN BY EMPLOYEE BEREAVEMENT AND GRIEF

A "Solutions-First" Leadership Coaching Edition

## Over \$100 Billion in Lost Revenue For American Businesses Each and Every Year!

NO ORGANIZATION IS TOO  
BIG OR TOO SMALL TO BE  
IMPACTED BY GRIEF!

- ✦ Over 4 million employees experience the death of a loved one every year
- ✦ 10% to 15% of working aged parents experience the death of a child each year
- ✦ Prime age of employee peak performance is also average age for parent experiencing child loss
- ✦ 90% of bereaved employees hurt on the job reported it was due to grief from the loss
- ✦ 85% of bereaved managers experience errors on the job for up to 6 months after Loss
- ✦ 62% of bereaved employees turn to other employees for support
- ✦ Only 3% to 7% of eligible employees will use an available Employee Assistance Program

### WHAT ARE THE DIRECT AND INDIRECT COSTS OF GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE?

Absenteeism	Worker's Comp
Accidents	General Liability
Injuries	Errors in Tasks
Hiring Costs	Low Production
Turnover Rates	Training Costs
Lost Customers	Poor Branding

When a valued employee has experienced the death of spouse, partner, or child, can the adverse influences of Grief in the Workplace be reduced or eliminated?

**YES!**

The compassionate yet proficient concepts found within this book provide proactive, reactive, and initiative based methodologies for managing your grieving employees. Take it from a former business executive and bereaved father who now serves others as a



Keynote Speaker, Business Coach, and award winning author of several grief and bereavement healing books...*R. Glenn Kelly*

Includes Bonus Chapters Devoted To  
*Death of an Owner or Leader* ✦ *Death of a Co-Worker*  
*Accidental Death on the Job* ✦ *Workplace Violence*  
*Natural Disasters* ✦ *National Security Events (Terrorism)*



# GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE

RECOVER HIDDEN REVENUE AND  
PRODUCTIVITY LOSS DRIVEN BY  
EMPLOYEE BEREAVEMENT AND GRIEF

Copyright © 2019 by R. Glenn Kelly  
ISBN-10: 0-578-45498-X  
ISBN-13: 978-0-578-45498-6

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

The material in this publication cannot substitute for professional advice. Further, the author is not liable if the reader relied on the material and was financially damaged in some way. This book and the content provided herein are for educational purposes only. Every effort has been made to ensure that the content provided in this book is accurate and helpful for the reader at publishing time.

## DEDICATION

---

To Jonathan Taylor Kelly, in Memoriam.

In your light, I learn how to love.  
In your beauty, how to make poems.  
You dance inside my chest where no one sees you,  
but sometimes I do,  
and that sight becomes this art.

~ Rumi

## PREFACE

---

The sudden death of my sixteen-year-old son and only child devastated me personally and professionally. When a rare heart defect tragically took his life, I was serving as the Director of a mid-sized company with over thirteen-hundred employees, including nine senior managers who reported directly to me. Admittedly, my poor job performance impacted my employer for a time after the loss, but I had no idea then that grief, regardless of where it originated, can ripple across an entire organization.

Just one seemingly small example of grief's ripple actually started before my loss. Then, my mornings at work routinely included each senior manager stopping by my office at some early point. These visits were not mandatory but instead evolved over the years from "good morning" greetings as they walked by my open door. Soon, I came to rely on these impromptu stop-ins for the opportunity to discuss the upcoming day's needs with each manager. Yet, we also talked about life, home, and families over morning coffee, and gained a mutually respectful, trusting work relationship. While I was glad I never had to chase down or schedule frequent meetings with my department heads, such casual leadership might not be the chosen business model for every executive. From my standpoint, however, those informal meetings played a substantial part in the continual rise of profit and growth for the business.

Then, my son died and when I returned to work, those managers quit coming by my office in the mornings. Stop there and think. Wise leaders will understand the full impacts and want to read more about *Grief in the Workplace*.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

---

R. Glenn Kelly is first and foremost a bereaved father. After spending his early adult life in public service, he would spend almost two decades in executive leadership roles working with some of the largest defense contractors in the United States. Sadly, in June of 2013, he would lose his sixteen-year-old son and only child to a rare heart defect.

After the loss, R. Glenn would use study and research of grief and human emotions to begin his personal healing journey. As healing progressed, he returned to serving others by authoring his first of several published books, *Sometimes I Cry in The Shower: A Grieving Father's Journey to Wholeness and Healing*. Shortly after his award-winning book was published, R. Glenn would begin accepting numerous invitations to speak from national and international organizations that serve the bereavement support community.

As a rare male who publicly expressed his emotional pains of grief, R. Glenn's speaking engagements would quickly spread to universities, hospitals, and Fortune 500 companies. He has spoken about the impacts of grief on *CBS Television*, *Trinity Broadcast Network*, *New York Public Television*, as well as multiple radio programs, live webcasts, and recorded podcasts across the country.

R. Glenn has been a participating board member on the *Advisory Council at Le Bonheur Children's Hospital* in Memphis, Tennessee, where his dear, deceased child had lost his life. He has also served as an active National Board of Directors member for multiple large-scale bereavement support organizations,

including *The Bereaved Parents of the USA*, *The National Grief and Hope Coalition*, and *Cry for Me No More, Inc.*

As an article writer, R. Glenn has contributed to multiple bereavement support magazines, including the monthly periodical published by *The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors* (TAPS). As a large non-profit support organization, TAPS provides bereavement-related support for the surviving family members of our U.S. Military who have died. As a former Marine himself, R. Glenn is proud to assist TAPS with their mission of service to our military. He has also contributed to periodicals published by the *Centering Corporation*, which remains the largest distributor of grief support books and self-help materials.

As a successful business leader, R. Glenn had learned first-hand about the impacts of grief in the workplace when he returned to his job shortly after the loss of his child. Now, after speaking and presenting before thousands of other employed grievers who returned to work after a loss, R. Glenn serves the business community in recovering over \$100 Billion in lost annual revenue. In doing so, he also continues to support his brothers and sister in grief, as well as the bereavement support community at large.

Along with traveling to speak publicly and present workshops today, R. Glenn enjoys creating and recording bereavement support productions from his own studio. He faithfully considers a return to serving others as a true legacy left behind by his late son and personal hero, Jonathan Taylor Kelly.



# GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ~ HOW TO USE THIS BOOK .....	viii
---	------

### PART ONE

#### IMMEDIATE RESPONSES TO GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE

CHAPTER ONE ~ INITIAL EMPLOYEE BEREAVEMENT RESPONSE.....	1
CHAPTER TWO ~ PREPARING FOR THE RETURNING GRIEVER.....	21
CHAPTER THREE ~ THE GRIEVING EMPLOYEE'S RETURN.....	39
CHAPTER FOUR ~ DEATH AND TRAUMATIC EVENTS ON THE JOB.....	63

### PART TWO

#### COST OF GRIEF TO ORGANIZATIONS AND EMPLOYEES

CHAPTER FIVE ~ GRIEF COSTS TO ALL ORGANIZATIONS.....	91
CHAPTER SIX ~ GRIEF LOSS IN REVENUE AND PRODUCTIVITY.....	97
CHAPTER SEVEN ~ GRIEF IMPACTS ON THE EMPLOYEE .....	105
CHAPTER EIGHT ~ EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS .....	123
CHAPTER NINE ~ ACTIVE AND PASSIVE GRIEF SUPPORT .....	129

### PART THREE

#### EXPOUNDING ON GRIEF AND GRIEF EMOTIONS

CHAPTER TEN ~ DEFINING GRIEF, MOURNING, AND BEREAVEMENT .....	139
CHAPTER ELEVEN ~ THE EMOTIONS WITHIN GRIEF .....	145

## INTRODUCTION ~ HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

---

*Grief in the Workplace* is a “Solutions-First” leadership coaching publication that is provided in three parts. Part One consists of Chapter One through Chapter Four and affords the immediate guidance to an organizational leader who has current employee grief influences on the job. Right up front, these chapters present effective and successful leadership responses and actions that support the bereaved employee and the business. There is no need to skim through pages of *cause and effect* before coming to a solution for those with pressing grief issues. Once responses and actions are well in motion, however, the reader can, and should, move forward through the remainder of the book. Doing this, a wise leader will discover the preemptive means for reducing the potential adverse impacts of employee grief to the business in the future.

The proactive leader without a current grief difficulty might first skip forward to Part Two, consisting of Chapter Five through Chapter Nine. This is followed by Chapters Ten and Eleven in Part Three. Part Two contains the *cause and effect* chapters, and drills deeply into where over **\$100 billion in annual revenue is lost to businesses across the country**. Part Three of this book provides the reader with an awareness and understanding of what grief, mourning, and bereavement truly mean for the employee who has sadly lost a loved one. At the completion of Part Three, the reader can then return to study Part One with the knowledge of *cause and effect* already in hand. In doing so, the

responses and actions in Part One will be recognized as prudent and compassionate measures for use with the grieving employee.

Of course, the reader is always free to peruse this book in any order desired. The knowledge found in every chapter will provide a greater understanding of the need for more compassionate support for the organization's most valued assets. The efforts will have great returns for any business.

### **CONTEXT OF GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE**

The recommended guidance found in *Grief in the Workplace* is intended to assist the leadership of individual organizations in mitigating the collective hidden loss of over \$100 billion in annual revenue. The overall context of this book provides awareness, understanding, and supportive response actions for organizational leadership when an employee has experienced the unfortunate death of a loved one.

The reader should also be aware that other personal life-changing events can cause similar grief impacts on any employee in the workforce, regardless of position or title. An unwanted divorce or acute change in personal health are just two examples that can induce grief in any employee. Fortunately, the same responses practiced by progressive leadership for an employee's death of a loved one can also be highly effective with grief from other personal crises.

### **THE TARGETED READER**

*Grief in the Workplace* is specifically targeted at business owners, organizational principals, managing executives, human resource personnel, and front-line supervision. It is *not* intended

to be provided directly to employees or other business-related associates who are experiencing grief from a family death or personal crisis.

The business entities targeted in this publication include for-profit and non-profit organizations, federal, state, or local government agencies, as well as associations and civic groups. While the for-profit business model typically focuses on maximizing profits, all other organizational structures generally share the same goal of taking in revenue and minimizing costs. Therefore, the responsibilities of sound business stewardship fall equally on the leaders of every organizational framework.

An Organization is defined as *a unit of people that is structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals*. Throughout this book, the term *organization* is used frequently. Other related terms such as *business*, *company*, *agency*, and *entity* are also used and generally intended to be interchangeable in context with *organization*. Such terms as *employee*, *staff member*, *worker*, *co-worker*, and *associate* are also used interchangeably unless necessary for clarity.

Although *Grief in the Workplace* discusses the impacts from many possible emotional issues of a bereaved employee, there is no intent implied by the author that business leaders should become mental health professionals. However, grief will come to work, and those leaders charged with overseeing the bereaved employee should possess the awareness and understanding found in *Grief in the Workplace*. Doing so will not just mitigate the potential for productivity and revenue loss, but compassionately support the employee, as well as the community.

# CHAPTER ONE ~

## INITIAL EMPLOYEE BEREAVEMENT RESPONSE

---

### **EXAMPLE SCENARIO - EMPLOYEE BEREAVEMENT NOTIFICATION**

The night shift manager receives a telephone call at 6:30 in the morning from an obviously distraught employee who is due to work at 8:00 am that same day. The employee states that his wife had unexpectedly passed away during the night and he would need to miss work for at least a few days. Before abruptly hanging up the telephone, the employee expresses that he will call his manager later with more information.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL ACTION AND RESPONSE TO BEREAVEMENT NOTIFICATION**

Within this chapter, the following leadership response actions for a newly bereaved employee event will be provided in the following recommended sequence of actions:

1. Receive the Initial Bereavement Notification
2. Make Immediate Upward Reporting as Required
3. Notify Production Management of Employee Absence
4. Initiate Bereavement Action Plan and In-House POC
5. Conduct Admin Contact with the Bereaved Employee
6. Enact Close Peer as Bereaved Employee Liaison
7. Senior Leadership Contact with the Bereaved Employee
8. Provide Bereavement Support During Initial Funeral Rites
9. Represent the Organization at Funerary Services
10. Follow Up with the Bereaved Employee After the Services

## **CHAPTER CORRELATIONS**

Whether a small business concern with 20 employees, a mid-sized government agency with 200, or a large corporation with 20,000 or more, the following bereavement response actions remain applicable for each organization type. Any adjustments in assigned personnel can be made based on company-unique models of management and administration.

### **RESPONSE OF THE ORGANIZATION**

#### **1. Receive the Initial Bereavement Notification (*Day One*):**

Immediately following the death of a family member, it is not surprising for a newly bereaved employee to call the organization and make notification to any available leader within the perceived chain of command. The employee may only inform the leader that a family member has died and there is an immediate need for absence from work. Senior leadership should allow for leniency here, and refrain from acting on any disciplinary actions for violations of established policies related to call off notifications.

It is not implied that all newly bereaved employees will make hurried telephone calls or violate notification policies. Most will be in compliance with proper procedures. However, the intent of this section is to prepare leaders with responses actions to bereavement behaviors which are not uncommon in early grief.

Typically, the newly bereaved employee can experience some level of mental shock for a brief period following the loss, and the mind is unfocused. With this, the concerns for company rules, regulations, and policies take a back seat. However, even the mind in shock generally recognizes a responsibility to inform

the employer that something has happened. The responsibility needs to be acted on, even though the griever has yet to mentally come to terms with the event. This can result in the initial expedited contact with the organization. Commonly, the conversation can be as succinct as, "I've had a death in the family and won't be in today. Please let my boss know that I'll call back as soon as I know more." To the newly bereaved, this initial call can satisfy the responsibility of notification, even if in violation of company policy.

An organizational leader should also consider the employee's personal and professional dignity, or pride when the initial bereavement notification is received. The griever can often be outwardly overwhelmed with painful emotions and not desire to display those emotions to anyone at work, including over the telephone. A very brief and concise conversation will allow the griever to state all that seems required before the emotions can become externally obvious to others.

Regardless of how the bereavement notification is received, it is not recommended for other company leadership to immediately attempt contact with the newly grieved employee. Within just a brief period, the emotional shock will begin to lift, albeit only slightly. This could be later during the same day as the loss event or the day after. Regardless, as this occurs, the employee will begin to mentally emerge from the initial shock and recognize other responsibilities in life. At that point, the grieving employee will usually make more appropriate notification with the organization and request allowable provisions for time off from work.

Understanding the mindset of the newly bereaved will go a long way in maintaining the morale and welfare within an organization. Consider leniency if the grieving employee goes outside of established policy when making initial notification of the bereavement event.

**2. Make Immediate Upward Reporting as Required (Day One):** Again, not all newly bereaved employees will violate policy when notifying leaders of a loss event. However, when the initial contact is improperly made through co-workers or lower level supervision, *it is imperative that upward reporting must be made without delay.*

Whenever improper personnel receive the initial notification of an employee's bereavement, it is imperative that all received information be fully conveyed in upward reporting. There is a time in the near future when appropriate personnel should attempt telephone contact with the bereaved employee. When doing so, it is helpful for the caller to have all relevant and available knowledge that was initially provided by the griever.

Ensuring that all employees are aware that prompt upward reporting of a worker's bereavement notification not only protects the company but the grieving employee, as well. Senior leaders and human resource personnel are better aware of any immediate allowances or resources that may be available to the bereaved. Some of those allowances may be delayed when upward reporting is not proper and immediate.

**3. Notify Production Management of Employee Absence (Day One):** When notification of an employee's bereavement event is reported to appropriate organizational authorities, the



next immediate action by that authority should be informing the affected production leaders of the employee's anticipated absence.

As will be discussed in the next sections of this chapter, it is not recommended for the organization to attempt contact with the newly bereaved employee on day one of the event. While seemingly indirect actions for the employee are taking place in these initial sections, an organization must also focus on continued productivity. Most business enterprises hold a custodial responsibility to other concerns, such as the remaining staff, clients, suppliers, and ancillary business parties. Responding to production needs does not take away from the compassionate care of the suffering employee at this time.

Regardless of job function, the unscheduled absence of even one employee can negatively impact overall business proficiency. An absent employee will most likely be a missing resource in most business models. In many enterprises, even one missing worker can require workforce reassignments or other temporary modifications to maintain desired levels of workflow. Prompt reporting of the bereavement event allows those leaders in control of production to mitigate the risks of missing staff members.

**4. Initiate Bereavement Action Plan and In-House POC (Day One):** The newly bereaved employee is often emotionally separated from the job in the initial phase of profound loss. This is particularly typical on the very day a family member has died. There is nothing better an employer can do directly for the grieving worker on that day than initiating or creating the

organization's Bereavement Action Plan.

A Bereavement Action Plan is the written prearrangement of the various responses and actions taken within an organization in support of any newly bereaved employee. The plan also ensures that continued productivity and safety goals are met during the absence, as well as the return, of the grieved worker. The developed plan is to be activated after the initial notification of an employee's bereavement event and carries well beyond the griever's return to work.

It would be sound business stewardship for an organization to develop and use a Bereavement Action Plan for whenever an employee has experienced the death of a loved one. While every loss event will be unique, an established plan provides a base protocol of actions that are both considerate to the business, as well as compassionate to the affected employee. The plan should also be developed for use with any level of employment position within the organization, from senior executives to front-line staff members.

The broad numbers of differing business models prohibit the inclusion of any pre-formatted Bereavement Action Plan in this book. However, each response action topic within this chapter can be considered as a recommended inclusion in many individual designs. To that end, an organizational leader can quickly and capably develop a company-specific plan by utilizing the knowledge found within *Grief in the Workplace*. However, the provided topics in this chapter should be considered as minimum actions taken to support the organization and the grieved employee.

Multiple persons within an organization can assume roles within the Bereavement Action Plan. However, it is recommended that only a single member serves as the Point of Contact (POC). The POC should be a member of senior administration or a ranking representative from within the human resources section of the organization. However, the appointed POC should be proficient in company-specific operations, employee policy, and employment law. If that is not possible, then the POC should have direct access to other members who can provide guidance where any weakness is found in specific knowledge.

While the POC may also perform specific tasks within the Bereavement Action Plan, that member will primarily be considered as the central coordinator. The POC will ensure all action items within the plan are delegated to appropriate personnel while monitoring progress and recording completion of each task. This eliminates redundancy in organizations with multiple levels of management and ensures all support is provided to the bereaved employee. It also allows confidence that each response action takes place in the proper sequence, as correct timing can be of further support to the bereaved employee and the organization.

Once composed, the Bereavement Action Plan should be maintained by those who oversee human resources for the organization, or senior levels of management. To maintain on-going effectiveness, the plan can always be modified in the future, based on constructive lessons learned from previous bereavement events.

### **5. Conduct Admin Contact with the Bereaved Employee**

*(Day Two):* When an employee has made initial notification of the immediate death of a loved one, it is typically not necessary for any members of the organization to attempt returning contact with the griever on that same day. This is irrespective of whether the employee's initial notification to the organization was or was not within established company guidelines. Further, front-line and senior leaders who only wish to relay condolences should refrain from early contact, as well.

Regardless of position or time on board with an organization, employees often mentally separate personal and professional lives. Whether right or wrong, the cultures within many organizations continue to encourage this division today. Regardless, the loss of a loved one is solely personal, and in the initial phase of grief, there may only be vague considerations for the professional life. Instead, the early griever may only desire consolation through family and community. By human nature, therefore, peers, subordinates, and supervisors from work generally do not fit into the personal support dynamic of the home life. However, the proper time will come when contact may be made by supportive supervisors and colleagues.

As expressed earlier in this chapter, the emotionally clouded mind of the newly bereaved employee will usually begin to lift within a short period of time, albeit only marginally. As this happens, the griever should begin to recognize other personal and professional responsibilities outside of the loss. As a result, the newly bereaved employee will typically attempt more detailed and appropriate contact with the organization no later than the day following the loss.

Of importance, the bereaved employee's mental separation of personal and professional life can go beyond the second day. Of course, this will depend on the level of emotional trauma resulting from the death of the worker's loved one. However, it is highly recommended that an appropriate member of the organization make follow up contact with the bereaved employee no later than the close of business on day two. This is suggested even if the employee had made proper notification on day one. While this may primarily be a morale and welfare call, every business has the obligation to maintain efficient levels of production, even during unscheduled absences. Without reasonably prompt communication between the organization and the bereaved employee, it may be difficult to anticipate adjustments to assignments, schedules, and tasks.

The organization also has a responsibility to a grieving employee. The insecurity that results from the loss of a loved one, especially a spouse, life-partner or child, can bring fear and unsureness about the future. A properly timed and tactful follow-up call from an employer on day two, with condolences and assurance of job stability, can ease some of the anxieties within the griever's mind.

Preferably, the initial admin contact with the grieving employee should be made by the appropriate member designated within the Bereavement Action Plan. This would typically be a human resource superior or a senior member of the company who is routinely in direct oversight of the grieving employee. On contacting the employee by telephone, the designee should compassionately relay the following matters:

- Convey condolences on behalf of the organization for the employee's loss
- Confirm basic facts required for any bereavement leave allowance
- Express that the employee is a valued member of the organization
- Confirm that all elements of company policy in reference to bereavement leave are understood, including allowances for paid and/or unpaid time off
- Obtain anticipation for employee's return date to work
- Inquire of any sensitive tasks or unfinished projects by the bereaved employee that may require immediate attention
- Advise the employee of the potential for continued contact for work-related questions or notifications
- Provide company POC contact information for any employment-related questions while on bereavement leave
- Briefly inform the bereaved employee of any company-sponsored grief support – do not urge or mandate participation, or give great detail unless requested during early grief
- Request permission to share minimal information of the family death event with other members within the organization

If allowed, sharing information about the loss within the organization can actually be emotionally beneficial for a bereaved employee. It can greatly reduce the number of times the griever must repeat details of such a profound event to

inquiring co-workers after returning from bereavement leave. The events surrounding the death of a loved one can be emotionally troublesome, and retelling the story multiple times can affect a griever's healing processes.

It is also suggested that telephone calls by company representatives be the preferred method of contact with the bereaved employee during the early stage. As stated earlier, a newly bereaved employee will often mentally separate personal life from work life in the mind. Although a well-wishing company leader may feel an urge to personally visit immediately with a troubled team member at home, the more intimate comforts during early grief are best left to family and community.

**6. Enact Close Peer as Bereaved Employee Liaison** (*Day Two*): It would be extremely helpful for an organization to identify a workplace peer who had previously developed a close work relationship with the newly bereaved employee. Strong relationships between colleagues are not unusual, as many employees spend more awake time with co-workers than they do with family members at home. Close bonds often develop at work, although interaction may not extend beyond the job.

The identified peer can serve as a valuable liaison between the organization and the newly bereaved employee in the intermediate days following the loss event. The peer will be not be used to execute or relay administrative information. Instead, the peer will gather information from the grieving employee that the organization might use to provide additional compassionate support.

Many newly bereaved employees who experience the death

of a spouse, life-partner, or child will request extensive but reasonable time away from the job. Having a peer to peer conduit that originates from within will allow better support for both the bereaved employee and the organization.

**7. Senior Leadership Contact with the Bereaved Employee (Day Two):** A member of upper leadership within an organization should conduct an independent follow up call with any newly bereaved employee. This contact should take place before the close of business on day two of a loss event. Upper leadership should be considered as an owner, senior executive, or the highest available member deemed to represent the organization as a whole.

Separate from the admin contact detailed in Section 5. of this chapter, the leadership call can further impress upon a grieving employee that support is truly company-wide. Regrettably, many front-line and mid-level staffers do not expect that senior members hold a consideration for the personal lives of employees. Therefore, a “condolence call” from an upper leader can provide a great deal of emotional support to any newly bereaved worker.

A senior leader call can also reduce the overall number of bereavement leave days taken by an affected employee. This is because early grief tends to unconsciously urge a griever to seek only those environments that are emotionally “safe.” Accordingly, a grieving employee is more apt to desire a sooner return to work when senior members give the perception that the workplace is safe, compassionate and supportive.

Contact with a bereaved employee by a senior leader should



be sympathetic but brief. An early griever may be engaged in multiple loss related issues, as well as overwhelmed with painful emotions. The leader should give condolences on behalf of self and the company, and express the value the employee holds within the organization. The employee should also be encouraged to focus the immediate time on the needs of self and surviving family members.

If the bereaved employee presents questions on company policy surrounding the loss, the senior leader should defer those inquiries to proper administrative personnel. While organizational leaders can often be the creator of internal policy, there are frequent changes to governmental employment laws. Therefore, it is always best to rely on the personnel tasked with remaining up-to-date with all legal issues. The senior leader should tactfully advise the grieving employee to expect a return call from a specific member or department with answers to any administrative questions.

The call should be closed with a confirmation that the bereaved employee has the correct contact information for company support that may be needed during the absence. This brief, but highly compassionate contact from a respected leader of an organization can go a long way in the healthy grief healing processes of the newly bereaved.

## **8. Provide Bereavement Support During Initial Funeral Rites**

*(Day Three +)*: It is recommended that the employing organization utilize the identified *Close Peer* or other designee from the Bereavement Action Plan to arrange some home support for the grieving employee by day three of the loss. This may initially consist of food and beverages for the employee and surviving family members in the home. However, other expendable items, such as facial tissue, trash bags, paper plates, and similar products can be helpful, as well. The newly bereaved family is often visited at home by other extended family members, friends, and clergy during this early period. Providing these frequently used household supplies can be a great support and allow the family to concentrate on the loss.

It can often be a week or longer between the death and the final interment of the deceased in most burial arrangements. During this initial period, there may be private gatherings or ceremonies with family and close friends. The organization should strongly consider catering such early events, as well as any Wake or Reception held as part of the final interment.

Except in the more extreme cases, funerary arrangements for the deceased are usually made by day three after the loss. To gather details of rites and ceremonies, it is recommended to use the Bereavement Action Plan designee for contacting the bereaved employee for information, as well as conducting follow up actions in this section. As an aside, this direct contact with an offer of support and participation typically provides the newly bereaved employee with a renewed connection to the organization.

The minimum information sought in organizational contact would be the location names, addresses, and times for open, formal funeral ceremonies. Flowers for any viewing or funerary service should be sent in a timely manner unless the bereaved employee expresses charitable donations or other wishes in lieu of flowers. Optimally, the organizational member making contact will tactfully request as much detail for all events as possible.

Arranging funeral services and accommodating guests can be difficult for the bereaved employee. Accomplishing these tasks while simultaneously experiencing the painful feelings of grief can make the entire experience emotionally and physically overwhelming. It should not be assumed by a compassionate organization that all help will come from family and community. There cannot be enough help and support when someone has experienced the death of a loved one.

### **9. Represent the Organization at Funerary Services**

*(Scheduled Day of Events):* It is strongly recommended that the most senior member(s) available from within an organization attend open, formal ceremonies for the employee's deceased family member. Leadership should personally approach and convey condolences on behalf of the company when attending, and avoid discussions of any job-related issues. If the bereaved employee does speak of work-related matters, the leader should guide the conversation toward the employee's continued value to the organization. The griever should also be encouraged to focus on personal matters for the time.

It is not always necessary or prudent that company leadership speaks directly with the bereaved employee when attending

services. Frequently, the griever can be emotionally overcome and surrounded by family members, which makes interruption inappropriate. Other times, the on-going activities and rites within the ceremonies may occupy the employee's time. In bereavement support, however, observed presence will mean more than spoken words. The visual recognition of leadership by the bereaved employee can be as emotionally beneficial as any handshake or verbal condolence.

Depending on the religious family views of the deceased, funeral rite ceremonies will vary greatly. Christian religions may hold a Traditional Service, a Memorial Service, or a Celebration of Life Service. Non-Christian and other world faiths must be considered, as well. Each type of service can hold numerous public or private end-of-life events. Those senior business leaders who anticipate attending a funerary event will need to establish the type of service and attendance restrictions, as well as any associated etiquette in advance of the event.

Regardless of funerary type, organizational leaders should understand and maintain proper decorum in attendance. Gathering events, such as a Viewing or Reception, often do not require attendees to remain for the duration of the event. Leaders who attend such events should convey condolences verbally, or through visual recognition, if the grieving employee is inaccessible. Afterward, leaders can remain only for the reasonable time respectful for the event. During the formal church or funerary services, the attendee should arrive before the event begins and remain throughout the service.

A strong organization can be emotionally helpful for a

bereaved employee in the early days of loss. Funeral Service attendance, at a minimum, by leadership members will not only show care and compassion but may also help reconnect the self-identity of the employee. As a result, the grieving employee may progress more healthfully into the grief healing processes and be better prepared to return to work after the loss.

**10. Follow Up with the Bereaved Employee After the Services** (*Throughout the Extended Absence of Employee*): The organization should maintain regular contact with the newly bereaved employee throughout the bereavement leave period. This is both soundly responsible for the company's interests, as well as compassionate toward the affected employee.

The frequency of such contact between the bereaved employee and the employer should be no farther apart than every two business days. However, based on the length of anticipated absence, the frequency can be adjusted. Speaking by telephone is the preferable method of contact, while email or other written text messages should only be used if necessary. Employers are cautioned to avoid directing an employee on bereavement leave to visit the workplace for checking in, as doing so may violate employment laws or bargaining agreements.

It is suggested that the bereaved employee is to be required to initiate each follow-up call at a specific time of day with an appropriate organization member. Requiring the griever to initiate the call can be helpful for the employee's mental transition back into the workforce. The employee has typically been focused exclusively on personal matters while away. A

mental gap can form between work and home during this time, and regular contact with the organization will help reconnect the griever's personal and professional lives.

Beyond compassionate care, an organization also has the responsibility to maintain constant contact with the bereaved employee to coordinate the ultimate date for a return to work. Adjustments in staffing or work assignments are commonly needed when there is a gap in the required workforce. In the traumatic death of a family member, such as a spouse, life-partner or child, it is not unusual for an employee to require an absence of up to two weeks or longer. This, of course, is at the discretion of the employer. However, the griever's ultimate return to work date may need to remain flexible in the more profound losses.

After the traumatic death of a loved one, the amount of time spent away from the job greatly impacts both the bereaved employee and the employing entity. Wise leadership understands that compassion for the employee must be tempered with strong stewardship of the business. Supporting the bereaved employee in the initial stages of loss takes minimal expenditures of company time and resources. The efforts, however, return many rewards to the organization.

On a final note in this section, the compassionate leader might be seeking an answer to when any available grief support should be offered to the newly bereaved employee. It is recommended to avoid the offer while the employee is away on bereavement leave. As will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, many of the newly bereaved are not emotionally prepared to consider outside

support in the immediate days following a loss. It is recommended that early in the grief period the employee is simply told that grief support is available, and unless requested sooner, will be offered in detail on the completion of bereavement leave.





## CHAPTER TWO ~

### PREPARING FOR THE RETURNING GRIEVER

---

#### **EXAMPLE SCENARIO - BEREAVED EMPLOYEE'S WORKPLACE ABSENCE**

A team member on a major project named Laura had telephoned her Human Resource Manager and reported the unexpected death of her spouse. She was granted bereavement leave over the phone and was not required to come to the workplace. The production manager was notified of the event but found no reason to immediately disrupt operations by telling the other team members of the sad news. Because of a delay in notification, false rumors and assumptions for Laura's absence began to spread through the team. Over time, the group spent more time on gossip than on the project tasks.

There would be another drop in production when the team was eventually briefed by management. It was obvious that answering the many questions that came from Laura's teammates took up valuable work time. *What happened? How is Laura doing? Should we call her? Can we attend the funeral? How are we going to finish the project on time?* Those questions and many more would take over two hours of additional time for management to satisfy the concerns of the project team. As the result of a manager's delayed notification of Laura's loss, a very important milestone was missed in the timeline for the major project.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL ACTION FOR PREPARING THE WORKPLACE**

The recommended actions of an organization preparing the workplace during the bereavement leave absence of an affected employee will be provided for consideration in this chapter. These actions are:

1. Notify appropriate leadership and reassign immediate tasks of the bereaved employee
2. Notify peers, and subordinates of the employee's bereavement event
3. Offer workplace grief support to all employees
4. Identify hazardous or sensitive tasks to be reassigned temporarily on return of the bereaved employee
5. Provide coaching to supervisory personnel for managing the bereaved employee on return
6. Provide coaching to teammates and close co-workers for interacting with the bereaved employee

### **CHAPTER CORRELATIONS**

Whether it is a business owner, a front-line supervisor, or a recently employed worker, a death in the immediate family of any organizational member will have some level of impact on the workplace. While initial concerns after an employee's bereavement event may focus on adjustments in workforce and assignments, personal grief emotions and professional anxieties can exist throughout the remaining staff.

Workplace relationships can form quickly on the job. Co-workers learn to respect and rely on teammates, and subordinates on the job can oftentimes hold a mentor-protégé

opinion of a supervisor. In like manner, it is not unusual for employees to consider a business leader, such as an Owner or Chief Executive Officer, to hold some level of control on the employee's future. As a result, life-changing events, such as the death of a loved one, can have negative influences in the workplace far beyond the bereaved employee.

In the initial days following a family member's death, the newly bereaved employee is typically isolated to the sensitive personal matters of the loss. This early period is when leadership should focus on operational modifications and preparing the workforce. Doing so will not only mitigate any significant loss of productivity during the absence but as well as beyond the ultimate return of the bereaved employee.

### **RESPONSE ACTIONS OF THE ORGANIZATION**

**1. Notify Appropriate Leadership and Reassign Immediate Tasks of the Bereaved Employee (*Day One*):** Upward notification within the organization must be made promptly and orderly after receiving the initial bereavement notice from an affected employee. Optimally, the organization will have already developed and had a Bereavement Action Plan in place that designates an appropriate member to serve as the plan Point of Contact (POC). Preferably, this would be a Human Resource lead or another ranking member who holds oversight of company-wide personnel.

Any organizational member who receives an initial report of bereavement from an affected employee must promptly report that event to the Bereavement Action Plan POC. The POC will then make immediate notification to members of senior

leadership, as well as appropriate front-line management or supervision. This notification will allow those who oversee production to make prompt adjustments to the workforce or to reassign the tasks of the absent employee.

**2. Notify Peers, and Subordinates of Employee's Bereavement** (*Day One*): It is always recommended that organizational leadership promptly notify the workforce whenever an employee has experienced a bereavement event and is away from the workplace. Preferably, this notification should be made in person, either in group gatherings or in one-on-one discussions that are led by an appropriate member of leadership.

Organizational leaders should immediately provide the workforce with the minimum information that a co-worker has experienced a loss. Further, the staff should be informed that more information may be provided when received but only with permission of the grieving co-worker. Teammates and close peers should also be directed to refrain from attempting direct contact with the bereaved colleague for the immediate future.

When it comes to an employer sharing more sensitive details of an employee's loss, it should be recognized that emotional grief is unique to any respective griever. One newly bereaved employee may feel the death of a family member is too emotionally painful and personal to share with those at the workplace. Another grieving employee may feel it appropriate to allow detailed information to be shared with anyone on the job. Some may only desire limited or specific information to be made available to others.

The organization's decision to ultimately release more sensitive details of a loss should only be considered with the consent of the newly bereaved employee. However, sharing greater details can be incredibly beneficial to both the organization and the grieving employee. It can prevent those caring but uninformed co-workers from attempting contact with the grieving employee at inappropriate times. So too, can it eliminate rumor and conjecture among the staff that often leads to time-consuming gossip sessions.

Any detail of the loss that can be shared with the staff may also aid the bereaved employee on the eventual return to work. Typically, teammates with limited knowledge of the loss will frequently approach a returning griever to ask, "What happened?" This repeated question will result in the suffering employee being pressed into recounting the painful narrative of the loss far too many times. While ignoring the emotions of grief is unhealthy for the bereaved, the workplace is typically not the proper environment to relive the painful loss.

The recommendation for sharing more detailed information about a loss event is also relevant when the bereaved member is an owner or executive leader within an organization. Many front-line and even some mid-level employees consider the personal lives of senior leadership to be out-of-bounds. This is not out of contempt or mistrust for the upper position. Instead, there typically exists a non-fraternization mentality between senior, mid, and lower level employees. However, workforce concerns for company or employment stability can still arise when a leader experiences a personal crisis and the details are

left to rumor and second-hand knowledge.

Organizational leadership may also want to consider notification of a bereavement event to any direct clients or outside business affiliates that are served directly by a newly bereaved employee. This notification would be on a case by case consideration and based on the sensitivity of the association. The established bond between an employee and a client, for example, can often be the binding link between the client and the organization. Further, the employee-client bond is often developed through the sharing of personal information, such as discussing family members and other interests outside of work. Because of this quasi-personal connection, the client may feel unappreciated by the organization if not notified of the employee's loss in a timely manner.

It is worth repeating that the amount of information relating to an employee's loss that can be shared by the organization should always be held to the wishes of the bereaved employee. Leadership would also do well to review any considerations under the HIPAA Act (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), as well. Regardless, it remains beneficial to both the bereaved employee and the entire organization to inform colleagues, and possibly outside associates, of an employee's bereavement event.

**3. Offer Workplace Grief Support to All Organization Employees (Day Two+):** It is recommended that employers offer formal grief support for all members within the organization whenever an employee has recently experienced the death of a family member.

At a minimum, the offer of workforce grief support should be extended to any supervisors, peers, and subordinates who are closely associated with the bereaved employee. The Bereavement Action Plan POC, or specific designee, can contact an outside grief counselor, local grief peer support specialist, or a contracted Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider to accomplish this support. The grief support should only be casually mentioned to the staff during the initial notification of the loss event but be more formally extended during the following days. These additional days allows more time for all employees to process their own emotional reactions for the co-worker's loss.

Today, many employees spend more awake time with workers on the job than with family members at home. Because of this, it is not uncommon for the development of professional and personal relationships. Even when those connections do not carry beyond the workplace, colleagues often develop levels of mutual respect and concern. This can include formal and informal mentorships when one experienced employee has taken a role in developing another. Another example is a teammate who holds a level of regard for another when the accomplishments of one directly correlate to the success of the other.

Professional and personal relationships on the job can bring sympathetic care and concern for a co-worker in crisis. The death of one employee's spouse, life-partner or child can often create adverse influences in others. In some instances, a co-worker may become debilitated with sympathetic emotions for a

teammate who is grieving a loss. These sympathetic emotions may not be as severe as those experienced by the bereaved employee but on some levels can still mentally and physically impair the caring co-worker.

Other extended staff members throughout the organization can be indirectly influenced by the loss of an employee's loved one. The workplace is often considered as a safe and emotionally secure environment, and death is not a comforting thought. Mortality is a very sensitive and difficult concept for many people to willfully consider. It forcefully presents the reminder that death can happen to anyone at any time. When a death event invades the comforting environments of the workplace, it can emotionally impact even those employees who usually do not interact with the affected employee.

Compassionate leadership must consider seeking out company-wide bereavement support whenever an employee has experienced the death of an immediate family member. The negative influences resulting from the loss are rarely isolated to the bereaved employee either at home or at work. What is often thought of as one unfortunate employee's grief can have adverse production and morale impacts across the entire organization.

**4. Identify Hazardous or Sensitive Tasks to be Reassigned Temporarily Upon Return of the Bereaved Employee** (*Day Two +*): While a newly bereaved employee is away on bereavement leave, it is recommended that senior members and operational leaders in the organization evaluate all tasks previously performed by the employee. Those tasks identified as hazardous or sensitive should not immediately be reassigned to



the grieving employee on return to work.

As is detailed in a later chapter of this book, the ability to consistently focus mental capabilities can typically be impaired to some degree in the newly bereaved. The required task-specific thought processes of the early griever can frequently be overridden by waves of emotions that present at unpredictable times. This includes while the griever is on the job. Grief from loss can also have a negative effect on the griever's physical health, as well. With the potential for mental and physical impairments, there is an increased possibility of workplace accidents, injuries, or administrative errors caused by the suffering employee. Any impairment can result in harm to self, co-workers, and the organization.

It is suggested that an employee who is returning to work after the death of an immediate family member be temporarily removed from all hazardous or sensitive tasks for at least the first week. This is crucial even when the affected employee appears to be fully prepared to return to full duty. Typically, newly bereaved employees are unprepared for the intensity and frequency of emotional waves early in grief. Getting a handle on those emotions at home is not the same as keeping a handle on those emotions outside the home. It is not uncommon for a grieved employee to feel confident and capable on day one of return, only to quickly be surprised and overwhelmed with grief emotions while on the job.

Any leadership decisions for the temporary reassignment of hazardous or sensitive tasks should first concentrate on the determination of physical and financial risk to the organization.

More difficult, however, is the length of time required for temporary reassignments. Determining the appropriate length of time should be based largely on supervisory observations of the grieved employee. These observations should be conducted by front-line leaders who are closely familiar with the pre-loss performance of the griever. The bereaved employee can be granted full return to hazardous or sensitive tasks only after the observer has determined performance will be at acceptable levels for the task.

The temporary reassignment of high-risk or sensitive tasks is nothing short of sound stewardship for an organization. While some leaders wonder if this could be considered an insult to an already suffering employee, it should not be considered as such. The short-term removal of mentally intense or dangerous assignments can be very beneficial to the emotional healing processes of the griever. It also supports the safety of all members of the workplace, as well as the overall wellbeing of the organization.

**5. Provide Coaching to Supervisory Personnel for Managing the Bereaved Employee Upon Return (*Day Two +*):** No member of an organization's leadership is expected to be a certified grief counselor. However, it is highly recommended that those responsible for daily oversight of employees be coached in recognizing, responding to, and reducing the negative influences of grief in the workplace.

In a forward-thinking enterprise, the leadership coaching for managing the grieved employee should be accomplished proactively while no current bereavement event is impacting the

workplace. If not proactive, and a bereavement event is present, coaching should be accomplished before the grieving employee returns from bereavement leave. This coaching can be conducted by senior leadership or by human resource department personnel who have become familiar with the awareness and understanding provided in *Grief in the Workplace*.

A newly bereaved employee who is returning to work after the death of a family member will likely be influenced mentally and physically with the many negative emotions that resulted from the loss. While each grieved employee will be unique in the intensity of that influence, there exist many behavioral responses caused by grief emotions that are easily recognizable by an observant leader. Responses to these behaviors can either be lessened in intensity through proper support or further exasperated by casual or uncaring concern on the part of a leader.

Front-line management can often hold tremendous potential for both positive and negative influences on the emotional healing processes of a newly bereaved employee. For some grievers, this influence at work may be equal to, or even greater than the influences of family, friends, and community relationships. This is because a profession can often become a substantial facet in the self-identity of many people.

To provide the positive influences for the newly bereaved employee, all leadership personnel, from team leaders and front-line management to the most senior members, should be provided with the following coaching points:

**LEADERSHIP COACHING POINTS – MANAGING THE NEWLY  
BEREAVED EMPLOYEE IN THE WORKPLACE**

- First and foremost, understand that the grieving employee will not “*Just get over*” the death of a loved one
- Avoid “Tough Love” leadership approaches, such as:
  - Being at work is what you need right now
  - You’ll work through this
  - If anyone can handle this, it’s you
- Establish a business-as-usual workplace environment, regardless of any temporary reassignments
- Do not avoid normal supervision or interaction with the bereaved employee
- Be observant of performance levels to safeguard the organization, but do not micromanage the griever
- If the workflow allows, establish a buddy system between the affected employee and a co-worker or teammate for the first few days of return
- Listen willfully if the bereaved employee wishes to talk about the loss - LISTEN more than SPEAK
- Express condolences with the grieving worker when appropriate - use only phrases, such as:
  - I am sorry for your loss
  - We are all thinking of you
  - I cannot imagine what you must be feeling
- Avoid clichéd phrases, such as:
  - They are in a better place now
  - Time heals all wounds
  - Maybe it was for the best
  - It was God’s will
- Expect reduced levels of mental acuity, physical stamina, motivation, and creativity in the newly bereaved employee

- Remain flexible with the grieving worker's assignments, including those that are not considered sensitive or hazardous
- Reduce outside influences for the affected employee, such as non-essential members from other departments or unnecessary client visits to the work area
- Be especially observant for lethargy in the newly bereaved employee, such as gazing long-term into the distance and being inattentive to the task at hand
- Tactfully suggest moments away from the workstation when observations of the grieving employee warrant
- Allow time for the bereaved worker to take a walk or allow additional requests for break times whenever requested
- Arrange a private area in the workplace when the emotions of any affected employee become overwhelming
- Allow requests by the new griever for additional days off if requested and production deadlines allow
- Anticipate some unscheduled sick leave call-offs from work by the newly bereaved employee
- Develop backup and adjustable workforce plans for future unscheduled absences of the grieved worker
- Be observant to co-worker interaction for those who may both overwhelm the grieved employee, or purposely avoid contact altogether
- Be alert for negative impacts that may appear over time in the bereaved employee, such as:
  - Unusually poor grooming
  - Indications of substance or alcohol abuse
  - Withdrawal from co-workers
  - Other obvious changes in normal behaviors

- Tactfully repeat the availability of any formal grief support sponsored by the organization to the grieved employee
  - Expect these offers to be dismissed in the early phases of grief

### **COACHING POINT ASSERTIONS**

The coaching points provided in this section are not intended to replace any mental health support offered by an organization or sought by a bereaved employee. However, it bears repeating that front-line supervision can have a tremendous influence on a newly bereaved employee who is returning to the workplace after a loss event. Coincidentally, there is little to no cost to an organization when these proven coaching points are put into practice. Any moderate costs may come in the possible form of short-term adjustments in workforce members or perhaps the momentary time needed by an emotionally overcome employee to seek privacy.

**6. Provide Coaching to Teammates and Close Co-workers for Interacting with Bereaved Employee** (*Day Two +*): An organization's leadership should coach employees in the supportive interaction with a newly bereaved employee who will be returning to the workplace. This guidance training can be conducted by administrative personnel or front-line supervision in either group or one-on-one sessions. Optimally, the guidance would be developed as a written training program to be used company-wide. The elements of recommended coaching elements are as follows:

### **TEAMMATE AND CO-WORKER COACHING ELEMENTS FOR INTERACTING WITH A NEWLY BEREAVED EMPLOYEE**

- First and foremost, understand that the grieving employee will not “*just get over*” the death of a loved one
- Avoid “Tough Love” encouragements, such as:
  - Being at work is what you need right now
  - You’ll work through this
  - If anyone can handle this, it’s you
- Maintain a business-as-usual atmosphere with the griever
- Do not avoid a newly bereaved co-worker, as It *will* be noticed and unappreciated by the griever, and may impair workflow
- Do not overwhelm a grieved worker with condolences, as too much attention can be interpreted as pity
- Acknowledge the bereaved employee’s loss and express condolences when appropriate, using such phrases as:
  - I am sorry for your loss
  - We are all thinking of you
  - My condolences to the family
  - There are no words that will help
- Do not use phrases directed at the bereaved employee’s well-being, such as:
  - How are you doing?
  - How will you ever get through this?
  - I don’t know how you can do this
- Avoid making clichéd phrases to the grieved employee, such as:
  - I know how you feel
  - They are in a better place now
  - Time heals all wounds
  - You are never given more than you can handle

- It was God's will
- Keep away from questions that force a newly bereaved employee to frequently relive the loss event, such as:
  - What happened?
  - Could it have been avoided?
- Do not give open-ended offers of help, such as:
  - Tell me what I can do
  - You know I am here if you need anything
  - Do not hesitate to call me
- Listen willfully if a bereaved employee wishes to speak of the loss - LISTEN more than SPEAK
- Leave sympathy cards or notes for a grieving employee in private areas only
- Avoid sharing personal grief experience with a newly bereaved employee, such as:
  - I also hurt badly when I lost my uncle last year
  - My brother lost his wife and it affected us all
  - I lost my pet and he was like a member of the family
- Avoid sharing personal grief experiences even if similar to the loss event of a newly bereaved employee
- Remember that even when a newly bereaved co-worker appears all right, that is probably not the case
- Remain observant for dangerous or harmful behavior exhibited by the newly bereaved employee, and report observations to supervision

### **FINAL CHAPTER DECLARATIONS**

The importance of providing teammate and co-worker guidance for appropriate interaction with a newly bereaved employee



cannot be overstated. As indicated earlier in this publication, many of today's workforce personnel spend more awake time on the job with co-workers than with family members at home. As a result, employees often consider the workplace to represent a familiar, safe, and welcome setting. It is imperative that the same safe environment remains for the returning griever. Insensitive or thoughtless interactions by co-workers can eliminate that feeling of security and hamper the grief healing processes of the bereaved employee. Further, these insensitivities may result in the bereaved employee calling in sick more frequently, as home seems the emotionally safer option during intense periods of grief.

Providing interaction coaching to the co-workers of a newly bereaved employee will benefit all parties. As with so many other aspects of *Grief in the Workplace*, this can be accomplished with little cost to the organization. There may be a marginal expense in clock-time spent on coaching personnel, but that would be relatively insignificant in comparison to the returns.



## CHAPTER THREE ~ THE GRIEVING EMPLOYEE'S RETURN

---

### **EXAMPLE SCENARIO – EMPLOYEE'S POST BEREAVEMENT RETURN**

Janet returned to work at 7:30 am on the day following the completion of her Bereavement Leave. She reported to her workstation without interaction from others and began performing her usual accounting duties. At 8:45 am, Janet unexpectedly became overwhelmed by grief emotions and was unable to focus clearly on her work. She then began to feel emotionally and physically exhausted by frequent attempts at concentration while holding in the feelings from her loss. At 10:00 am, a co-worker observed Janet openly crying at her desk, but felt too awkward to approach and give comfort. Fatigued and foggy minded at 11:35 am that morning, Janet unwittingly deleted an incoming purchase order worth several thousands of dollars from a new buyer. The buyer later took the business elsewhere.

### **MIND AND BODY INFLUENCES ON THE NEWLY BEREAVED EMPLOYEE**

In this chapter, the following mental and physical distresses that are typically observed in the newly bereaved employee, as well as any recommended response actions to be taken by organizational leaders, are presented in the following sections:

1. Mental impacts of emotions on the grieving employee;
2. Physical impacts to a bereaved employee's well-being;
3. Self-Awareness of the newly bereaved employee

## **CHAPTER CORRELATIONS**

The more internal mental and physical influences of grief emotions on a bereaved employee may not be as obvious to the employer as the more outward expressions of sadness or anger. Yet, the depleted well-being of a grieving employee's mind and body has a tremendous negative sway on the ability to perform at acceptable levels on the job.

The death of an immediate family member can often result in many grief-related distresses to the survivor's physical and mental health. The more prevailing distress conditions usually have a greater impact within the first few weeks following a loss and lessen progressively over a reasonably short period. However, variances that may include type and cause of death, as well as the intimacy level within a relationship can cause some bereaved souls to take longer in progression. Some mental and physical distresses can even remain long-term for the bereaved.

In a commissioned study cited in a later chapter of this book, over 25,000 bereaved employees were surveyed with questions about negative job performance following the death of a loved one. The results showed that 85 percent of those grieverers in management positions experienced significant errors in judgment. Further, 95 percent of those who identified as front-line employees would attribute accidents and injuries on the job to the adverse influences of grief. Further still, both manager and front-line personnel reported that these grief-induced incidents continued on the job for up to six months or longer beyond the loss event.

Along with compassion for the griever, leadership must be

observant of any employee who is not capable of safely and proficiently performing assigned tasks. However, one complication in doing so may come indirectly from a newly bereaved employee's own lack of concern for self. Self-concern is usually secondary in the mindset of many early griever, and due to such factors as being overwhelmed by emotions or spending considerable time supporting other family members.

Regardless of complications, a leader with awareness and understanding can observe and identify many of the influences of grief on the mind and body of the employee. Acting on an adverse observation may only require that leaders do so with common sense, good judgment, and the help of guidance provided in this chapter.

### **GRIEF OBSERVATIONS IN THE BEREAVED EMPLOYEE**

**1. MENTAL IMPACTS OF EMOTIONS ON THE GRIEVING EMPLOYEE** The following negative mental influences are often readily observable in a bereaved employee by supervisory personnel and represent a *high-risk* to self, other personnel, and the company as a whole. The recommended response actions of leadership, as well as more detailed potential impacts to the organization, will be addressed after the identified observations that follow:

- **Lack of Concentration**
  - Unable to maintain long-term focus on tasks
  - Inability to make decisions
  - Appears restless at the workstation
  - Frequently losses files, documents, tools
  - Unable to complete a single task

- Attempts to self-resolve by moving to easier tasks
- **Forgetfulness/Absent-Mindedness**
  - Performs tasks while frequently but unknowingly omitting required sub-tasks within an established process
  - Unwittingly absent from scheduled meetings or misses established deadlines
- **Confusion**
  - Frequently halts production or tasks when unable to comprehend instructions
  - Unable to continue projects as levels previously demonstrated before the loss event
  - Questions co-workers about standard workflow processes or routine procedures
  - Frequently appears idle at the workstation for no evident reason
- **Impeded Memory**
  - Unable to recall new project instructions on task or project commencement
  - Repeatedly unclear with details, skill levels, or processes once performed prior to the loss event
- **Lethargy**
  - Performs tasks but moves slowly and methodically
  - Appears drowsy, dull, and unenergetic
  - Frequently halt tasks to gaze into the distance

- **Lack of Desire to be Productive**
  - Appears busy, but with only smaller tasks within a project, or smaller tasks across multiple projects
  - Infrequently achieves completion of the overall objective
- **Diminished Concern for Goals/Mission**
  - Performs assigned tasks without concern for acceptable quality levels in individual components or completed projects
  - Is self-aware that completed tasks are sub-par but makes no effort in correction
- **High Anxiety Levels**
  - Displays nervousness towards perceived importance of tasks or projects
  - Heightened sense of supervisory or deadline pressure in work
  - May display aggravated levels of attention to detail in tasks
- **Rejection/Insubordination of Supervision**
  - Becomes verbally or visibly challenging to appropriate admonishments or reprimands from leadership
  - Purposely avoids required interaction with senior members in authority
- **Frequent Mood Swings**
  - Experiences rapid changes along a spectrum of temperament ranging from cheerful to angry without notable cause or provocation

- Moods may be extreme in nature and sharply uncharacteristic in disposition as prior to the loss event
- **Quick to Anger**
  - Frequently becomes antagonistic during interactions with co-workers
  - More prone to ignore usual tact and judgment in refraining from the escalation of disputes with subordinates, peers, and supervisors
- **Isolation from Co-Workers**
  - Untypically performs work independently without usual or required collaboration with others in the workplace
  - Frequently relocates from group environments to more private settings to perform individual tasks
- **Loss of Creativity**
  - Works on tasks or future ventures without mentally thinking beyond the abilities of self or the organization
  - Unable to mentally consider all options in new or troublesome assignments
  - Frequently ignores new opportunities in existing assignments that become obvious to supervision
- **Decreased Ambition/Self-Motivation**
  - Performs or completes tasks without a passionate drive to do so at full capabilities
  - Experiences a mental lack of purpose for achieving a high level of quality work



- **Low Morale**

- Demonstrates no appreciation for the organization, leadership, or co-workers
- Frequently avoids social workplace events, such as taking breaks with co-workers or other in-house social gatherings

- **Questions Value to the Organization**

- Speaks to others or may be overheard speaking to self about usefulness to the organization or teammates while in the current state of grief
- Avoids or dismisses new projects that were previously suitable with skill level
- Requests removal from tasks or projects deemed high-value or require high skill sets

- **Questions Spiritual Faith**

- Speaks to others or may be overheard speaking to self about the loss of faith in previously displayed religious convictions
- Observed taking frequent safety risks without concern for personal outcome
- Makes precarious judgment errors purposely to witness the results

### **RECOMMENDED RESPONSE AND SUPPORT ACTIONS OF LEADERSHIP**

Once any negative observations are made, an appropriate senior member of the organization should privately and tactfully confront the bereaved employee. It is important that the leader remain honest and refrain from attempts to understate or excuse any performance deficiencies with respect to the griever's loss.

In healthy grief healing, the truth is always more helpful to the bereaved.

Responses to a bereaved employee who is exhibiting infrequent or minor mental lapses might include offering an unscheduled break away from a current assignment, or the remainder of the day off from work. In either option, the employee will require continued scrutiny in performance on the return to duty.

The appropriate member of leadership can also offer remedial instructions or training when more severe confusion or impeded memory impacts workplace safety and productivity. A temporary buddy/teammate system can be established to provide on-task support, as well. The temporary reassignment of more hazardous or sensitive duties may also be in order until the bereaved employee can demonstrate the ability to perform at or above required standards.

A strong organization will already have informed the newly bereaved employee of any company-sponsored grief support. Unfortunately, the offer is rarely acted on by the affected employee when early in grief, if ever at all. However, any leadership member who is counseling a grieving worker should take the opportunity to remind and encourage the employee to take advantage of the services.

### **WORKPLACE IMPACT**

A newly bereaved employee who is observed or reported to be impaired by grief emotions will present a potential for risk to any business entity. These impairments may well lead to workplace accidents that threaten the safety of the grieving employee, the

co-workers in the workplace, and the company assets on the ground. There could be a risk for financial or administrative damages, as well as mistakes in production that lead to defective products or reduced delivery to clients.

Legal liabilities, such as lawsuits and damage claims are risks that must always be included in any consideration when an employee is adversely influenced by grief emotions. These risks, from low to high, must always be in the thoughts of all leaders within an organization.

### **MENTAL FATIGUE ASSERTIONS**

Mental fatigue is a very common condition experienced by the bereaved during the more immediate periods following the loss and is often mistakenly observed as mental illness. This subsection in the chapter has been included to briefly address these differing conditions of the mind.

*Mental fatigue* is the temporary decline in cognitive performance abilities resulting from extended periods of mental activity. This can include experiencing painful emotions or stress for long periods of time. *Mental illness* is defined as a decline in cognitive performance abilities caused by an organic disease of the brain. While mental illness requires professional intervention in attempts to alleviate the condition, mental fatigue can usually be resolved with the lessening or elimination of the offending influences.

Many newly bereaved employees will initially experience the powerful grief emotions of anger, guilt, fear, and confusion at levels of intensity that were never felt in the past. These emotions create mental stress and anxiety as the survivor not only

struggles with the shock of loss but the uncertainty of a future without a loved one. At the same time, the griever may also be tasked with a myriad of responsibilities, such as funeral arrangements, legal and financial adjustments, as well as a return to work. Without question, these mental activities can be exhausting and overwhelming to the grief sufferer.

Organizational leaders should anticipate witnessing one or more mental fatigue influences on the newly bereaved employee throughout the initial return to work. These impacts should ease in a reasonably short period as the survivor mentally adjusts to the reality of the loss and the lessening of emotional stressors. Leaders should continue to recommend any company-sponsored grief support to a recently grieved employee. Further, support recommendations should become more urgent if the griever's symptoms of mental fatigue carry on for longer than four to six weeks. At this point, normal grief may be evolving into a condition known as *Complicated Grief*. Left unchecked, Complicated Grief typically requires intervention by mental health professionals.

### **2. PHYSICAL IMPACTS TO A BEREAVED EMPLOYEE'S WELL-BEING**

The newly bereaved employee may develop physical disorders that result from the adverse influences of painful and overwhelming grief emotions. To aid the organization, a list of the more typical conditions and potential causes has been provided in this section. Leadership must be aware that some disorders may not readily be observable at the workplace and only become known when reported by the bereaved employee. The recommended response actions for leadership, as well as

more detailed potential impacts to the organization, will be addressed after the list of potential physical disorders that follow:

- Sleepiness and falling asleep on the job
- Decreased physical stamina and rapid exhaustion
- Muscle weakness
- Gastric and digestive disorders
- Anxiety attacks
- Restlessness
- Body aches and pains
- Headaches and migraines
- Heart attack and stroke
- Chest pains and shortness of breath
- Increased blood pressure
- Heart palpitations
- Increased illnesses from a weak immune system
- Worsening of current health issues

### **RECOMMENDED RESPONSE AND SUPPORT ACTIONS OF LEADERSHIP**

#### *SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL HELP WHEN APPROPRIATE*

Some observations or complaints of physical disorders in a newly bereaved employee may require urgent intervention by professional emergency medical services. There is no intent in this chapter, or elsewhere within this book, to diagnose physical health conditions or provide recommendations of when medical aid should be requested for any person. The decision for medical aid must be made by the bereaved employee or by appropriate personnel within the organization when the affected employee is incapacitated by a medical condition.

In all cases of physical disorder, the employee should be tactfully confronted in private and informed of the observation,

as well as the negative impacts on the organization. This remains appropriate in events when the disorder is either observed by a supervisor or reported by the grieved employee or witnessing co-worker. Regardless, it is important that the leader refrains from minimizing or excusing any adverse observations or performance deficiencies with the bereaved employee. The truth is always important for both the suffering employee and the organization.

Actions for observed or reported physical disorders in a bereaved employee will be dependent on the sound judgment of leadership and based on the circumstances and the task at hand. It may be appropriate, at times, to only recommend the grieving employee take a break from the workstation, or even take off the remainder of the workday. Other indications might dictate removal and reassignment of hazardous tasks. While no employee can be forced to seek medical attention, some physical disorders may require the griever be found unfit to perform the task and removed until cleared by a certified medical doctor. Like mental grief impairments, however, many of the minor physical disorders may ease in a reasonable rate of time as the affected employee progresses through grief healing.

The risk to workplace safety and productivity still exist when a bereaved employee's physical disorder appears minor or non-life threatening. These lesser types of conditions may include but are not limited to, sleepiness on the job or complaints of body aches and pains. Minor instances of poor physical coordination or nodding off at a workstation can seem trivial at first but quickly cascade into consequences of great jeopardy. Therefore, an

immediate stoppage or reassignment of work should be considered by leadership in mid to high-risk assignments whenever a grieving employee displays or reports a physical disorder.

A strong organization will have already informed the newly bereaved employee of any company-sponsored grief support. Early in grief, however, the offer is rarely acted on by the bereaved employee. Regardless, any leadership member who is counseling a grieving worker should remind and encourage the employee to consider the offer. Further, grief support recommendations should become more urgent if the griever's physical disorder symptoms carry on for longer than four to six weeks. As with mental fatigue, even minor physical disorders could be an indication of *Complicated Grief* for the bereaved employee, and require intervention by mental health professionals.

### **WORKPLACE IMPACT**

A newly bereaved employee who is impaired by grief-induced physical disorders does present a strong potential for risk to any business entity. These adverse physical conditions may lead to workplace accidents that threaten the safety of the affected employee, co-workers in the workplace, and the company assets on the ground. There could be a risk for financial or administrative damages, as well as mistakes in production that lead to defective products or reduced delivery to clients. In addition to other risks, legal liabilities, such as lawsuits and litigious damage claims must always be included in any consideration when an employee is physically impaired by grief

related disorders.

### **PHYSICAL WELL-BEING ASSERTIONS**

There are many ways a newly bereaved employee can fall into poor health after the recent death of a loved one. Sleep difficulties are common, with insomnia being the most prevalent. It is not unusual for a griever to avoid falling asleep at night for fear of a nightmare that will replay the tragic event over and over. If sleep does come, it is often interrupted by those dreams or by the many other pains, anxieties, and concerns that come with a loss.

Malnutrition is another frequent disorder observed in a newly bereaved survivor. Loss of appetite is common, as grief emotions can overwhelm the hunger impulses in the body. On the opposing side, some grieving individuals may turn to overconsuming comfort foods to fight the emotional pain. Unfortunately, most angst-appeasing diets are usually comprised of foods that typically have little healthy or nutritional value. Yet, another cause of a poor diet may simply be logistical. Oftentimes, a survivor may become so busy with funeral and other loss-related tasks that there is little time or concern for proper nourishment.

Another negative impact to physical health comes when a newly bereaved individual fails to mentally progress through the painful loss and remains in the influences of intense grief. The powerful emotions of grief can include shock, fear, or anger, and continually invoke the “fight or flight” mode in the griever’s mind. This mental mode releases stress hormones into the body that trigger many physiological changes, such as the heart pumping



faster and greater responsiveness for the muscles. This mind-body response is pre-wired in all humans but is only intended to facilitate the immediate escape from danger. It is not meant to be long-term. Intense grief emotions that continue for an extended period of time, however, will continually dump caustic hormones into the body and disrupt many of the normal physical functions. As a result, heart attacks, strokes, and digestive disorders are just some of the more common health maladies that result from intense and long-lasting grief.

The poor or degrading physical health of a grieving employee may not immediately be noticeable to leadership at the workplace. These conditions will probably not present themselves on the first day an employee returns from bereavement leave. In some cases, it may take weeks or months to become apparent to even a frequent observer. However, the potential that poor health can also bring greater risk to the workplace certainly merits the heightened awareness and understanding by all leaders within an organization.

### **3. SELF-AWARENESS OF THE NEWLY BEREAVED EMPLOYEE**

Recognition of adverse impacts of grief on an employee returning to work after a loss can be difficult for even the most observant leaders. It can be even more difficult when leaders must also rely on the grieving employee's own perception of mental and physical preparedness to proficiently accomplish the job.

It would be simple if all newly bereaved employees could be found at either end of a *ready or not ready* scale. For example, one grieved employee is mentally and emotionally prepared to

return to work and does so successfully. Another bereaved worker knows with certainty that work would be too difficult in the current state of grief. These two types of bereaved employees both have a good sense of self-awareness and respective management can make appropriate decisions about each griever's return to full duties.

The difficulties for leaders will come from those newly bereaved employees who may fit somewhere in between knowingly *ready* and knowingly *not ready* to return to work. Grief emotions can cloud the mind, and gauging self-awareness can be a challenging measure for most new grievers. Some may return to work while unsure of readiness but do so only out of the need for continued income. Others may return while feeling mentally prepared, but soon find it far too difficult to process the emotions of the loss and concentrate on work tasks.

The self-awareness, or self-perceived preparedness, of a newly bereaved employee who is returning to work has been categorized and provided in this section. Each category also provides a level of risk to self, others and the organization. The risks indicated, which range from low to high, should not be confused with the risk potential of any specific task at an organization's worksite. For example, there are safety risks inherent in heavy equipment operations, as well as a risk of financial errors in accounting positions. Task-specific risks are always unique to the employing organization but should also be considered along with self-awareness when determining the fitness for work of a returning griever.

The self-awareness category list is intended to aid organizational leaders in evaluating workplace risk in the initial

return of a grieving employee. The recommended response and support actions, as well as more detailed potential risks to the organization, will be addressed after the list.

### **SELF-AWARENESS CATEGORIES FOR NEWLY BEREAVED EMPLOYEES**

- **Fully Prepared** (*Low Risk*)
  - Returns to work after appropriate time away to process the more severe grief emotions in a healthy manner
  - Experiences occasional waves of moderate grief emotions, but is able to acceptably remain focused on tasks
- **Reasonably Prepared** (*Low to Medium Risk*)
  - Returns to work after appropriate time away but is just beginning the healthy grieving process
  - Experiences frequent waves of moderate to severe grief emotions but self-initiates action to mitigate adverse impacts
- **Unknown Preparedness** (*Low to High Risk*)
  - Returns to work without reasonable time for healthy progression into grief healing, and is unsure of abilities to cope with acute and severe emotions away from support at home
  - May not be prepared to self-initiate actions to mitigate the unanticipated influences of acute and severe emotional waves
- **Knowingly Unprepared** (*High Risk*)
  - Returns to work out of requirement or need while still attempting to begin, or failing within, the healthy processing of grief emotions

- Fully aware of an inability to perform tasks due to constant moderate to severe grief emotions
- Unable to self-initiate action to mitigate adverse impacts of acute and severe emotional waves
- **Misperceived Preparedness** (*High Risk*)
  - Returns to work before a reasonable time for healthy progression in grief healing and with the mistaken perception of full preparedness to resume tasks
  - May not be prepared to self-initiate actions to mitigate the unanticipated impacts of acute and severe emotional waves
- **Self-Deceived Preparedness** (*High Risk*)
  - Quickly returns to work before progression into grief healing in an attempt to avoid experiencing the acute and severe emotions of grief
  - Will not be prepared to self-initiate actions to mitigate the unanticipated impacts of frequent acute and severe emotional waves
  - Will be delayed in the healthy healing process of grief

#### **RECOMMENDED RESPONSE AND SUPPORT ACTIONS OF LEADERSHIP**

It is recommended that leadership conduct a face-to-face meeting with the newly bereaved employee on the first day the employee returns to the workplace. This should be done at the start of the workday and before the griever attempts a return to previous tasks or projects. The leader who conducts the meeting should speak openly and tactfully to the grieved employee about

the concerns of safety and productivity in the workplace. While compassion and empathy will be appreciated, directness and honesty are more essential to the progressive healing processes of the griever.

The purpose of the leadership meeting with an employee returning after a death in the family is to determine the employee's ability to mentally and physically perform usual responsibilities on the job. While there will always be some level of emotional influence on the newly bereaved, many will likely be able to immediately resume normal assignments. It remains a recommendation, however, that returning employees with mid to high-risk assignments be delayed in resuming such tasks for the first week. If this is not possible for an organization, then the employee should be supervised closely while on the job.

Any newly bereaved employee who presents or reports mannerisms that indicate an inability to perform usual tasks (*Knowingly Unprepared category*), should immediately be removed from all assignments. The affected employee should be directed to take additional days off from work to seek support in coping with the loss. The number of additional days should be flexible and include regular progress updates between leadership and the employee. If the employee has no paid leave available, leadership should inform the employee that the days off are mandatory even if they must be taken without pay. Leaders should check with in-house human resource or other appropriate personnel for guidance with employment laws or internal policy before mandating unpaid leave. However, employee removal for demonstrated or suspected inability to

perform tasks is typically in accordance with most rules and regulations.

The recommendation for removal from assignments is also relevant for those bereaved employees in the *Misperceived Preparedness* category. These grievers initially appear prepared and present as such, but soon become incapacitated on the job by grief emotions. Similarly, the returning employee who has *Unknown Preparedness* must also be monitored closely on the job. One unsure griever may quickly discover an ability to cope with the loss at work while another unsure griever finds the emotions are far more overwhelming than imaged before the return. One can certainly continue to work and the other must be removed until able to demonstrate the ability to perform the required tasks.

An organization could always use discretion in allowing an emotionally unfit grieving employee to remain at work and perform other tasks that hold no risk. These mundane tasks, if available, should demand little focused attention and allow for the bereaved employee to take frequent breaks. It would also be optimal if these minor duties were performed in an isolated area where the environment is more suitable for the griever's state of mind. Deferring to work without risk versus mandating time off without pay may provide the suffering employee a safe and solitary environment that is conducive to grief healing. In addition, it may also aid the financially challenged griever, as well as serve the entire organization through continued productivity.

One high-risk category of greater concern is "Self-Deceived Preparedness." This type of bereaved employee has either

consciously or unconsciously opted to hold back the painful emotions of grief by concentrating all mental focus on the job. This temporarily allows the painful emotions of the loss to be avoided by the griever. However, the emotions of grief are only delayed. Multiple clinical studies have proven that repressed grief will only strengthen over time and eventually expose the griever to more intense emotional responses in the future. When and how intense those emotional responses will be is unknown to anyone, including the griever.

An observant front-line leader should be familiar with the usual performance traits of employees and be able to recognize the self-deceived griever. A newly bereaved employee who is uncharacteristically arriving early or working beyond normal hours may be avoiding or repressing the painful emotions of grief. Other indicators may be the employee's frequent requests for additional tasks or responsibilities in order to remain busy. On the personal side, the typical grief repressing employee may display no adverse reactions to the recent death and purposely avoid any workplace conversations on the subject.

Leadership can confidently respond to indications that an employee might be repressing grief without concern for further interfering in the healing processes. While contact should not be aggressive, a leader can approach the affected employee and inquire about the observed *out-of-character* work habits. The employee might be reminded of expected hours on the job and overtime regulations, if appropriate, as well as concerns for employee *burn out*. It is also acceptable for a leader to verbally recognize the recent loss with the employee and recommend

moderation on the job in light of the event. Once again, the truth is important for a grieving employee and may well jumpstart the stalled grief healing processes.

### **WORKPLACE IMPACT**

There will be some level of mental and physical impairment suffered by almost all newly bereaved employees on return to the workplace. The amount of impairment is dependent on many factors, including the closeness of the relationship with the deceased, the degree of trauma experienced during the loss, and the griever's time and early achievements through the grief healing processes. However, any degree of impairment present in the bereaved employee increases the probability of workplace accidents, injuries, and errors in judgment.

Accidents on the job can result in injuries or fatalities to the bereaved employee, as well as co-workers and others who may be present in the workplace. There is also the potential for legal and medical costs with accidents and injuries. This brings with it the probability of a long-term increase to insurance and Worker's Compensation rates. Equipment may be damaged or sidelined temporarily, asset liability claims could increase, and production deadlines can be delayed by adverse grief emotions on the job.

While errors in judgment by the newly bereaved employee can result in physical accidents in the workplace, the concern also exists for mistakes in the administrative, financial and management arenas. These areas of business can hold both short and long-term risks that not only impact front-line productivity, but also a broad spectrum of financial and business relations matters. An incorrect keystroke or an unintentional



omission of protocol from a mind overwhelmed with grief emotions can cause non-physical harm to the organization as a whole.

Workplace risks from grief can be reduced or eliminated by observant and responsive leadership in any organization. Those leaders must hold to the truth that all employees, including those who are temporarily impaired, are a valuable asset to the enterprise. Further, each leader must also possess common sense and good judgment, as well as a compassion for those grieving the death of a loved one.

### **FINAL CHAPTER DECLARATIONS**

Many newly bereaved employees will return to the workplace after the death of a loved one having reasonably entered the healthy healing processes of grief. Some, however, may return before any emotional healing has even begun in earnest, either through lack of self-awareness, or simply to adhere to a bereavement leave policy. Still, others return too quickly in attempts to focus the mind on anything other than the loss, and not aware that the pains will only surface at some unknown point in the near future.

It is not typical for an employee who has recently experienced the death of a spouse, life-partner or child to *just get over it*. There is no instant cessation of severe, acute, and often mentally debilitating emotions. There is no chronological timeline when painful thoughts will suddenly stop influencing the grieving employee, either. No two bereaved individuals will grieve alike. Even those who are progressing healthfully through early grief may be unexpectedly hit with frequent waves of emotions on the

job.

The proactive organization understands that employees returning to work after the death of a loved one may present a risk in the workplace. That level of risk, from low to high, is dependent upon many factors, including the type of work normally performed by the affected employee. The majority of those returning grievers should be mentally and physically capable of resuming low-risk assignments with little more than enhanced observations by leadership.

There will be those newly bereaved employees who return to work while still struggling to cope with the emotional waves of grief. Those waves have the potential for overwhelming the mind and body of the grieved worker at any moment. It is in these overwhelming moments when leaders can mitigate the risk by applying the awareness and understanding learned in *Grief in the Workplace*.

## CHAPTER FOUR ~ DEATH AND TRAUMATIC EVENTS ON THE JOB

---

### **EXAMPLE SCENARIO – A DEATH IN THE WORKPLACE**

Pinnacle Tarps, Inc. was a woman-owned small business. On one Monday morning, the COO gathered the staff and announced the unexpected death of the company owner. Along with statements of shock and condolences, one staff member asked about the future of the business. The COO responded by saying that the surviving family members were considering all options and he would keep the staff up to date on the decisions. Weeks would go by without an update, and rumors about the business closing became common in the workplace. Then, one employee decided to retire. She had been with the owner from the start and felt her loyalties no longer had value. Soon, three other employees resigned without notice to seek a job in a more stable environment. Three months later, and without notice, the surviving family members announced the immediate closure of the business. The remaining employees were advised on exit that the recent reduction in experienced manpower and a decline in product quality were the final determining factors in the decision to close the business.

### **CHAPTER CORRELATIONS**

The topics within this chapter range from the death of a business owner or senior leader to the death of a co-worker, as well as other traumatic events. Each occurrence can expose the entire organization to the adverse influences of grief. The grief events,

as well as the recommended actions taken by leadership, will be presented for consideration as follows:

1. Death of an Owner or Respected Leader
2. Death of a Co-worker (Off the Job)
3. Accidental Death (On the Job)
4. Workplace Violence/Homicide
5. Natural Disasters Local to the Organization
6. National Security Events

The death of a direct employee will happen far less frequently than the death of an employee's family member. Yet, the grief impacts for a leader or respected peer who has suddenly passed away can rapidly spread across the entire organization. Other traumatic events may also result in emotional influences for employees. For instance, a tornado which damages a large portion of an office building can impact a member's concern for continued employment. A workplace violence incident can leave other staff members with a diminished sense of personal security on the job. Even a terrorist attack carried out in another city, such as that of September 11, 2001, can bring on adverse emotional influences to an entire nation of employees.

### **GRIEF EVENTS ON THE JOB AND LEADERSHIP RESPONSE ACTIONS**

The recommended leadership response actions within this chapter do not include the detailed bereavement support that was provided in the earlier chapters of this book. The reader is asked to return whenever needed to those chapters. Further, any instances of death or other traumatic events on the job will have unique impacts that are specific to an individual organization. For

that reason, such measures as emergency services response, legal and investigative requirements, and administrative actions have not been suggested.

### **1. DEATH OF AN OWNER OR RESPECTED LEADER**

#### **Workplace Influences**

- **Icon of the Company**
  - Often represented the organization's identity and community branding
  - May have personified the company's sustainability and continued job security of the staff
  - Likely held strong business relationships with critical customers and key suppliers
- **Deeply Respected**
  - Held in high esteem for accomplishments by employees
  - Created an atmosphere for others to seek or maintain employment with the organization
- **Role Model**
  - Upheld and demonstrated business practices that were highly respected by employees
  - May have held mentorship relationships with multiple workers
  - Junior members may have desired long-term employment to learn professional habits

#### **Personnel Impacts**

- **Personal Grief**
  - Employees may feel personally connected and experience emotional impacts from the death
  - Employees in family-like business environments

may feel the same grief emotions and sympathies as with losing a family member

- **Professional Grief**

- Employees may experience moderate levels of grief emotions when the deceased is considered a business or industry icon
- Workers in mentor-protégé or role model relationships may grieve a loss to future learning or career opportunities

- **Professional Anxieties**

- Employees may question if the organization will close or fail
- May become concerned for potential changes in business styles with new ownership or senior leader
- Apprehensions can arise for potential changes in workplace rules, policies, and practices

- **Partner/Client/Supplier Concerns**

- Ancillary business associates may become concerned about declining or changing business practices
- May question if the business will close or fail
- May consider transferring partnerships to other businesses with existing high-level relations

- **Competitor Response**

- May quickly preempt the organization's death notification to existing clients or prospects in attempts to obtain business

- May attempt recruitment of high-performance employees of deceased leader's organization

### **Recommended Response and Support Actions of Leadership**

- **Engage or Establish Bereavement Action Plan**
  - Refer to Chapter One for details of the Bereavement Action Plan
  - Adjust the Bereavement Action Plan as appropriate for the position/title of the deceased owner/leader
- **Notify All Employees**
  - Provide details of loss at a degree allowable and respectful of surviving family member wishes
  - Provide funerary arrangements if available and attendance is open to employees
  - Assure all staff of business continuity or of any potentially adverse impacts to the business
  - Continue updates well into the reasonable future to reduce employment security anxieties
- **Notify Partners/Clients/Suppliers**
  - Provide details of loss at a degree allowable and respectful of surviving family member wishes
  - Provide funerary arrangements if available and if open to partners and clients
  - Assure all of business continuity or of any potentially adverse impacts to the business
  - Continue updates well into the reasonable future to reduce business relationship anxieties

- **Offer Grief Support to Employees**
  - Offer on-site grief and bereavement support to all employees
  - Coach leadership in listening to employee emotions and anxieties
  - Provide secluded areas where emotional employees can grieve in private if desired
- **Monitor Production**
  - More closely observe employee reaction to the loss and respond accordingly
  - Remain reasonably flexible in accommodations for employees overwhelmed by grief or anxieties

## **2. DEATH OF A CO-WORKER (OFF THE JOB)**

### **Workplace Influences**

- **Workmate Friend**
  - May have developed personal relationships with co-workers both on and off the job
  - Potential for sibling-like co-worker connections in organizations who foster a family environment
- **Dependable Co-worker**
  - Could be held in high esteem for exceptional enthusiasm and reliability
  - May be considered a co-worker/teammate that other employees enjoy working with on the job
- **Skilled Teammate**
  - May have possessed exclusive skills and knowledge needed to supplement other co-workers on group projects



- Could have had the same skills as other team members but relied on for higher levels of ability
- **Role Model**
  - May have held mentor-like relations with a co-worker(s)
  - Habits and motivations may have been mimicked by new or aspiring employees

### **Personnel Impacts**

- **Personal Grief**
  - Co-workers may have strong emotional grief responses when deep friendships have developed in the workplace
  - Grief impacts might increase further if friendship included social interactions such as with mutual family and home life
- **Professional Grief**
  - Moderate grief impacts can result when co-workers share tasks and projects that relied upon or were complemented by the actions of the deceased
  - Workers in mentor-protégé or role model relationships may experience grief when losing future learning opportunities in a desired skill
- **Professional Anxieties**
  - Co-workers may have relied upon the exclusive skills or abilities of the deceased and become anxious about continued success and productivity
  - May be concerned about the abilities and mannerisms of the deceased co-worker's replacement on the team

- **Workforce Morale**

- Surviving employees may observe leadership response to a co-worker's death and use that positive or negative observation to evaluate the organization's concern for morale and welfare
- Morale may lessen if individual workload increases due to the sudden loss of the deceased

### **Recommended Response and Support Actions of Leadership**

- **Contact Immediate Family**

- Senior member in the organization should contact the surviving family of the deceased employee and give initial condolences
- Immediate follow-up by appropriate personnel to provide support (Example - food and beverages for funerary ceremonies)
- Request funeral arrangement info and family wishes for release of information to employees
- Provide information for any pending financial resources (E.g. Life Insurance or unpaid wages)

- **Notify Employees**

- Provide details of loss at a degree respectful of family wishes
- Provide funerary arrangements if available and if open to employees
- Assure business continuity or any potentially adverse impacts to same
- Continue updating employees as to leadership's intents of personnel replacement or adjustments to

workflow

- **Offer Grief Support to Employees**

- Offer on-site grief and bereavement support to all employees, including those who did not work directly with the deceased employee
- Coach leadership in listening to employee emotions and anxieties
- Provide secluded areas where emotional employees can grieve in private if desired

- **Notify Partners/Clients/Suppliers**

- Make prompt notification to outside parties if the deceased employee maintained consistent business associations
- Provide details of loss at a degree respectful of family wishes
- Provide funeral arrangements if available and if open to others
- Assure business continuity or any potentially adverse impacts to same
- Continue updates well into the reasonable future to reduce business relationship anxieties

- **Monitor Production**

- Respectfully resume all work routines as quickly as possible
- Closely observe employee reaction to the loss and respond accordingly
- Remain reasonably flexible in accommodations for employees overwhelmed by grief or anxieties

### **3. ACCIDENTAL DEATH (ON THE JOB)**

#### **Workplace Influences**

- **Productivity Levels**

- Expect an immediate negative impact on production levels for the immediate period following an accidental death of an employee on the job

- **Safe Environment**

- Employees typically feel unsafe and less secure following an accidental death on the job
- Be watchful for employees who attempt to self-resolve perceived lack of safety

- **Leadership Perception**

- Employees typically look to the response and follow up of organizational leaders after an accidental death on the job

#### **Personnel Impacts**

- **Traumatic Distress**

- Co-workers who accidents involving human blood and mutilation to the body may experience symptoms of emotional shock
- Employees may exhibit short-term mood changes or fatigue, as well as complain of difficulties sleeping away from work

- **Personal Security Anxieties**

- Co-workers may develop short-term and long-term concerns for personal safety and security on the job site
- Long-term concerns can lead to employee

- attempting to self-correct perceived safety issues
- Long-term concerns can lead to increased employee absenteeism and resignations to seek more secure workplace
- **Co-worker Grief**
  - Employees in the workplace may have developed close relationships with the deceased co-worker
  - Refer to previous Death of a Co-worker topic for staff support response
- **Workforce Interruption**
  - Workplace may become chaotic with accident response and follow up actions
  - Employees may risk harm or may corrupt follow up investigations if attempting to aid the deceased
  - Employees can often become confused without leadership guidance following a death on the job event
- **Hazardous Exposure**
  - Employees in the area of the event may become endangered by bloodborne pathogens or hazardous chemicals that may be released from the accident
- **Traumatic Observations**
  - Members of the workforce may witness or be exposed to the accident scene with views of gruesome bodily injury or mutilation

## **Recommended Response and Support Actions of Leadership**

- **Reestablish Orderly Environment**
  - Remove the ability of bystander employees to view the event scene
  - Survey all employees who were near but not involved in the event to determine the ability to resume normal operations and manage accordingly
  - Identify other employees who may be emotionally overwhelmed by the event and support appropriately
- **Reassure Safety**
  - Convey the organization's continued intent to provide safety for all employees
  - Promptly and honestly answer all employee questions about personal safety and steps taken to mitigate future fatal accidents in the workplace
  - Assure all personnel that no reoccurrence of the event is anticipated
- **Provide Event Information**
  - Convey non-sensitive event details to all workforce employees as soon as reasonably possible
  - Update employees as investigations allow
  - Inform workers that some details may not be shared or must wait until a later time
  - Update employees as details become available
- **Support Event Witnesses**
  - Offer professional emotional trauma support to employees who may have witnessed the physical

- damage to the accident victim's body
- Be flexible with time off allowances for employees who may have witnessed the event
- **Resume Work Routines**
  - Respectfully begin the continuation of all work routines outside areas impacted by the event
  - Maintain a *business-as-usual* atmosphere for all workers
- **Co-worker Grief Support**
  - Offer any available grief support services to all employees
  - Provide private areas for employees who may wish to grieve while at work
  - Remain flexible with time off requests of those overwhelmed by the death of a co-worker
- **Support Surviving Family**
  - Refer to *Chapter 1, Section 8. of this book: Provide Bereavement Support During Initial Funeral Rites*
  - Remain aware of ongoing investigations and legal matters surrounding the incident when communicating with surviving family members
  - Have appropriate organization personnel assist the surviving family with remaining pay and benefit concerns, as well as the release of any personal property belonging to the deceased employee
- **Co-worker Follow Up**
  - Ensure all employees are frequently updated on measures taken to maintain safety in the workplace following the event

- Provide information on any funerary arrangements made for the deceased employee as they become available and in conjunction with family wishes

#### **4. WORKPLACE VIOLENCE/HOMICIDE**

Examples of workplace violence include, but are not limited to:

- Active Shooter
- Acts of Domestic Violence
- Worker-on-Worker Assault
- Criminal Act of Violence Against Persons

##### **Workplace Influences**

*Assumes events have concluded and no further danger exists*

- **Productivity Levels**

- Expect an immediate negative impact on production during the time period following a violent event at the workplace

- **Safe Environment**

- Employees typically feel unsafe and less secure following a workplace violence event
- Be watchful for employees who attempt to self-resolve perceived lack of safety

- **Leadership Perception**

- Employees will look to the response and follow up of organizational leadership following any workplace violence event

##### **Personnel Impacts**

- **Traumatic Distress**

- Co-workers who witness violent acts involving human blood and mutilation to the body may



experience symptoms of emotional shock

- Employees may exhibit short-term mood changes or fatigue, as well as complain of difficulties sleeping away from work

- **Personal Security Anxieties**

- Co-workers may develop short-term and long-term concerns for personal safety and security on the job site
- Long-term concerns can lead to increased employee absenteeism and resignations to seek more secure workplace

- **Co-worker Grief**

- Employees in the workplace may have developed close relationships with the deceased
- Refer to previous Death of a Co-worker topic for co-worker support response

- **Workforce Interruption**

- Workplace may become chaotic with event response and follow up actions
- Other employees may risk harm or may corrupt future investigation if attempting to aid victim(s)
- Some workers can become confused without leadership direction following the event

- **Hazardous Exposure**

- Employees in the area of the event may become exposed to bloodborne pathogens

## **Recommended Response and Support Actions of Leadership**

- **Reestablish Orderly Environment**
  - Remove the ability of bystander employees to view the event scene
  - Survey all employees who were near but not involved in the event to determine the ability to resume normal operations and manage accordingly
  - Identify other employees who may be emotionally overwhelmed by the event and support appropriately
- **Reassure Safety**
  - Convey the organization's continued intent to provide safety for all employees
  - Promptly and honestly answer all employee questions about personal safety and steps taken to mitigate future violent events in the workplace
  - Assure all personnel that no reoccurrence of the event is expected
- **Provide Event Information**
  - Convey non-sensitive event details to all workforce employees as soon as reasonably possible
  - Update employees as investigations allow
  - Inform workers that some details may not be shared until a later time
  - Update employees as details become available
- **Support Event Witnesses**
  - Offer professional emotional trauma support to employees who may have witnessed the event
  - Be flexible with time off allowances for witnesses

following the event

- **Resume Work Routines**

- Outside of areas impacted by the event, respectfully begin or ensure the continuation of all work routines
- Maintain a *business-as-usual* atmosphere for all workers

- **Co-worker Grief Support**

- With or without the loss of human lives, violent acts that affect a workplace can induce grief emotions in employees, and grief support should be made available
- Provide private areas for employees who may wish to grieve while at work
- Remain flexible with time off requests by those emotionally overwhelmed as a result of the event

- **Support Surviving Family (If applicable)**

- Refer to Chapter 1, Section 8. of this book: Provide Bereavement Support During Initial Funeral Rites from this publication
- Remain aware of ongoing investigations and legal matters surrounding the incident when communicating with surviving family members
- Have appropriate organization personnel assist the surviving family with remaining pay and benefit concerns, as well as the release of any personal property belonging to the deceased employee

- **Co-worker Follow Up**

- Ensure all employees are frequently updated on measures taken to maintain safety in the workplace following the event of violence
- Provide any funeral arrangements made for a deceased employee as they become available and in conjunction with family wishes

## **5. NATURAL DISASTERS LOCAL TO THE ORGANIZATION**

Examples of natural disasters include, but are not limited to:

- Tornados
- Hurricanes
- Floods
- Fires

Natural disasters can cause death or serious bodily injury to persons in and around the event. However, this section focuses exclusively on the adverse influences of grief and anxiety possible for employees who experience and survive such events. An organization's response to a death that results from a disaster event remains in alignment with responses found in Section 1. and Section 2. of this chapter. Chapter One of this book can also be referenced if a family member of an employee has died as the result of a natural disaster.

### **Workplace Influences**

*Assumes events have concluded and no further danger exists*

- **Productivity Levels**

- Expect both short-term and long-term negative

impacts to production possible before and after the natural disaster event

- **Safe Environment**

- Employees typically have emotional expectations of safety and security from harm at the workplace

- **Leadership Perception**

- Employees will look to the response and follow up of organizational leadership after a natural disaster event has occurred in the workplace or in the surrounding communities

### **Personnel Impacts**

- **Workforce Interruption (Immediate)**

- Workplace may become chaotic with disaster response and follow up actions
- Employees may become confused without leadership guidance following the event

- **Workforce Interruption (Post-Event)**

- Employees may need extensive time away from the job site to care for personal concerns at home or within the community
- May be damage to structure and equipment if impacts are local to the organization

- **Dangerous/Hazardous Exposure**

- Employees in the area of the event may become exposed to toxic hazardous chemicals

- An employees may be subject to physical harm in remaining structural damage resulting from the event

- **Traumatic Distress**

- Workers who experience natural disasters may

experience symptoms of both short-term emotional shock, as well as long-term Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- Employees may exhibit mood changes or fatigue on the job, as well as complain of difficulties sleeping away from work
- **Personal Security Anxieties**
  - Co-workers may develop short-term and long-term concerns for personal safety and security on the job site
  - Long-term concerns can lead to increased employee absenteeism and resignations
- **Decreased Workforce**
  - Employees who experienced extreme personal property damage may require an extended leave of absence or may resign employment
  - Employees who are laid off or delayed from reporting to work due to facility or equipment damage may seek other employment
- **Continued Employment Anxiety**
  - Damage to the facility may halt production and create concern among the employees for termination or lay-offs

### **Recommended Response and Support Actions of Leadership**

Leadership response actions do not include detailed bereavement support, emergency incident response, or administrative and legal actions resulting from the event. It is

strongly recommended that organizations develop formal Emergency Action Plans (EAPs) for each facility for use in Natural Disasters incidents.

- **Provide Safe Environment**

- Provide safe evacuation areas for all employees when the disaster event is forecasted or observed with adequate notice
- Shut down and evacuate employees whenever a natural disaster has been forecasted with advanced notice, such as possible with a hurricane or tornado

- **Reestablish Safe Environment**

- Post-disaster, remove all employees from unsafe areas
- Visually account for all employees with the use of personnel rosters
- As time allows, contact off-duty employees in area-wide disasters to check on well-being
- Survey all employees to determine the ability to resume normal operations
- Identify employees who may be emotionally overwhelmed by the event and support appropriately

- **Support Disaster Survivors**

- Be observant for employees who exhibit signs of shock following an event
- Offer professional emotional trauma support to all employees, including those not on site during an area-wide disaster

- Remain watchful in the future for employees who display symptoms of PTSD
- Be flexible with time off allowances for those with emotional and personal concerns resulting from the event
- **Reassure Safety**
  - Convey the organization's continued intent to provide a safe working environment for all employees
  - Promptly and honestly answer all employee questions about personal safety and steps taken to provide workplace safety in future disasters
- **Provide Employment and Production Information**
  - Convey damage, production, and any employment impacts to all workforce employees as soon as reasonably possible
  - Update employees as frequently as possible
- **Resume Work Routines**
  - Outside of areas impacted by the event, respectfully begin or ensure the continuation of all work routines
  - Express the organization's goal of maintaining or returning to a business-as-usual environment to all employees, including any who may be unable to work due to damage or personal needs off the job
- **Offer Grief Support**
  - With or without the loss of human lives, natural disasters that affect a workplace can induce grief



emotions in employees, and grief support should be made available

- Provide private areas for employees who may wish to grieve while at work
- Remain flexible with time off requests by those emotionally overwhelmed as a result of the event

### **6. NATIONAL SECURITY EVENTS**

The national security events considered in this section will not likely occur at the workplace. However, each can have a strong grief influence on workforce members across a large geographic area. Examples of such events include, but are not limited to:

- Terroristic Actions
- Civil Unrest (Rioting)
- Political Assassinations
- Declarations of War or Military Action

The tragic terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, set the strongest example of how national security events can create adverse grief influences in the workplace. The attacks not only brought on great shock and pain for lives lost but also decreased the secure feelings of personal safety for Americans across the country. Although the vast majorities were not present at the attack sites, many citizens felt vulnerable to physical harm and helpless in personal defense. Following that fateful morning, employees across the country carried their grief home at the end of the day and brought it back to work for well into the future.

### **Workplace Influences**

- **Productivity Levels**

- Expect negative impacts on both short-term and long-term production

- **Safe Environment**

- Employees who once felt safe in the workplace may feel unsafe and vulnerable even though the event occurred elsewhere
- Employees may feel as if being confined in a workspace following an event removes the ability to remain aware and alert to any additional events
- Be cautious for those employees who attempt to self-initiate personal protection

- **Leadership Perception**

- Employees will look to the response and follow up of organizational leadership and expect patriotic or community support
- Although leaders must remain tactful and civil, employees may become disconnected from employers who do not display resentment or offense against those who committed the event

### **Personnel Impacts**

- **Employee Turnover**

- Employees who are inactive or reservists in the military may be recalled to active duty
- May be an increase in younger employees separating employment to enlist in the military
- Employees may resign to respond and assist at the national security event site

- Employees at or over retirement age who are experiencing personal or emotional stress from the event may choose to retire
- **Workforce Interruption (Immediate)**
  - Workplace may become chaotic when employees learn of the national security event
  - May become immobilized with shock and unable to mentally function
  - May be preoccupied with looking for information through the media in breakrooms or through contacts on the telephone
  - Multiple workers may become emotional and request immediate time off from work to be with family members
- **Traumatic Distress**
  - Workers may experience symptoms of both short-term emotional shock, as well as long-term Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
  - May exhibit mood changes or fatigue on the job, as well as complain of difficulties sleeping
- **Personal Security Anxieties**
  - Workers may develop short-term and long-term concerns for personal safety on the job site
  - Long-term concerns for safety can lead to increased employee absenteeism and turnover

## **Recommended Response and Support Actions of Leadership**

- **Establish Orderly Work Environment**

- Leadership should become highly visible to employees following a national security event
- Monitor, reduce, or temporarily halt hazardous tasks
- Immediately survey all employees to determine the ability and timeline for resuming normal operations
- Identify other employees who may be emotionally overwhelmed by the event and support appropriately

- **Support Traumatized Employees**

- Be observant for employees who exhibit signs of shock following a national security event
- Offer professional emotional support to all employees
- Show concern for employee families by allowing phone calls to loved ones and early departures from work
- Allow for employee monitoring of TV and radio media for event updates
- Remain watchful in the future for employees who display symptoms of PTSD
- Be flexible with time off allowances for those with emotional and personal concerns resulting from the event

- **Reassure Safety**
  - Convey the organization's continued ability to provide a safe working environment for all employees
  - Promptly and honestly answer all employee questions about personal safety and steps taken to provide workplace safety at all times
- **Resume Work Routines**
  - Respectfully resume work routines in a respectful manner
  - Express the organization's goal of maintaining or returning to a business-as-usual environment
- **Offer Grief Support**
  - National security events can induce grief emotions, and any company-sponsored grief support should be immediately offered to all employees
  - Provide private areas for employees who may wish to grieve while at work
  - Remain flexible with time off requests by those emotionally overwhelmed as a result of the event

### **FINAL CHAPTER DECLARATIONS**

The adverse impacts of grief in the workplace do not come only with the loss of a loved one in the personal life of an employee. Many members within an organization will spend more awake time with co-workers on the job than with loved ones at home. Emotional bonds can develop over time, and the loss of a respected leader or co-worker can result in emotional grief in the workplace. This mental and physical impairment of a staff member can bring real safety and productivity risks to any

organization.

Many of the emotional responses to grief from a loss include fear and anxiety in the survivors. These very same feelings can often be prevalent in employees both during and after a major crisis event. Workplace fatalities from accidents or criminal activities may result in grief felt for the inflicted co-worker, but these incidents can also bring distressful concerns for personal safety. Additionally, matters of family member safety and personal property damage in the wake of a local disaster may cause even more adversity to many employees on the job.

The more intense influences of grief offered in this chapter usually have a greater impact in the first few days following the event. With compassionate and strong leadership within an organization, these influences should progressively decrease over a reasonably brief period of time. Every employee in the workplace, however, is unique. Some may not exhibit any grief influences, while others are visibly impaired by a traumatic incident.

This chapter included only a few possible examples of other internal and external events that could create adverse influences of employee grief. Those readers around during the tragic events of September 11, 2001, may have already known that production halting grief does not come only from the death of a loved one. It also comes from far and unfamiliar settings.

## CHAPTER FIVE ~ GRIEF COSTS TO ALL ORGANIZATIONS

---

### **GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE COST DATA**

Organizations across America collectively lose well over \$100,000,000,000 (*billion*) in annual revenue due to the impacts of grieving employees. That astronomical loss figure was first reported in 2003, at an original amount of \$75.1 billion. The findings were a result of an extensive and well-accepted study that was conducted and reported by the Grief Recovery Institute Educational Foundation of Sherman Oaks, California. The study was published under the title *Grief Index: The "Hidden" Annual Costs of Grief in America's Workplace*. At the time of the report, the institution had over 500,000 grieverers who had participated in their renowned Grief Recovery Outreach Program.

The Grief Recovery Institute (GRI) was founded in 1987, by John W. James, with the related educational foundation to be opened in 1996. James also authored the book *Grief Recovery Handbook*, which has been translated into five foreign languages. It remains in distribution today and is in use around the globe. According to James, it was the tragic terrorist events of September 11, 2001, that prompted the study, and the resulting Grief Index Report. After observing the economic impacts of mass grief that followed the terrorist events, the foundation conducted extensive interviews with institute participants to help come up with their findings.

When the Grief Index Report was published, the Wall Street Journal investigated the results with great interest. When

complete, the Journal published an article stating that *“The report is significant because of its use of as many quantitative measures as possible. **GRI counselors interviewed more than 25,000 grieving people and almost all said their job performance was affected.**”*

Following the interviews of these 25,000 grieving and employed participants by GRI counselors, twelve recognized productivity studies were used to conservatively factor the cost of a lost hour.

The cost-to-productivity findings were as follows:

Death of a loved one.....	\$37.5 billion
Death of extended family, friend, colleague.....	\$7.0 billion
Death of a pet.....	\$2.4 billion
Divorce.....	\$11.1 billion
Family crisis.....	\$9.0 billion
Financial loss.....	\$4.5 billion
Major lifestyle alterations.....	\$2.4 billion
Other losses.....	\$1.2 billion
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$75.1 billion</b>

**\$75.1 BILLION BECOMES OVER \$100 BILLION IN REVENUE LOSS**

Inflation of the U.S. dollar has played the largest role in increasing the originally reported \$75.1 billion to over \$100 billion in current annual revenue loss. Little has improved in grief support in the workplace since then, while the value of a dollar has certainly decreased over time. Between the years 2003 and 2018, the U.S. dollar experienced an average inflation rate of 2.09 percent per year. In other words, \$100.00 in 2003 was equivalent in purchasing power to \$136.47 in 2018, a difference



of \$36.47 over 15 years. That also equates to a 36.47 percent increase in costs since the Grief Index report was published. As of the year 2018, that increase in inflation alone took the \$75.1 billion figure to almost \$102.5 billion in lost annual revenue.

On top of inflation, the Grief Index Report does not address the tremendous cost of substance abuse in the workplace. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates alcoholism use will continually cost organizations at least \$249 billion each year, while illicit drugs will result in another \$193 billion in annual loss. Not surprisingly, a vast majority of substance abuse relapses occur as a direct result of the death of a loved one. This is yet another reason why the original \$75.1 billion figure is actually well over \$100 billion in lost business revenue every year.

### **STATISTICS – NO ORGANIZATION IS TOO SMALL**

Small and mid-sized organizations may have a misperception that the entity is not large enough to be impacted by grief. This may be due to leadership limiting the scope of thought only to losing a direct employee. In truth, the death of a direct employee can occur so infrequently that it has minimal bearing on productivity. It is, however, the employee who has experienced the loss of a loved one at home that creates the greatest negative impact on the bottom line.

Published figures released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) may falsely aid in misperceptions. In their 41st Annual Report on the Health of the Nation released in 2018, the CDC reported mortality figures recorded through 2016. These findings showed an average death rate of 823.7 per

100,000 persons each year. This was an average annual death rate of less than one in one-hundred persons. Indeed, this number will not seem substantial to a smaller organization that may only experience the death of an employee every few years.

Again, the loss of an employee is not where the majority of the negative influences of grief originate for an organization. It is mainly derived from the employee who has experienced the death of a loved one at home and has returned to work with the resulting grief. To consider loved ones further, the Pew Research Center reported that 2.4 is the current average number of children per married couple in America. Combine the children with a spouse, as well as possible siblings and living parents, and the possibilities multiply exponentially for grief impacting an employer.

The U.S. Census Bureau places 3.14 as the average number of persons per household. This helps to account for those unmarried employees involved in domestic partnerships, younger employees residing with parents or other relationships where persons cohabitate in a household environment. Regardless of the makeup, the possibility exists that when one member in the relationship has passed away, the surviving partner will bring the resulting negative impacts back to an organization.

A 2017 report from the American Hospice Foundation revealed that an average of **four million employees** in the American workforce experience the death of a loved one each year. Yet, that astronomical number does not include the nearly **one million women** on average who will experience

miscarriages annually or the other **26,000** who will experience a stillbirth. This data is provided by the U.S. CDC and does not determine how many of these grieving women, or their emotionally impacted partners, were employed at the time of the loss. However, the probability can be argued that a significant number were employed, and only add further to the potential for grief being brought to the job.

It also bears notice that the U.S. Department of Labor places the average of thirty-five as an employee's prime age of productivity. This is the golden year when an employee's talents, work experience, and motivation are at peak performance. The CDC, on the other hand, reports the age of thirty-five is also the average year for adults who experience the death of a child.

While the passing of an employee's loved one has a negative impact on any organization, other events that invoke grief emotions can be prevalent in the workplace, as well. For instance, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2016, the number of deaths *on the job* was 4,836 employees. Industrial accidents, workplace violence, and even the natural death of a leader or co-worker can all have long-term influences on productivity. Outside the workplace, employees may experience such life-altering events as an unwanted divorce, a sudden financial downfall, or a major decline in personal health. These types of events can all have negative influences on the affected employee and adversely impact the organization.

The information provided within this chapter should have left the reader with no question that all organizations, small to large, are influenced by grief in the workplace. The recognition of this fundamental fact is paramount to leadership who truly regard the

employee as the most valuable asset within the organization.

## CHAPTER SIX ~ GRIEF LOSS IN REVENUE AND PRODUCTIVITY

---

### **DIRECT AND INDIRECT COSTS OF GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE**

The once coveted model for an organization was that personal problems brought to work only presented a barrier to getting the job done. Yet, even today, some of the most forward-thinking leaders fail to bring up the topic of grief when it comes to business planning. In many cases, this can be attributed to ignoring or misunderstanding human emotions. Supervisory personnel who misunderstand the influences of grief in the workplace often chastise, or even threaten the emotionally impaired employee with disciplinary actions.

One of the primary errors in judgment can be a leader's belief that a newly bereaved employee will *just get over it*. Even if initially recognized and supported by the organization, the compassions felt for the employee often fade within days. However, some internal and external symptoms of grief may not manifest in the suffering worker for many weeks or even months beyond the loss event. This delayed reaction can confuse the observing leader who does not hold some level of understanding in the grief healing processes.

The adverse mental and physical impacts of grief from the death of a spouse, life-partner, or child can be personally challenging to the bereaved employee. On a professional level, the griever will typically not leave the influences at home, as the painful emotions are too powerful to set aside. Therefore, leadership must not only consider grief to be a risk to productivity

but for workplace safety, as well. Negative and even tragic consequences can take place on the job when just one of the griever's potentially negative behaviorisms is introduced into the workplace.

Each of the sections that follow will provide areas where grief can have significant consequences to an organization's revenue, productivity, and safety.

### **ABSENTEEISM**

Unscheduled absenteeism from work is a great expense to organizations in America. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a report in 2016 that revealed productivity losses due to absenteeism from work had cost employers a staggering **\$225.8 billion**. That equates to **\$1,685** per employee in that year alone.

When considering the adverse impacts of grief in the workplace, unscheduled absenteeism is not uncommon. In addition to the data already discussed in the previous chapter, the Grief Recovery Institute study also found that one in four employees on the job will be grieving at any given time. That research also revealed that an estimated 30 work days are lost each year by **employees going through loss without employer and co-worker support**. Further, 20 percent of those grieving employees will continue missing workdays for a year or more after the initial loss event.

### **INCREASED ACCIDENTS/INJURIES**

On Memorial Day in 2012, then U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis stated in a speech, "Every day in America, thirteen people go to work and never come home. Every year in America, nearly

four million people suffer a workplace injury from which some never recover.”

Grieving employees, especially the newly bereaved, can often be mentally and physically impaired by overwhelming emotions at some level. Even a slight impairment can cause risk to the physical safety of an affected employee, as well as to others in the workplace. The Grief Recovery Institute’s Grief Index Report cited in Chapter Five of this book also speaks to safety. Over 25,000 interviewed griever reported being actively employed during and after the death of a loved one. Of the grievers who identified as front-line employees, 90 percent reported injuries after returning to the job that were directly related to the influences of grief. These accidents and injuries account for preventable direct and indirect costs to an organization.

### **HIGHER WORKER’S COMPENSATION RATES**

Injuries on the job go well beyond just paying for the employee’s medical bills and lost wages. It can also cost a business more in Worker’s Compensation Insurance. In the year 2016, The U.S. Occupational and Health Administration estimated that employers paid out over **\$1 billion per week** for direct worker’s compensation costs. That figure equates to a collective **\$52 billion** to U.S. businesses in one year alone.

An injury on the job will add to an organization’s loss history, as recorded and maintained either by a state or national rating bureau, depending on the business location. Each injury will be used as a critical part in calculating the entity’s loss history, and therefore the cost rate of Worker’s Compensation Insurance. With the knowledge that 90 percent of bereaved employees

injured on the job attributed the injury to grief from the loss, a strong leader must remain observant of those who perform medium to high-risk tasks.

### **HIGHER GENERAL LIABILITY/PROPERTY DAMAGE COSTS**

The higher risks for accidents and injuries for a grieving employee have the potential for causing damage to assets of an organization, as well as those of the customer. While many factors can go into calculating the premium rate charged by the insurer, a certain future cost factor is always the previous claim history. The more claims that are made equate to a greater risk for the policy carrier and will increase the cost to an organization.

### **HIGHER TURNOVER RATES**

The death of a loved one is a life-changing event for many survivors. The emotional impact of loss can sometimes result in a newly bereaved worker separating employment. Some grievers may be near, or beyond, retirement age and a loved one's death could facilitate a desire in the employee to leave the concerns of work behind. Perhaps another newly bereaved employee becomes emotionally unable to work after the loss and determines it best to resign for the immediate future. Another grieving employee may be unable to perform tasks as required and is involuntarily terminated by an unsupportive supervisor. In these and other separation cases related to grief, the unfortunate result is an increased hiring cost to the employing organization.

The negative impacts of employee turnover hit an organization in cost aspects of both overhead and production. Most importantly, the skills, knowledge, and ability to contribute to the company's goals, profit, and performance will



also exit the job with a separating employee. According to the Society of Human Resource Management, the business turnover rate of employees in 2016 was 18.1 percent. In 2017, the rate climbed to a 19 percent turnover rate.

The direct cost of turnover can be added up from the various sections in this chapter. However, other indirect areas of revenue can be impacted by turnover, such as lower employee morale. This can stem from overworked employees who have had increased workloads and responsibilities due to decreased staffing. Lower productivity and inferior product quality can also result from a disruption in daily operations due to the use of inexperienced replacement employees.

### **INCREASED HIRING COSTS**

In 2016, the Society for Human Resource Management's Human Capital Benchmarking Report revealed that it takes an average of 42 days to fill a vacant position. The average cost-per-hire was \$4,129, or approximately 38 percent of the employee's annual salary. That monetary figure speaks volumes on its own.

### **INCREASED TRAINING COSTS**

According to the Association for Talent Development's most recent State of the Industry Report, organizations spend an average of \$1,208 per employee on training and development. For companies with fewer than 500 workers, that number is even higher, coming in at \$1,888 per employee. According to the same study, organizations are spending an average of 31.5 hours per year training employees.

Training costs likely include both the supervisor and employee's time during formal training, on-the-job training,

instruction materials, and equipment. There are often other hidden costs that include the loss of productivity until the new hire attains proficiency and the cost of time for the new employee to network and collaborate with other important co-workers.

### **ERRORS IN TASKS**

In 2008, the global analyst firm IDC issued a white paper that examined workplace human error in the form of “employee misunderstanding” and its financial impact on 400 U.S. and U.K. businesses. Although an older study, the report showed the average cost of misunderstandings at a company with 100,000 employees was then \$62.4 million per year. Combined, U.S. and U.K. organizations were losing an estimated \$37 billion in revenue every year. The cost of intangibles like reputation and customer trust could have even greater consequences. Employee misunderstandings are not the only potential error in tasks that could result from the grieving employee. The overwhelming influences of grief emotions on the bereaved can create errors in performance, errors in memory, and errors in judgment, as well.

Errors by grieving workers are not respectful of employment title or position. In the Grief Recovery Institute’s *Grief Index Report* cited in Chapter Five of this book, over 25,000 interviewed griever reported being actively employed during and after the death of a loved one. Of the griever who identified as managerial or supervisory, 85 percent reported errors in judgment on the job that were directly related to the emotional influences of grief. Further, the grieving leaders reported that errors in judgment continued for at least six months beyond the initial grief event.

### **INCOMPLETE TASKS**

The emotional impairment of grief may lead some bereaved employees to fail or delay the completion of assigned tasks. The direct and indirect costs for this grief impact could come from additional workforce required to complete time-sensitive projects, or increased supervision over the affected employee to ensure eventual completion of tasks. There could also be a reduction in workforce morale whenever other employees are relied upon to complete more than the usual workload. In many cases, incomplete tasks will cause delayed production and impact clients, suppliers, and other associates of the organization.

### **DISRUPTION TO WORKPLACE ORDER**

Grief has the potential to cause a great deal of stress in anyone who has experienced the recent death of a loved one. This overwhelming stress can sometimes cause a grieving employee to become antagonistic and impatient towards other workers on the job. This includes supervision and anyone in a position of authority over the griever. As a result, the bereaved employee can become insubordinate and disruptive to the orderly environment at the workplace.

Insubordination creates several problems. Most directly, the insubordinate worker undermines supervision and the organization itself by not carrying out roles or assigned responsibilities. This can lead to tension, lower morale, and lower productivity.

Unchecked insubordination can be devastating to an organization. A grieving and stressed employee who creates conflict and discord in the workplace has the potential to reduce productivity and increase overhead costs. Conflict in the

workplace can also create a hostile work environment. Other employees who follow the rules may become frustrated or annoyed when disruptions force other employees to pick up the slack of the insubordinate worker.

### **DISRUPTION TO CLIENTS, PARTNERS & SUPPLIERS**

When the negative influences of employee grief are brought to the workplace it can halt or delay production and deliveries of products or services. It can also weaken relations and mutual respect with business partners and suppliers. Satisfied customers spend more money, while dissatisfied customers are very costly to the bottom line. Resolving poor production or delivery issues requires extensive follow-up involvement for leadership. Every time a customer must initiate questions, request a refund, or return a defective product, it costs immediate money as well as future revenue.

It is widely known that satisfied customers remain customers longer. A recent Harvard Business Review study shows that customers who report high levels of satisfaction have a 74 percent chance of still being a customer a year later. Only 43 percent who rated their experience less than high would stick around for another year. Dissatisfied customers also tend to share their disappointment with others. With today's numerous social media platforms, one unhappy customer can instantly share a negative experience with not only friends or industry partners but with the whole world.

## CHAPTER SEVEN ~ GRIEF IMPACTS ON THE EMPLOYEE

---

### **PHASES AND TIMELINES OF THE NORMAL GRIEVER**

Someone experiencing the profound death of a loved one, such as a partner or a child, does not *just get over it*. Contrary to another myth, time does not heal all wounds, either. Time can never fully heal the pain, as life will never again be the desired *normal* it once was for the survivor. Time can, however, lessen the pain. Accordingly, the bereaved employee's initial return to work after a loss represents the period of greatest risk to safety and productivity in an organization.

Not all newly bereaved employees will present a risk. Approximately 80 to 90 percent of recently grieved workers will return to the job after bereavement leave capable of performing previous tasks. These employees have moved forward from the debilitating emotional shock of loss and begun the healthy healing processes that are typical in the *normal griever*. Even then, leadership must not expect all grieving workers to instantly perform at previous levels of proficiency. With support both on and off the job, however, the normal griever should soon be back to usual standards.

The term *normal* is used for a griever who is moving forward in the healthful manner that is required when emotionally healing from a loss. There is never complete healing for many who have experienced the death of a loved one, just as there is no exact timeline or stages. Healing from the loss remains an individual process where no two persons will manage grief in the same

manner. Yet, there are some common watermarks. Generally, the newly bereaved can spend four to six weeks in the *Acute Grief Phase*. During these weeks, the griever will continually work through such painful feelings as denial, guilt, anger, and regret. Obviously, all these feelings can be both mentally and physically debilitating to the sufferer. The adverse influences on the newly bereaved at work must be monitored closely by organizational leadership.

As the Acute Grief Phase ends, the bereaved employee will typically transition into the *Integrated or Abiding Grief Phase*. There are those in the mental health professions who consider this phase to be one of the desired end-points in the grief healing processes. In this Integrated Phase, reflections of the deceased and the loss remain present for many years into the future, but no longer overwhelm the griever's mind. Many of the bereaved who have reached this phase report a better outlook on life, live more intentionally, and rearrange life's priorities.

The painful emotions of loss can still have impacts well into the future. Even the normal griever in the Integrated Phase may temporarily reenter the Acute Phase several times as far out as six months to a year beyond the transition. This can come without warning to the bereaved, and result in experiencing the pains of the loss as if it had just occurred. In these instances, the griever may again experience emotional dysfunctions similar to those present early in the Acute Phase.

Referring to the Grief Recovery Institute's *Grief Index Report* cited in Chapter Five of this book, over 25,000 active, grieving employees were interviewed as part of the widely-accepted

study. One data collection method that was used required that the participants be separated into groups who identified as either management, supervisory, or front-line personnel. Of those groups, 85 percent of managers and supervisors reported *major errors* in judgment or performance at work due to the emotional influences of grief. Further, 90 percent of the front-line employees who suffered reportable *injuries on the job* directly related the incidents to grief from loss. Of importance in repeating this study result is that all employed participants reported the error or injury-inducing influences of grief went on for at least six months beyond the loss event.

### **THE COMPLICATED GRIEVER**

The use of the word *complicated* in Complicated Grief can be clarified through the medical description for a Complicated Wound: When a physical wound to the human body is left untended it becomes infected and inflammatory, delays the healing, becomes more painful, and often threatens to cause further health issues. It is no longer just a simple wound, but a complicated wound that requires immediate medical intervention. Complicated Grief is the mental equivalent to a Complicated Wound. Of those who experienced the death of a loved one, 10 to 20 percent of newly bereaved employees will experience some form of Complicated Grief.

The newly grieved worker who returns to the job quickly and displays no emotions for a loved one's death may be suffering Complicated Grief in the form of *Avoidance*, *Delayed* or *Repressed Grief*. Another bereaved employee may have moved forward after several months but bounces back and forth

frequently between the Acute and the Integrated Phases of Grief. This could be considered *Prolonged Grief*. While there are even more categories of Complicated Grief, the results are similar to that of an untended wound in the body. Mental inflammation and infection further delay the healing processes. The pain only grows and there is a risk for future health and safety concerns for self and others. Also like a Complicated Wound, healing Complicated Grief often requires the intervention of professional support.

In the first several months after the death of a loved one, the symptoms of Complicated Grief can be difficult to detect in a bereaved employee. During the Acute Phase, deep grieving is not necessarily a sign of emotional and psychological issues. If the acute grief behaviors seem to only intensify as more time passes, or persist for six months or longer, the suffering employee may indeed have developed Complicated Grief.

It is not the intent of this book to infer that organizational leaders can professionally diagnose symptoms of Complicated Grief in an employee. However, observant leaders with awareness and understanding of grief can certainly act when an employee displays the potential for Complicated Grief. If risks to safety and productivity are apparent, then the affected employee should be relieved from tasks until such time that safe performance can be demonstrated.

At the minimum, a bereaved employee who is exhibiting signs of Complicated Grief should be strongly encouraged to seek intervention through grief support services. Caution should be taken whenever considering mandating support as a condition of



continued employment, as well as any potential disciplinary action or involuntary relief from assignments. Leadership should consult with members of the organization who are responsible for maintaining knowledge in current employment laws and other controlling principles concerning remedial and disciplinary employee actions.

### **FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF**

A common misuse of great research comes from the popular *Five Stages of Grief* model. Although valuable for one type of griever, it is often incorrectly used by many counselors, clergy and grief support specialists. The five stages model was not developed for a survivor who is grieving the death of a loved one. Instead, it was based on the observations of terminally ill patients who were knowingly advancing toward imminent death. In healing from a loss, however, there is no one-size-fits-all model that predictably moves along abrupt stages or a linear timeline.

In 1969, Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross published the book *On Death and Dying* based on her research with living but terminally ill patients. In her work, Dr. Ross observed that the patients who were knowingly approaching death tended to follow five progressive *stages* of emotional awareness. These stages began with *denial*, followed then by *anger*, *bargaining*, and *depression* before the terminally patient eventually came to *acceptance* of their pending mortality.

Originally, Dr. Kübler-Ross named her model *The Five Stages of Receiving Catastrophic News*. However, before the book was first published, she changed the model name to *The Five Stages of Grief*. Since the release of her book, many mental health

providers and caregivers erroneously morphed the model to include those grieving the death of a loved one. As tragic as anticipation of certain death can be, however, it is far different than the emotions felt by the survivor after loss of a partner or child.

Any well-intended but misguided grief supporters who use Kübler-Ross' Five Stages of Grief model may adversely impact a griever who experienced the loss of a loved one. For example, a newly bereaved survivor who has been introduced to the Five Stages of Grief model may falsely believe it is the only healthy way to heal from the loss. When the griever fails to progress along the prescribed five stages, it could greatly impair and delay the true healing processes.

In more modern grief work there is another conspicuous variance to Kübler-Ross' five stages. In her model, *acceptance* is the final stage of grief. However, acceptance should be the first accomplishment for a griever when healthfully healing from the loss of a loved one. Without acceptance, it is not possible for the newly bereaved to move forward.

### **PHYSICAL & MENTAL IMPACTS OF GRIEF ON THE EMPLOYEE**

All individuals experience emotions. Arguably, humanity would not survive without having and responding to internal feelings in some manner. When grieving the profound loss of a loved one, the newly bereaved will either be suffering painful emotions never felt before or feeling them at levels far deeper than ever in the past.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *emotion* as *a conscious mental reaction (such as anger or fear) subjectively*

*experienced as strong feelings usually directed toward a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes in the body.*

Of importance is the last line in the definition that indicates an emotion will typically be accompanied by physiological (physical) and behavioral (mental) changes. These are changes to the body, as well as to the mental processes of the mind. In the newly bereaved employee, the more severe physical and mental influences are usually temporary and more prevalent early after a loss. However, complicated, or prolonged grief can extend the period of time the severe influences are experienced by a bereaved employee.

The adverse physical and mental impact indicators in the following sections may not be easily recognized in the bereaved employee on the job. In truth, the impacts are not often initially apparent to the suffering employee, either. When one or more are exhibited or experienced, it can actually come as a surprise to both the unaware leader and the emotionally impacted employee.

### **PHYSICAL IMPACTS OF GRIEF ON THE EMPLOYEE**

What follows are just some of the more common *physiological impacts* (body and body chemistry) of grief experienced by those who have suffered the recent death of a loved one:

- **Insomnia** - It is common for the newly bereaved to experience a change in their sleeping patterns in the days and weeks following the loss of a loved one. Grievers may have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. Reasons why a griever might have difficulty sleeping include

intrusive thoughts, anxieties, and fears. The griever may be anxious about recurring dreams of the initial loss event or want to avoid sleeping in the bed once shared with the deceased partner.

- **Loss of Appetite** - The negative feelings associated with grief can leave the newly bereaved with a lack of appetite and disinterest in food or eating. From a nutritional perspective, this leads to undernutrition and weight loss. Also, the physiological effects of depression, as well as isolation and lack of social support, can have further negative impacts on the griever's dietary intake, and therefore, physical health.
- **Restlessness** - After the loss event, the griever may be unsure of what to do next. The bereaved may feel hesitant and unsure of a self-ability to make decisions. Often, the loss event can seem to take control away from the affected employee, and there is a resulting need to *do something*, even when not possible. Restlessness could result in short periods of hyperactivity when the bereaved employee performs busy work, such as cleaning, or putting away supplies. This can then be followed by periods of just sitting, yet appearing anxious or nervous, but unfocused.
- **Fatigue** - Extreme fatigue and exhaustion are common experiences for many newly bereaved employees. Obvious reasons can be lack of sleep and malnutrition. However, stress is heavily present in grief from loss and is a major contributor to fatigue. Stress overworks the body's adrenal glands, which specifically deal with human

survival responses in the *fight or flight* mode. Prolonged stress leads to adrenal exhaustion, and if unchecked, to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

- **Muscle Weakness** - The ability of the bereaved employee to exert physical efforts may be reduced even without feelings of exhaustion. Tension from anxiety alone can leave a grieved worker physically weak. Add in possible nutritional deficiencies, insomnia, as well as prolonged periods of emotional stress, and the body muscles do not receive adequate fuel or rest to recover. A recently bereaved employee may be willing to perform physical tasks but will often be unable to do so on the higher levels performed before the loss event.
- **Body Aches and Pains** - Grievors may complain of aches and pains in the body, although not recently involved in physical trauma or increased activities. One accepted theory is psychosomatic, meaning bodily symptoms caused by the mental or emotional influences of the mind. Aches and pains are felt when the grieving employee's mind involuntarily reduces oxygen to certain parts of the body, causing the sensation of physical pain. This is unconsciously intended to distract the conscious mind in attempts to avoid the emotional pains of grief.
- **Headaches/Migraines** - The newly bereaved often experience headaches, and at times, debilitating migraine headaches. While psychological distress alone can trigger the conditions, there are often multiple causes implicated in grief. Other factors include a change of diet, lack of

nutrition, altered sleep patterns, and other negative influences that can cause headaches and migraines.

- **Overall Health Issues** - The emotional distress from the death of a loved one can result in lifestyle changes to the bereaved employee. The griever may move from, or even give up, such behaviors as maintaining a healthy diet or exercising regularly. The suffering employee may go beyond the physical limitations of the body during the emotional confusions that result from loss. Existing medical conditions can be exasperated, especially if prescribed medications are missed or ceased due to forgetfulness or other emotional stressors.
- **Heart Palpitations/Tightness in Chest/Shortness of Breath** - A grieving employee may suddenly complain of symptoms indicating a possible heart attack, with pain and tightness in the chest, as well as shortness of breath. In these cases, a heart attack must be ruled out immediately by proper medical personnel. However, per the Mayo Clinic, this also may be a physical response to grief known as stress-induced cardiomyopathy or *broken heart syndrome*. These symptoms may be brought on by the heart's reaction to a surge of stress hormones that cause a part of the heart to temporarily enlarge and not pump as efficiently. Per the Mayo Clinic, the condition is treatable and typically reverses in short order. Regardless, either condition requires immediate attention *by proper medical personnel*.
- **Gastric/Stomach Pains** - The bereaved may experience

changes to normal eating habits which will influence the gastric functions of the body. The stress can lead to loss of appetite, or on the other end of the spectrum, overeating. This can lead to numerous digestive conditions, including nausea and indigestion. While generally short-term, longer periods can lead to intestinal disorders like diarrhea, constipation, dehydration, and excessive weight loss or gain.

- **Decreased Immunity/Sickliness** - Increased stress levels, poor diet, lack of sleep, and other grief-induced influences on physical health can weaken the body's immune system. This leads to more frequent illnesses for the newly bereaved employee, such as colds and flu. However, the emotional stress from grief can also interfere with the body's ability to fight the more severe bacterial infections, like pneumonia, meningitis, and food poisoning.

### **MENTAL IMPACTS OF GRIEF TO EMPLOYEE**

What follows are the most common *psychological impacts* (mental and emotional state) of grief experienced by those employees who have suffered the recent death of a loved one:

- **Lack of Concentration** - This is often referred to as brain fog. The griever's mind may be unwittingly attempting to process so many emotions or related stressors that it overwhelms conscious effort to focus on a specific task. Often, a newly bereaved employee cannot concentrate and will gaze into the distance for long periods. At other times, the griever may begin a project, but lose concentration shortly after beginning the task.

- **Confusion** - *How could this happen? How could I have stopped it from happening?* Grief events are generally unexpected. That leaves the newly bereaved employee with questions about the loss, as well as about life that have no easy or immediate answer. The mind will repetitively ask such questions until answered, or until it eventually accepts that there is no answer. This unwillingly consumes a great deal of conscious thought that is normally reserved for receiving input from others at work. The employee may appear to pay attention, but the details from discussions and directives can often be overshadowed by the persistent unanswered questions that overwhelm the mind of the bereaved employee.
- **Memory Loss** - The death of a loved one can take up enormous mental space and energy in the mind of a newly bereaved employee. As a result, the griever's mental memory center can be compulsively occupied with more grief related requests. Previously known details, tasks, and appointments can be temporarily forgotten. Memory gaps of the past may develop, and the suffering employee may have garbled or mixed recollections of earlier events or conversations.
- **Anxiousness** - *Who am I now? What does the future hold for me?* Such difficult self-questioning is often played out in the mind of the newly bereaved employee. These and many similar questions surrounding the loss of a loved one have no easy or immediate answer. The inability to come to an answer creates fear, and unalleviated fear creates



nervousness and anxiety. Grief also creates many unpleasant emotions. The griever will have to face these emotions but will be mentally uneasy in doing so. Fear, nervousness, and unease felt by the bereaved employee create anxiety that will often manifest negatively in the workplace.

- **Distractedness** - Lack of concentration, confusion, memory loss, and anxiousness may all, individually or collectively, give the appearance of a lack of focus for a newly bereaved employee. Also, the early griever's mind will typically be challenged with extreme emotional pains that present involuntarily and overwhelm all other thoughts. Distractedness may become prevalent in leadership observations as the griever attempts to process these mental grief pressures while performing tasks on the job.
- **Mental Exhaustion** - The newly bereaved employee may experience the cumulative mental impacts caused by excessive and prolonged stress from the loss. This typically occurs when the griever feels overwhelmed and emotionally drained yet faces the on-going demands of life and work expectations. Mental exhaustion may also increase physical exhaustion in the affected employee.
- **Lethargy** - The emotional stress of the loss of a loved one often leaves a newly bereaved employee feeling tired, fatigued, and lacking energy. This is the result of overwhelming emotional stress, altered diet, and a disruption of normal sleep patterns. Lethargy may cause

the employee to feel sleepy, physically and mentally drained, and sluggish. This sluggishness can be in terms of movements or in cognitive thinking abilities, and lead to concerns for safety in the workplace.

- **Mood Extremes** - The newly bereaved employee can often experience negative emotions, including anger, confusion, and despair. These negative feelings can potentially be at intensity levels never experienced by the griever in the past. While the processing of emotions is generally internal to the bereaved, it may become overwhelming and the emotions displayed more outwardly. For example, a newly bereaved employee who is casually working suddenly begins crying loudly, then surprisingly becomes angry and speaks in an agitated tone of voice to nearby workers.
- **Denial of Realities** - The death of a loved one for a newly bereaved employee was an unwelcome and unwanted event. Denial of the loss can often be a common conscious coping mechanism for the survivor. Although deceptive, it mentally provides the overwhelmed griever with short-term relief. Even if only temporarily successful, however, the griever may carry this coping mechanism over into other areas, such with difficult tasks, assignments, or supervision on the job.
- **Withdrawal** - Fears, unanswered life questions, guilt, and other emotions contribute greatly to the anxiety levels of the early griever. Anxiety is also a leading cause of social withdrawal, as apprehensions can become overwhelming.

A newly bereaved employee who is back on the job may also feel concerned that others will observe and judge any perceived grief expressions in a negative way. Further, the grieved employee may feel isolated in suffering and therefore unable to relate to others. As a result, the bereaved employee withdraws by avoiding supervision, co-workers, and activities that mutually support the workforce.

- **Distrust of Self and Others** - The death of a loved one is typically outside the control of the newly bereaved employee. Yet, the control over one's perceived realm of responsibilities can be a very instinctive trait for humans. After the sudden and unexpected death of a loved one, the grieving employee may have feelings of personal inadequacy and distrust in the ability for managing other responsibilities in life. Conversely, the griever may also fault others for the loved one's death, and thereby determine no one else can be trusted but self. Either distrust reaction can transition to the workplace where offers for assistance or teamwork from others is avoided or declined by the griever. The bereaved employee may refrain from seeking usual advice or counsel from supervisors and shun any once-respected views from experienced leaders or co-workers.
- **Loss of Faith** - The majority of cultures around the globe believes in a higher power and considers religious beliefs to be part of self-worth. The unexpected loss of a loved one can cause some bereaved employees to question or even lose convictions of faith. Feelings of hopelessness,

despondency, and despair can be typical when deep-rooted beliefs become uncertain to the believer. A loss of religious faith can also lead to a loss of faith in self, as well as a faith in others. Any loss of faith transitioned to the workplace may result in a loss of motivation and creativity, as well as lead to a withdrawal from co-workers by the grieved employee.

- **Depression** - Shortly after the loss, the newly bereaved employee may begin to fully contemplate being without the deceased loved one. The loss is typically life-altering and greatly unwanted. The griever's mind may therefore unwittingly struggle for answers on how to return to that previous life. When those answers cannot be found, the bereaved may come to believe that life will never be good again and that nothing or no one can change that outlook. That false belief can lead to an overall depressed state-of-mind for the suffering employee. When depression is transitioned to the workplace, the bereaved employee may appear fatigued and lacking energy. The griever may become isolated and avoid others on the job. A depressed employee may avoid socializing at work but will often accept support from close peers and respected leaders. As long as it does not lead to harm for the griever or others, some levels of depression in grief are normal, short-term, and part of the grief healing processes. The bereaved employee is mentally coming face-to-face with an unwanted but unavoidable reality. True depression, however, is a clinical disorder that can lead to long-term

feelings of hopelessness and despondency. If left unchecked, it could also lead to suicidal tendencies. Any bereaved employee who exhibits symptoms of possible severe or long-term depression should be encouraged by leadership to seek intervention through mental health professionals.



## CHAPTER EIGHT ~ EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

---

An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is an outsourced employee service provider that may be contracted for use by an organization. The programs provided by an EAP are designed to offer confidential help to participating employees in dealing with a range of work-life stressors. These include such issues as family, mental health, and financial concerns, as well as substance abuse and legal issues. For the contracting organization, an EAP is an effort of preventing an employee's personal matters from carrying over into the workplace.

The concepts presented in *Grief in the Workplace* are not intended to replace an EAP provider within a business. For the sound organization, however, an EAP is only a marginal tool for use in support of a grieving employee. The false assumption that it is the total solution for mitigating over *\$100 billion in shared annual revenue loss* only furthers the truth that grief remains a hidden cost in American business.

Early EAP services actually began just after World War II, as a means of helping the many returning soldiers who frequently became alcoholic employees. The tremendous growth of these services really began in earnest in the 1970s, and currently, there are over 7,000 direct employees of EAP companies in the United States. The use of these providers is extremely popular in today's business. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) recently reported that over 97 percent of U.S. companies with more than 5,000 employees contract out to

an EAP provider. Another 80 percent with 1,001 - 5,000 employees use one, as do 75 percent of U.S. organizations with 251 - 1,000 employees.

With the mental health support offered through an EAP, it is not uncommon for a business leader to erroneously discount the concepts provided throughout this book. If approached with the suggestion that all leadership personnel should be coached in grief awareness and understanding, an unwise leader may respond by stating, "We don't need that. We already use an EAP." Tactful replies to that response, however, might include the question, "Why, then, with all the EAP services under contract today, does grief still account for over \$100 billion in loss to American revenue each and every year?"

Many organizational leaders look to EAP providers to be the end-all-and-do-all support for the bereaved employee. This is due, in part, to *mortality* being a very difficult and sensitive subject. The thought of death can be uncomfortable to the mind, and it is not often voluntarily considered in business planning sessions. Also, the old business model yet remains in some organizations that employees should leave their personal lives at home. The death of an employee's family member is a personal matter, and anything related should remain away from the job site. For these reasons and others, the unpleasant and messy responsibility of employee grief support is exclusively relegated off-site to an EAP service.

Providing the availability of mental health services to a newly bereaved employee through an EAP is commendable on the part of any organization. Yet, the misconceptions begin there with the



notion that once offered, all that could be done for a grieving employee has been done by the company. Another big misconception is that the bereaved employee will take the EAP support offered, *just get over it*, and be right back to previous standards on the job. However, the ultimate organizational goals of mitigating loss and supporting the bereaved employee are rarely achieved with the sole offer of an EAP.

It is essential to first consider that EAP providers are third-party, profit-based business entities. In the past, EAPs typically used licensed counselors to provide employee services either in-person, by telephone, and even over the internet. Up to six sessions were generally offered free of charge. That would change with the financial crisis of 2008 in America. After that, many *free to the employee* EAP services began operating on an *assess-and-refer* model. In this newer approach, the participating employee would call the EAP phone number and be referred to a fourth-party mental health provider. This could result in a possible claim on the employer's health care plan.

The last thing either any employee or employer desires is to initiate more insurance claims. If the organization is experience-rated, with the insurance company reviewing annual health care costs, then the price of premiums could rise dramatically with EAP use. If the program is merely directing more traffic to the health care plan, then it is costing the organization, and the employees, more money in the long term.

An issue that a strong leader never desires is the lack of accountability within the organization. In the typical employee assistance model, the company will outsource employee support

to the third-party EAP provider. That third-party then outsources the employee support again to fourth-party vendors in the mental health professions. This multi-tiered relationship clearly inserts several layers of separation and decreased accountability between the organization, the troubled employee, the EAP service, and that fourth-party mental health provider.

Along with accountability, an organization must also consider the historically low employee participation rate of an EAP service. According to other recent SHRM reporting, only three to seven percent of eligible employees will take advantage of an offered program. One reason for this low use rate may be attributed to the negative stigma of the service itself. EAPs are often thought of solely in the context of employer-initiated intervention for workers with mental health and substance abuse issues. Regardless of confidentiality, many employees wrongfully believe that involvement with the program might be discovered and result in condemnation by supervisors and peers. Because of this fear, much-needed support is often turned away by reluctant, yet troubled employees.

Another negative EAP concern is in the frequency of support for the emotionally suffering worker. A bereaved employee who actually does elect to participate will only receive mental health support on the fourth-party provider's schedule. Counseling sessions might be scheduled weekly, bi-monthly, monthly, or even more infrequently, and are limited in the number of allowable free visits. Acute grief emotions, however, do not follow a prescribed schedule, and a bereaved employee can become anxious when help is delayed by days, weeks, or even

months.

Given the extremely adverse impacts of grief on the job, it does not seem sound for an organization to exclusively rely on a third-party provider for the total solution. It seems even less sound for yet another layer of added separation when the total solution is farmed out by the third-party to a fourth-party. Further, it should never be considered sound business to rely on any outsourced program that historically holds only a three to seven percent participation rate. Frankly, most business leaders would halt every internal program with such low yields, as well. All combined, it would be difficult to positively value an EAP service as the sole grief support solution for the bereaved employee or the organization.

Again, the intent in this chapter is not to discount the use of an EAP service. Yet, with so much at risk, any support programs for bereaved employees should also include the concepts found in this book. The practice by leadership of the awareness and understanding of grief's impacts will mean that support is consistent and ongoing. It provides continual accountability and holds a 100 percent participation rate with or without the affected employee's knowledge. It has little to no relative costs, either. Yet, the proven concepts will only help mitigate an organization's share of over \$100 billion in lost annual revenue resulting from *Grief in the Workplace*.



## CHAPTER NINE ~ ACTIVE AND PASSIVE GRIEF SUPPORT

---

Each year, 10 to 15 percent of working-aged parents will experience the death of a child. These findings are the result of a commissioned study by The Compassionate Friends, a large, non-profit organization that supports grieving parents. These findings indicate that a company with 1,000 employees could face the potential for 100 to 150 new influences of grief in the workplace every year. While these numbers may seem too incredible, consider that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports an average of over 57,000 deaths to children under the age of 19 in the United States every year.

Along with the 10 to 15 percent for tragic child loss, many working-aged adults will experience the death of a spouse, life-partner, sibling, or parent each year. Add to that the astronomical number of working aged women who annually experience a miscarriage or stillbirth. Even without providing empirical averages, it is fair to subjectively consider that these additional losses further increase an organization's yearly exposure to the negative impacts of grief.

For any number of unfortunate reasons, only a small fraction of newly bereaved employees will seek or accept offers of support from outside sources. This is regardless of being sponsored through an employer, or available within the community. However, more passive styles of grief support have also been shown to drastically benefit the bereaved. A compassionate organization, therefore, will have already

sourced all forms of available grief support, both internal and external, and be prepared to provide these options to all bereaved employees.

The sections that follow in this chapter will outline the various forms of grief support, including the professional and peer-to-peer formats. There is also a section dedicated to the appropriate timing in offering and encouraging the employee to take advantage of internal and external programs. In addition, the final section provides the comprehensive benefits potentially realized when an employer advocates grief support to a bereaved employee.

### **ACTIVE GRIEF SUPPORT**

Active grief support can be considered as any organized grief support program that is available to a bereaved employee. One of the most widely considered support avenues is the mental health services offered through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). One negative aspect of this service worth repeating is that EAPs only average a three to seven percent participation rate by eligible employees. This lack of involvement makes it imperative for wise leaders to have other means of grief support identified and available to the bereaved employee.

Organizations can greatly benefit from other external grief support services that are typically available within the local communities. These include independent grief support counselors and clergy, as well as many hospice providers and funeral homes. In addition, there are many large, well structured, national grief support organizations currently in existence in the United States. Many of these non-profit, peer-to-peer support

groups have long-standing regional chapters located in almost every city throughout the country and are free of cost.

Each grief support regional chapter maintains appropriate leadership and dozens, or even hundreds, of local members who gather regularly in conventional meeting sites. During these meetings, the members often share personal loss and healing experiences with other grievers in a social atmosphere. Guest speakers and organized workshops on grief healing are also typical for chapter meetings. Some of the larger organizations hold annual conferences where thousands of grievers gather for three or four days of bereavement-related seminars and renowned speaker presentations. Many of these organizations also maintain a very interactive presence on social media platforms and make grief support materials available to members on propriety websites.

One of the major benefits of a regional peer-to-peer support group is the opportunity for a newly bereaved employee to meet regularly with other grievers. Many of the members can often be more long-term loss survivors who are commonly referred to as *seasoned* grievers. This style of gathering can be extremely powerful in the emotional healing that must follow the death of a loved one. Grievers who seek support after a loss often report that it is far more favorable to discuss emotional hardships with someone who had also “been through the fire.” Often, many group members who initially received professional support after a loss eventually turn to peer-to-peer group support instead. In several of these instances, the griever reported being mentally unable to accept healing attempts from a counselor who had not

experienced the death of a loved one.

Internal employer-sponsored support groups are another highly successful use of the *peer-to-peer* model. An employee grief support group inside an organization is a formidable method in mitigating the adverse impacts of grief on the job. Given just the 10 to 15 percentile of annual child loss to working-aged adults, the intensity of adverse impacts within any mid to large-sized company is almost immeasurable. That impact grows even more with the possibility of an employee who may lose a spouse, life-partner, sibling, or parent every year. Of interest within the same Compassionate Friend's study is the finding that 62 percent of grieving employees reported turning to other grieving employees for emotional support. While already substantial, an organization-endorsed support group would certainly help increase that percentage.

The internal peer-to-peer grief support groups would consist of employees who had experienced the death of a loved one and voluntarily wish to gather with other bereaved co-workers. Regular meetings could be conducted before or after work in a private area of the facility, and under the guidance of a select group member as a coordinator. The coordinator would arrange and oversee the meetings, as well as liaison with company leadership charged with monitoring the overall effectiveness of the program. Even though confidentiality is imperative, it can be breached if a grieving member shows signs of intended harm to self or others. Peer group members can also be effective in recognizing when intervention is needed for another member. Often, this is helpful in persuading an emotionally troubled



griever to take advantage of other available support, such as that of an Employee Assistance Program.

There are large organizations that currently have internal grief support peer groups in place. While these known companies are experiencing incredible success with the programs, the release of details in this book is prohibited through non-disclosure requirements. However, many emergency response agencies, such as police and fire departments, have incorporated peer-to-peer support groups for their members who have experienced trauma on and off the job. The measured results of success, as well as outlines of program models, are typically available to the public through the participating governing bodies.

### **PASSIVE GRIEF SUPPORT**

Passive grief support is compassionately managing bereaved employees with the awareness and understanding of grief's influences in the workplace. Once properly armed with this awareness and understanding, leadership need only observe, respond, and be confident in actions taken to support both the grieving employee and the organization.

One positive value in passive grief support is that it requires little time or financial output. Whatever modest levels are invested, however, will only result in positive returns for an organization. Another strong value is that its positive influences cannot be turned down or delayed by even the most reluctant griever. Rightfully, the acceptance or denial of active grief support is always at the discretion of the affected employee. Yet, even when accepted, active support through mental health professionals or external peer-to-peer groups is typically

infrequent. A grief therapist or counselor may schedule weekly visits, at best, and most organized groups routinely meet only once per month. However, the most acute emotions of grief often come at times and locations that are beyond the control of the bereaved employee. As a result, the grieving worker who is willfully participating in active support may actually spend long periods of time in pain while being forced to wait for help on the schedule of another.

A strong organization's passive grief support program will positively aid all bereaved employees, whether in addition to or in absence of, other active programs. The workplace is the one place where a bereaved worker will be present on an almost daily basis, excluding regular and customary time off. It is common knowledge that many employees will spend more awake time with co-workers on the job than with family members at home. It is also in the workplace where the grieved employee will be influenced both negatively and positively by supervisors, subordinates, and peers.

Persons in and around the workplace are generally not prepared to interact with a grieving employee. As a matter of fact, society at large is not prepared for interacting with a griever. Unfortunately, the newly bereaved employee is also largely unprepared to cope with self, or with others, when influenced by grief. Deep, confusing, and dark emotions are being experienced for the first time or felt at intensities not experienced by the griever in the past. Interacting with others in the workplace, either socially or productively, can be a challenge for a newly bereaved employee in an unsupportive organization.

Thankfully, for the employer and for the employee, the workplace is the one existing area where business leaders can exercise control over the adverse impacts of employee grief. Even when active support is declined, passive grief support remains a fundamental means in mitigating revenue loss from reduced productivity, workplace accidents, and low morale. The approaches of a passive program do not require a mental health license, a great deal of time, and little to no cost.

### **THE TIMING OF OFFERING ACTIVE AND PASSIVE GRIEF SUPPORT**

It is important for organizational leaders to consider the proper time when offering active grief support to a grieving worker. Many newly bereaved employees may not yet have the proper mindset to consider emotional help in the immediacy of the loss. Early after the death of a loved one is typically a period when the griever does not think about self. Instead, the focus tends to be on thoughts of the deceased or the care of other surviving family members. Further, the newly bereaved usually have no early concept of how the painful emotions of loss will impact life in the foreseeable future. It is often not until those emotions become overwhelming and detrimental to well-being that help is even considered by the griever. For these reasons, and others, the early offers of grief support are typically either dismissed by the bereaved, or the consideration deferred mentally to a later time.

Initially, a newly bereaved employee should only be informed that grief support is available. This is best conveyed when the griever makes the first contact with the organization to report the loss of a loved one. Providing detailed information or encouraging participation in sponsored grief support should be

delayed until the employee's return to work. If the anticipated absence is to be more than two weeks beyond the loss, however, then the organization can provide full support details during early follow-up calls with the absent griever.

There may be instances when a bereaved employee requests grief support details almost immediately after the loss. As with all aspects of grief, every employee is unique. Some survivors may be mentally prepared to begin the healing processes right away. Since support through programs such as an EAP also includes the employee's immediate family, another new griever may be gathering information for a surviving spouse or child at home. Regardless of the motive, there is no reason to delay providing support information whenever requested by the affected employee.

While it is emotionally helpful for the newly bereaved employee to know that support is available, organizational leaders should refrain from being overly aggressive in the offers. Grief studies reveal that only a small percentage of the bereaved will ever seek formalized support. If it is sought, it will be only at the time when the griever has self-determined a need. That should not, however, prevent a strong leader from tactfully encouraging the bereaved employee to seek support whenever observations indicate it would be beneficial to health, safety, and productivity.

### **THE BENEFITS OF ACTIVE AND PASSIVE GRIEF SUPPORT**

An indifferent approach to grief in the workplace can greatly exacerbate the potential for its adverse influences. It will also result in the bereaved employee missing out on excellent

opportunities in personal growth, mutual support, development, and transformation. Grieving employees who are supported by the organization are far more likely to later support other co-workers who face difficulties in the future. On the other hand, if bereavement has not been adequately dealt with, there may be difficulties that carry on for the bereaved employee long after the initial return to work.

Grief support in the workplace offers a great opportunity for any organization to demonstrate an employee well-being quality in leadership. This caring style of management demonstrates a commitment to the single employee, the workforce, and sound business stewardship. Many companies and agencies are in the proper mindset today that the employee is the greatest asset. Gone are the days of the disposable employee.

Responsible leaders must continue to seek innovative approaches to ensure unnecessary workforce turnover does not eat into the bottom line. As available studies will show, turnover costs for even the low-wage employee go well into the thousands of dollars for each separation of employment. An organization with strong governance will recognize that effective, yet compassionate support for a grieved employee will go a long way to mitigating the hidden loss of over \$100 billion in annual revenue.

The support concepts found in this publication provide proactive, reactive, and initiative based methodologies in managing a grieving employee. These methods do not expire or require future updating. Once in place, there will be no operating systems to update or a trade-up to the latest model. The successful reduction of hidden costs, as well as improved

industry and community branding, can be the reward for an organization that holds an awareness and understanding of *Grief in the Workplace*.

## CHAPTER TEN ~ DEFINING GRIEF, MOURNING, AND BEREAVEMENT

---

### **CLARIFICATIONS OF GRIEF, MOURNING, AND BEREAVEMENT**

Grief, bereavement, and mourning are words often used interchangeably when speaking of a survivor's state of being after the death of a loved one. While each word has a separate and specific meaning, there is no social indignation or scorn when used out of context by a well-wisher. However, it can be advantageous for leaders within an organization to have a fundamental understanding of the differences in each term.

The sections that follow within this chapter are intended to provide definitions and differences between the terms of grief, mourning, and bereavement. The final section, *Grief Work*, has been included in this chapter due to its frequent use throughout this book. The section provides an outline of the mental healing processes a survivor must experience to emotionally move forward from the loss of a loved one. As with the definitions of grief, mourning, and bereavement, leaders would do well to have an awareness and understanding of the Grief Work processes.

### **GRIEF**

For the purposes of *Grief in the Workplace*, grief is particular to the death of someone where a bond or affection was formed with the survivor. Grief is most frequently defined simply as *the internal, emotional responses to a person's loss*. That is all. Unfortunately, the popular definition fails to mention that those emotional responses are painful and have the potential to become intense. If not processed healthfully by the survivor, grief

can quickly become harmful to self and others.

The term *grief* is most commonly associated in society with an outward display of painful emotions that results from a loss. Grief is not external, however. Further, grief is not an emotion. It is not felt by the survivor, as feelings of anger, guilt, or despair can be. Taken figuratively, grief can be considered the mind's mental box that holds all the painful emotions consciously present after a loss. To adjust healthfully to a new life without the lost loved one, the griever must face and learn to cope with these challenging feelings. This internal mental struggle, or processing, with intense and painful emotions within the box is *grief*. Grief only becomes externally observed when the bereaved is overwhelmed by the internal emotions. Early in the loss of a loved one, the box can easily and often become overflowing with powerful feelings and spill over to the external side of the griever.

Grief can also come from other profound loss events that undesirably alter life for a person. Examples include an unwanted divorce, the diagnosis of a major health condition, or a significant financial downfall. These types of acute loss events also bring heightened levels of negative emotions, such as anger and fear, and can allow grief to cause some degree of impairment to the sufferer's normal judgment and thought processes.

*Leaving your personal life at home* is just an old and empty concept. A strong, experienced leader is always aware that the values carried in personal life are the very same characteristics that make for a strong, mediocre, or weak employee. Any organization that expects a newly bereaved employee to



instantly return to high levels of performance is just turning a blind eye to the definition of grief.

### **MOURNING**

While grief is the internal emotions felt by the bereaved for the loss of a loved one, *mourning* is the external actions that may be taken afterward. Mourning is mostly a shared, outward response to a loss. It externalizes the loss in the form of action, symbol, ceremony, or ritual that activates social support. The activities of mourning are intended to aid the griever in transitioning to a new life without the deceased.

Unfortunately, in today's busy society, the more time-honored mourning customs have become something of the past. Funerals, wakes, and memorials with plain black clothing remain common today. Yet, mostly gone now are the traditional intervals before the bereaved should reenter society, as well as the wearing of certain mourning symbols or accessories in public. These declining indicators of being in mourning are no longer deemed important to the emotional healing of the survivor. In recent societal norms, transitional healing may go unconsidered in the workplace, where it is not uncommon to expect a griever to *just get over it* and be back on the job in just three short days.

There are also mourning rituals for the bereaved that are more private and do not call for social support. For example, the mourner may set an empty place at the table during holiday meals or celebrate a birthday or anniversary as if the deceased were present. Although highly emotional, these rituals are not practiced out of a mourner's desire to bring the deceased back to life. Instead, such self-initiated rites are a transitional way for

the bereaved to accept the reality of the loss, while also integrating the life and love once shared with the deceased.

Leadership within a strong organization will do well by becoming aware that mourning is essential in the emotional healing processes of a bereaved employee. Also, it is important to be aware that mourners do not *just get over it*. Mourners only transition into a new life without the physical presence of a lost loved one. This typically does not happen by the completion of bereavement leave.

### **BEREAVEMENT**

The source word *Bereave* is commonly defined as *depriving, taking away, seizing, or robbing another of something of value*. The term *Bereavement* in relevant context can be defined as *being deprived of a loved one through a profound absence, especially due to a loved one's death*. While grief is internal and mourning is external, *bereavement* is the *state of being* that begins immediately with the death of a loved one. Put another way, a bereaved person is simply in the position of having been deprived of a loved one. It is the actual state of being bereaved that result in the actions of grief and mourning.

Many specialists in grief support wrongly consider bereavement as the period in which the most intense emotions of loss take place. However, being bereaved is not at all related to emotional grief responses or transitional mourning actions. In fact, the very state of being deprived of a lost loved one cannot be lessened or reversed. The deceased loved one will not return. A survivor will be in the state of being *bereaved* for the remainder of life.

*Bereavement* is, by definition, different from *grief* and *mourning*. Yet, leaders who unwittingly interchange the words should not consider it insensitive toward affected employees. Most of society, including the bereaved employee, does not know the difference. However, understanding the real meaning of each term will demonstrate a true commitment to awareness and understanding of loss by a forward-thinking organization.

### **GRIEF WORK**

*Grief Work* has been a descriptive phrase used throughout *Grief in the Workplace*. The phrase was first used by psychiatrist Erich Lindemann in 1944, to describe the tasks and processes that a griever must successfully complete to emotionally heal after the death of a loved one. Within this book, the phrase *Grief Work* has also frequently been referred to as the *healthful grief healing processes*.

Healing through grief is difficult work for a bereaved employee. It requires exertions of physical and mental energies that are no less strenuous than digging a ditch or being made to solve an almost unsolvable problem. A typical newly bereaved worker will not only mourn and grieve for the deceased, but also for the unfulfilled hopes, dreams, affections, and needs once shared with the lost loved one.

Grief Work must be actively performed by the griever to ease the emotional pains of loss. That demands much more than just experiencing the reactions. It also requires the griever to actively perform mental tasks and undertake specific courses of thought. To do so successfully will allow for the griever to gradually release the intense emotional pains and begin to experience the

present in a healthy manner. It also serves the important function of transitioning the bereaved for life in the future.

Many organizational leaders who have not experienced profound loss are unaware of how much work is involved in moving beyond the emotional pains. In fact, today's society as a whole has unrealistic expectations for the influences of grief. There are often many unhealthy suggestions in the workplace from supervisors, peers, and subordinates when a grieving employee returns from bereavement leave. Phrases such as "*Be strong*," "*Time heals all wounds*," or "*You'll get over it soon*," can conflict with the healing concepts of grief work. This conflict can cause the bereaved worker to avoid the healthy expression of emotions. This avoidance or repression of emotions can result in a very problematic disorder known as *complicated grief* and delay the emotional healing of a bereaved employee.

The newly bereaved employee will also be unaware of how much work it takes to heal from a loss. Grief work is a concept rarely known outside of clinical circles, as the knowledge is typically not sought by the bereaved before the unexpected loss. Any organizational leader who is armed with the awareness and understanding of Grief Work can, therefore, better support the newly bereaved employee.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN ~ THE EMOTIONS WITHIN GRIEF

---

Grief is a very broad topic that covers many different emotional scenarios created by events that are perceived as life-altering by the sufferer. Many profound events can create emotional grief in the mind of an employee. A worker may grieve the departure of a maturing child from the home. Another worker could grieve a demotion or lack of promotion on the job. Within the context of this book, however, grief has been the result of an employee who has experienced the death of a loved one, such as a spouse, life-partner or child.

As stated in previous chapters, it is not expected that organizational leaders become grief counselors. However, it is important for leaders to possess awareness and understanding of the bereavement-related grief emotions that could potentially impact the workplace. While some recommendations are included in this chapter, personnel actions directed at any bereaved employee exhibiting an emotional impairment on the job are only at the discretion of leadership within an individual organization. As with all topics within *Grief in the Workplace*, the information provided is to be considered along with a leader's sound business management practices and in compliance with governing policies, regulations, and laws.

The most typical emotions faced by a grieving worker are generally more intense and mentally impairing during the immediate days or weeks following a loss. While the greater impacts may be short-term, there could be emotional influences

that remain with the bereaved employee at reduced levels throughout the remainder of life. Some of the more typical emotions experienced by the newly bereaved employee are provided in the next section of this chapter, along with the common definitions and topic correlations for each term.

### **EMOTIONS TYPICAL OF THE NEWLY BEREAVED**

- **Shock** - *An injury to the psyche after living through an extremely frightening or distressing event and may result in challenges to functioning or coping normally afterward.* Shock can be both emotionally and physically debilitating in some newly bereaved employees, often requiring the immediate but temporary aid of others. While each person who experiences a traumatic event will react differently, many do recover quickly from shock with proper support and do not experience long-term problems. While shock may have subsided in the newly grieved employee before an eventual return to work, its effects may be present during early bereavement notifications with an organization.
- **Denial** - *The refusal to accept a past or present reality and is most commonly employed to protect an individual from their own negative thoughts about an event or action.* Denial in grief is the refusal to accept the facts of the loss, either consciously or unconsciously. In a traumatic event, such as the death of a loved one, the unconscious mind may also seek a return to “normal” in defense of the individual’s mental health. Normal, in this sense, means life before the deceased passed away. In this normal, the deceased is alive, although not present. This response is

usually short-term in nature but may frequently repeat in the griever's mind. Denial can be prolonged by refusing to deal with the consequences of the death, such as visiting the gravesite, getting rid of personal belongings, or even filling out necessary paperwork.

- **Emotionally Overwhelmed** - *The mental state of being beset by intense emotions that are difficult to intellectually manage.* Being emotionally overwhelmed can often affect a person's ability to think and act rationally or perform in an efficient and functional manner. In the recent loss of a loved one, the bereaved employee may not only feel overwhelmed by the painful emotions, but also by the responsibilities in tending to the typical funerary services and any legal matters related to the deceased. Being overwhelmed may be short-term in nature but may frequently recur over longer periods in the griever's mind.
- **Confusion** - *A feeling that one does not understand something or cannot decide what to do.* When considering grief from loss, the newly bereaved employee can often experience periods where the ability to concentrate may be severely limited. This failure to concentrate is simply a result of the numerous emotions, questions, and concerns that are constantly overwhelming the thought processes of the griever. A confused employee can be a low to high risk to the safety of an organization, which can only be determined and responded to accordingly with observation. Confusion is typically a short-term emotional condition and should diminish reasonably soon with the

proper healing processes.

- **Fear/Afraid** - *The distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined.* Fear is one of the most typical emotional responses to loss, as the newly bereaved employee is often faced with an unfamiliar life and unknown future without an anticipated spouse, life-partner, or child. There can be fear in adapting to dramatic changes in all the former familiar habits, behaviors, and feelings. Fears after the loss of a loved one can diminish without serious aftermath to the bereaved if the grieving processes continue in a healthy manner. This means the bereaved must become familiar with a future without the loved one. Early in grief, however, fear can combine with other painful emotions and unexpectedly overwhelm the grieving employee at any time.
- **Panic/Anxiety Attack** - *A sudden uncontrollable fear or anxiety, often causing wildly unthinking behavior.* After the death of a loved one, the bereaved employee may become overwhelmed by questions about the future that seem to have no answers. This can create anxiety and fear, leading to panic in the mind. Trying to hide or repress emotions may also create panic and high anxiety due to the constant fear of uncontrollable outbursts of grief emotions in public settings. One common reaction to fear-induced panic in humans is to freeze or cease all motion. However, anxieties in panic typically result in wildly uncontrolled physical reactions. Oftentimes, acute panic or



anxiety attacks require the intervention of mental health professionals. While panic and anxiety attacks are typically short-term and more intense during the early phases of grief, the resulting physical reactions can create risk within the workplace. Like other early grief emotions, any panic or anxiety episodes should lessen in a reasonable amount of time through successful grief work by the bereaved employee.

- **Anger** - *An intense emotional state of mind caused by displeasure. It can result when something of value has been taken against one's desire or control.* In the death of a loved one, there are numerous reasons for the newly bereaved to feel angry. A bereaved employee may feel anger toward self for being unable to control what took place. The griever may be angry at God, or the universe, for the death, feeling personally targeted or punished by uncontrollable supreme powers. The anger might be focused at other parties involved in the loss, such as an emergency room doctor who failed to revive a terminally injured trauma patient. As long as the bereaved employee is not harmful to self or others, anger is a healthy and normal response to loss. Anger from loss has actually contributed to society in positive ways. The organization *Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)* was the result of the anger felt by a surviving parent after the child was killed by an alcohol-impaired motor vehicle operator. Any outward displays of intense anger should lessen in a reasonable amount of time through successful grief work

by the bereaved employee. However, displays of uncontrolled anger on the job could cause risk to the workplace and negatively impact the morale of co-workers and customers.

- **Guilt** - *A feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offense, crime, wrong, etc., whether real or imagined.* Guilt can be a normal response to a self-perception that the bereaved employee somehow failed in the duties and obligations owed to protect the deceased loved one. Guilt may also stem from believing that some action or inaction by the survivor resulted in the death. It is normal for a griever's mind to quickly find fault for the death, as the unconscious mind desires answers for that which is unknown. When fault is unknown, the griever's mind will often assign blame to self in order to satisfy that immediate need for closure. Even when fault is known, the bereaved often consider actions or lack of actions by self to be a contributing factor, resulting in feelings of guilt. However, long-term impacts of guilt are not common in most cases of bereavement. Over time, the grieved employee will typically recognize that there were no self-initiated actions or inactions that led or contributed to the death of the loved one.
- **Regret** – *A feeling of sadness, repentance, or disappointment over something that has happened or been done.* Guilt and regret are often considered the same. However, regret is different. It implies a lesser or indirect action or inaction not taken by the griever before

the death of a loved one. It may include being in an argument just before the tragedy struck, or not having the opportunity to tell the deceased, “I love you,” during the most recent conversation. It is a natural and normal emotional response after a loss. Like guilt, regret is meant to be mentally helpful in personality development. It is the mind’s way of recognizing that an action or inaction was not proper and should not be repeated in the future. Regret may not have any outwardly adverse impacts to the griever but can contribute to other impairing emotions, such as anger and depression. The influences of regret on its own are not long-term but will remain until self-forgiveness is achieved by the bereaved employee through the healthful grieving processes.

- **Shame** - *The painful feeling arising from the consciousness of doing something dishonorable or improper and others know or will discover and disapprove of the act.* In a loss, a parent may feel shame for not being the protector of a child who died. In the workplace, a newly bereaved employee may experience shame for appearing weak when displaying uncontrollable grief emotions. Shame after a loss, however, rarely involves an actual bad action. Instead, it is typically only self-perceived as a bad action by the griever. Early after the loss, shame may not have any outward indications but can combine with other intense loss emotions to overwhelm the griever. Any feelings of shame in a bereaved employee should lessen over time through healthful grief work.

- **Inferiority** - *The perception that someone, including self, is not as good, important, intelligent, etc. as someone else.* Especially in the recent death of a spouse, life-partner, or child, a newly bereaved employee may no longer feel good enough to continue in the same social circles of mutual friends. A parent grieving the loss of a child may falsely interpret self as an inferior nurturer and protector of any surviving children. While inferiority may not be highly observable in the workplace, the impacts to the bereaved employee may carry over into a lack of confidence in all areas, including performance on the job. Inferiority should normally be a short-term condition for the grieved employee when progressing normally in the grief healing process.

#### **HIGHER-RISK/ACUTE GRIEF EMOTIONS**

- **Depression** - *A major mood disorder that causes one to have a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest.* Depression caused by the loss of a loved one affects how the bereaved employee feels, thinks and behaves. It can lead to difficulties in performing day-to-day assignments and activities. In severe cases of depression, a grieved employee may come to feel that life is no longer worth living. Grief can be a major trigger for depression, but not all griever will experience depression. Grief and depression can actually share very similar symptoms, including:
  - Dismal mood or irritability
  - Significant impairment in functioning

- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Loss of appetite and significant weight loss
- Sleeping too much or not enough
- Difficulty concentrating
- Indecisiveness
- Sluggish movements
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness and guilt
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Grief and depression are each a distinct experience, and the distinction is important for several reasons. Experiencing depression-like symptoms in grief due to a significant loss is normal, and the impacts typically decrease over time with healthy grief healing. With depression, the symptoms tend to be more persistent and pervasive. Left unaddressed, depression can lead to self-harm or suicide. Getting a diagnosis and seeking treatment can be life-saving for the bereaved employee. An employee who exhibits signs of depression must be strongly encouraged by leadership to seek immediate mental health intervention. Leaders should also consider removing the bereaved employee from any mid to high-risk tasks until such time that acceptable standards of performance can be demonstrated.

- **Despair** - *The feeling that there is no hope and that nothing can be done to improve a difficult or worrying situation.* The emotion of *despair* has been included as a high-risk condition because, like depression, despair

resulting from the death of a loved one can lead the bereaved employee to suicidal thoughts. It is not difficult to imagine the loss of hope when the death of a loved one brings uncertainty and insecurity in the future for some grievers. Like grief and depression, grief and despair can seem similar in the symptoms of a bereaved employee. Grieving, however, is a healthy, productive and adaptive response to loss. Despair, on the other hand, is unhealthy and destructive. It is a maladaptive response to the death of a loved one. It can include such exhibited symptoms as:

- Feeling hopeless and empty inside
- Self-loathing and feeling worthless
- Feeling that life is not worth living
- Persistent sadness or irritability
- Loss of joy or pleasurable feelings
- Inability to control negative thoughts
- Anxiety/Mood swings and aggressiveness
- Short-tempered with well-meaning colleagues
- Isolation and decreased social interaction
- Engaging in reckless behaviors

Recent mental health studies have shown that many patients in a state of despair are also experiencing depression. This does not mean, however, that depression must be present for the origin of suicidal tendencies. Depression and despair each carry a high risk of these thoughts for an employee suffering either condition. Regardless, it is recommended that an employee who exhibits signs of despair be strongly encouraged by leadership to seek immediate mental health intervention.

Leaders should also consider removing the bereaved employee from any mid to high-risk tasks until such time that acceptable standards of performance can be demonstrated.

### FINAL CHAPTER AND BOOK DECLARATIONS

The awareness and understanding of the typical emotions of loss will greatly assist organizational leaders in managing any adverse impacts of grief brought to the job. A strong, progressive leader will also use the proactive, reactive, and initiative based methodologies found in this book to provide compassionate support to all bereaved employees.

A supportive approach to grief not only allows a grieving employee to cope with loss but shows a commitment to the workforce. It demonstrates that employees are a valued resource and not just an expense. This commitment not only becomes apparent on the job, but can improve the entity's favorable branding to clients, partners, and other companies within the industry. It reduces accidents and injuries at the workplace, as well as increases feelings of safety and security for all personnel.

Along with all the other benefits found in this book, the positive impacts to the bottom line from employer-based grief support cannot go unmentioned. With little more than just awareness and understanding of *Grief in the Workplace*, a forward-thinking leader can **reduce or eliminate the organization's share of over \$100 billion in annual revenue loss for businesses across America.**





## CONTACTING THE AUTHOR

---

R. Glenn Kelly is a dynamic and experienced Keynote Speaker, Workshop Presenter, Corporate Trainer, and Author

- **EMAIL:** *Direct to R. Glenn*  
**rglennkelly@rglennkelly.com**
- **SOCIAL MEDIA:** *Simply search for “R. Glenn Kelly” on*  
**Facebook.com • LinkedIn.com • Twitter**
- **YOUTUBE:** *Grief Support Video Productions – search for:*  
**The Bring Your Own Grief Network Studio**
- **WEBSITE:** **www.rglennkelly.com**

## WORKSHOP

**THE WORKFORCE CAPITAL RECOVERY PROGRAM** is a management workshop presented at a participating organization’s site by R. Glenn Kelly. The customized presentation provides leadership with the opportunity to learn even more about managing the bereaved employee on the job. To learn more about this *Grief in the Workplace Leadership Seminars*, please visit [www.rglennkelly.com](http://www.rglennkelly.com) or contact R. Glenn directly.



[rglennkelly@rglennkelly.com](mailto:rglennkelly@rglennkelly.com)

## OTHER BOOKS BY R. GLENN KELLY

---

- **SOMETIMES I CRY IN THE SHOWER:** *A Grieving Father's Journey to Wholeness and Healing*
- **THE GRIEFCASE:** *A Man's Guide to Healing and Moving and Moving Forward in Grief*
- **GRIEF HEALING 365:** *Daily Inspirations for Moving Forward to Your New Normal*

**Paperback and eBooks:** Versions are available at Amazon.com and all other popular online bookstores. Please use the site's search field to look up your choices by title or author.

**Audiobooks:** Copies of **SOMETIMES I CRY IN THE SHOWER** and **THE GRIEFCASE** can be found at Audible.com and iTunes. Again, please search by book title or author.

**Paperback:** Copies of all books can be found at bookstores everywhere. If your local bookstore does not currently have a particular book title on the shelf, please ask them to order copies for you and the store today.

**Look for R. Glenn Kelly's latest book release soon:**

- **PACKING YOUR GRIEFCASE:** *A Grieving Employee's Return to Work After the Death of a Loved One.*

*Packing Your Griefcase* will greatly ease the newly bereaved employee's return to work. Organizations will want to obtain and gift this book to those employees who have recently experienced the passing of a family member. For more information, please visit [www.rglennkelly.com](http://www.rglennkelly.com).