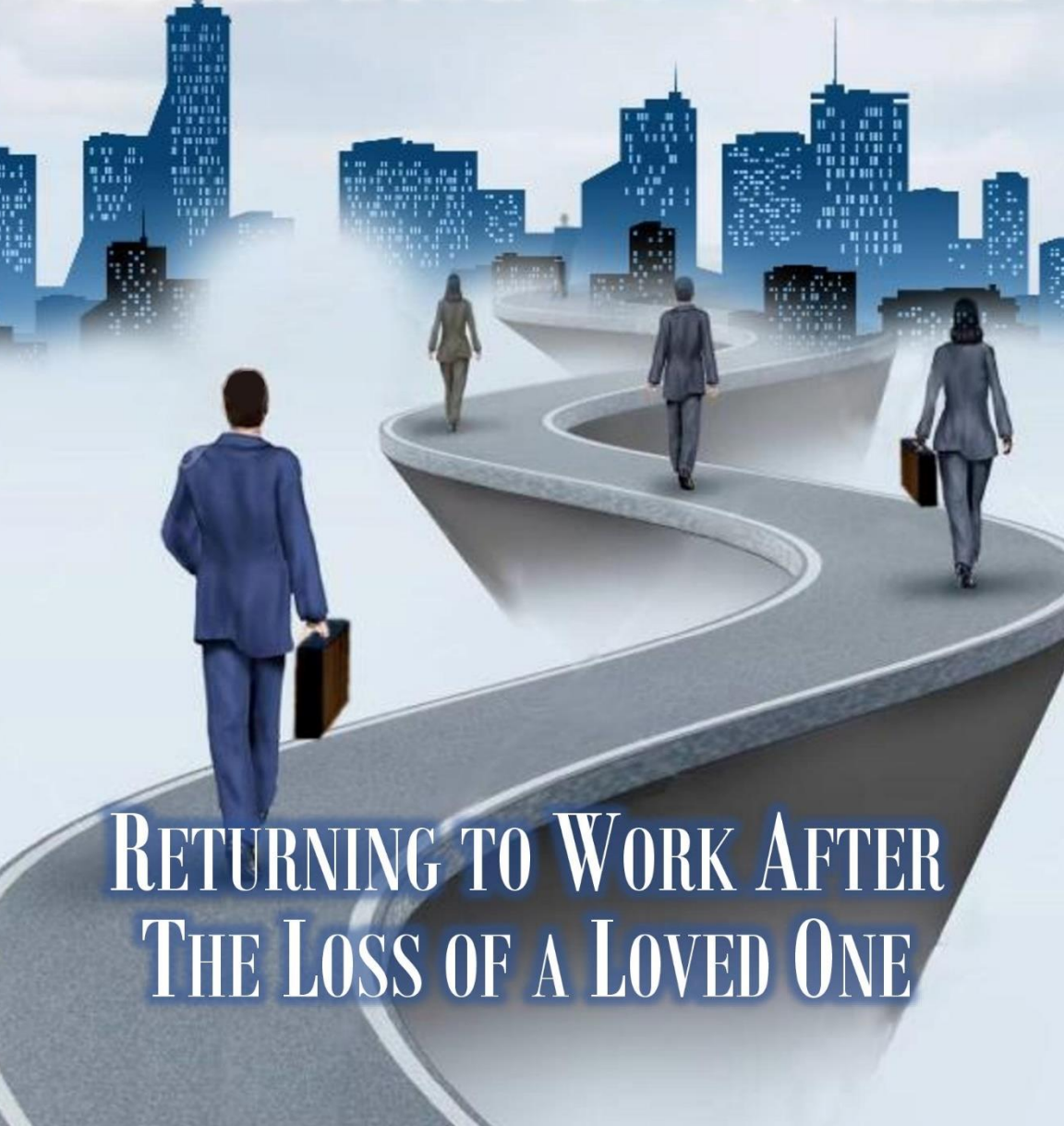


R. GLENN KELLY

TAKING YOUR GRIEFCASE TO WORK



RETURNING TO WORK AFTER
THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

TAKING YOUR GRIEFCASE TO WORK

Returning to Work After the Loss of a Loved One

By Award-Winning Author and Bereaved Father

R. Glenn Kelly

Award-Winning Author, Grief & Life Coach, Public Speaker, and Bereaved Father, R. Glenn Kelly has appeared on CBS Television, The Trinity Broadcast Network, New York City Public Television, as well as numerous radio programs, Podcasts, Webinars, and in newsprint to discuss grief and bereavement support for loss survivors and business leaders. A noted authority on moving forward after the loss of a loved one, R. Glenn has provided Keynote Presentations or Workshops at Fortune 500 companies, National Grief Support Conferences, Universities, Hospitals, Civic Organizations, and more.

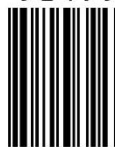
Are you like R. Glenn Kelly? Have you gone through the tragic loss of a loved one and now faced with returning to work? Do you know what to expect? Maybe. Maybe not. Or are you already back and things just seem foreign now? Are you coming back to an employer who is compassionate and understanding toward you and what you've been through? Maybe the workplace will be indifferent, and even hostile, toward your needs as a bereaved employee.

In this groundbreaking book on moving forward while returning to work with loss heavy in our hearts, R. Glenn Kelly shares his renowned understanding of grief and bereavement support combined with over two-decades of executive business management experience to help us transition back to a workplace that was once as safe and secure as home, but may not be now. This is a great companion book to R. Glenn's *THE GRIEFCASE* and one published for business leadership, *GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE*.



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DEDICATION

To My Son, Jonathan Taylor Kelly, in Memoriam,

What moves through me is a silence, a quiet sadness, a longing for one more day, one more word, one more touch.

I may not understand why you left this earth so soon, or why you left before I was ready to say good-bye...

...But little by little, I begin to understand not just that you died, but that you lived...

...And that your life gave me memories too beautiful to forget, and love too pure, too unconditional, to ever fade."

Dad

TAKING YOUR GRIEFCASE TO WORK

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PREFACE

When my precious son and only child died in June of 2013, I was serving in the number two position with a large, regional service provider. We had roughly twelve-hundred employees in the field and I had seven or so managers who reported directly to me. During my earlier days on the job, it became customary for those managers, one by one, to stop by my door at some point in the morning. At first, they wouldn't even come in. It was just pleasant exchanges of "*Good morning,*" while they toted a cup of coffee back to their desk. Pretty soon, however, each manager began coming in and sitting down, as our discussions eventually grew to talk about family and life beyond the job.

As time went by, however, those morning pop-ins also morphed into talking about the day to come. Sure, the pleasantries were still there, but my managers and I unwittingly added in talk about the workday and all that needed to be done. For me, this was fantastic. I was building a strong bond with my team and always had an early check on the day's pulse. I could mentor, change a manager's plans if needed, and express my expectations without ever leaving my chair. All this, by the way, done without frequent time-killing staff meetings or annoying conference calls.

I always said that it might not be everyone's leadership model, but these daily, casual meetings worked darn well for me. In fact, within the first year of me being there, we exceeded the company's growth goals for the first time ever and saw profits continually rise far above expectations. Beyond professional, I also personally enjoyed those daily sessions that innocently started with my managers simply stopping by my door each morning.

Then, I would return to work not long after that terrible day my son died from a rare heart defect. I went back rather quick, as I sought that familiar comfort in the office where everything might just seem normal, if only for a few hours a day. Actually, I longed for it. But guess what? When I got there, no one stopped by my door anymore. Enough said!

R. Glenn Kelly - Author

CHAPTER ONE - TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR GRIEFCASE

“Be totally empty, embrace the tranquility of peace. Watch the workings of all creation, observe how endings become beginnings.”

Lao Tzu

We’re here to wrap our minds and hearts around both returning to and surviving in the workplace with profound loss still so heavy in our life. For a broad range of reasons, many of us have got to get back to work. Sometimes that means too soon, and usually when we’re just learning to breathe again, right? But are we emotionally and physically ready for the job? Maybe. Maybe not.

Before we tangle with that, however, we first need to understand that we’ll be taking our very own *Griefcase* back to work with us when we go. But what is this Griefcase, and do each of us really have one? Well, the answer to the latter question is yes. If we’ve experienced the loss of someone we deeply love, then we’re indeed carrying a Griefcase. It’s not something we asked for, and certainly not something we ever wanted. Absolutely no one ever does. And even though we probably didn’t know what it was when we got it, there’s a good bet we all know the very moment it was handed to us. See, I got mine from a relative stranger in a hospital. She was the doctor who tried in vain to revive my son when his heart crashed, and he died. I didn’t know her before that day and have not seen her since. Sadly, though, I couldn’t refuse the Griefcase she gave me when I held my son as he took his last breath.

So, just what is this Griefcase thing? Well, it obviously combines the

words grief and briefcase, and in simple terms, it's our conscious mind's carrying case that holds all the emotions of our loss. They'll be more on this later, but grief, or grieving, is actually the internal processing of our painful emotions. We grieve inside. Mourning, on the other hand, is the *external* expression of that grief. We mourn outside. Grieving is internal. Mourning is external. Now, think of a conventional briefcase. Its most commonly defined as a flat, rectangular, hand-carried container, typically used for carrying important papers and personal effects to and from a place of employment or business. But let's hold that thought for a moment.

While many think of grief as an emotion, it's actually not a human feeling at all. Case in point, if you asked me how I felt early after my child passed, I would not have said I felt grief. Instead, I might've said I felt anger, guilt, confusion, fear, or any number of feelings that made up my internal assembly of mental pain. But I didn't feel grief. Instead, I felt the emotions that were essentially *contained* within my grief. To that end, I came to recognize that grief, my grief, was really just a carrying case that inside held all the feelings for my son's loss. So, grief became my Griefcase. It's my carrying case for all of grief's emotions. You have yours, too. And, like me, you'll carry it with you until you see your dear loved one again.

Also, like me, you couldn't refuse receiving your Griefcase either. Know that it cannot be put down. It cannot, even for the briefest of moments, be left behind. And right now, I'll bet it's heavy and so burdensome that it gets in the way of almost everything you do. You trip over it. You stumble and fall when lugging it around, even in those times when you're trying so hard to get it together. Oh, and it's a great excuse, isn't it? I mean, you just can't go out and socialize with others right now, can you? No. After all, someone might see you suffering the burdens of

your Griefcase. And even when a rare moment brings a flash of joy or laughter to your life, you feel the tugging weight of your Griefcase and simply shut back down. So often, it can seem just as confusing, frustrating, and scary as the loss itself. It's not all bad, though. Actually, if you'll bear with me, you'll discover that your Griefcase can actually be an amazing accessory for healthfully moving back into the workplace, and once again to a life of peace and purpose.

How can we use our Griefcase in dealing with such a profound trauma as losing a loved one? Well, let's just learn to acknowledge, organize, and process our feelings in ways that remove the fog of grief from our thoughts. And to help visualize this further, what things do we typically find inside a briefcase? For me, the most common things that immediately come to mind are important documents, right? I imagine many papers inside that convey the knowledge, viewpoints, and considerations of the briefcase owner. And, in a well-organized briefcase, all the individual papers are typically filed away neatly in specific manila folders, each properly labeled with the subject matter found inside. Why, the bearer of such a tidy briefcase can easily open and find whatever's needed inside with little to no effort or confusion.

Think of our grief as that mental, emotional Griefcase. Inside, each painful feeling we now experience from the loss belongs within a specific manilla folder of emotion. We probably have one labeled Sorrow, and another one for Fear. We might have one for Anger, Guilt, Despair, Regret, or so many other agonizing emotions. But let's stop for a moment and just look at the Anger folder, as that's often a more common one for so many of us. Early on, it's likely jumbled and overflowing with many disorganized papers that each represent some specific perception from the loss that makes us feel angry. And understand that each single piece of paper may or may not relate to others in the file since, with loss, we're

often angry about a lot of things, aren't we? Further, there could be papers in Anger that were erroneously filed inside that don't really belong there in the first place. They may go in an entirely different folder but were misfiled during that nasty fog of grief that's so common when loss first strikes us.

Getting back to it, let's visualize lifting the Anger folder from inside our Griefcase. Right now, it's thick, heavy, and in complete disarray. If we're not careful, papers will spill out. But let's put it down and take hold of the Guilt folder now and we'll find it the same, as we do with the Regret, Sorrow, or the Fear folders. Just how in the world could anyone effectively function at work, or in life for that matter, with these emotional files in such a wreck? Some suffering souls might just toss the whole jumbled mess back into their Griefcase, slam the lid closed, and put their face down in their hands. But not us. Not you and me. We're here not only to find ways to cope with our return to work but to do so in a progressively healthful manner. That means facing the emotional manilla folders in our Griefcase and buckling down to do our *Grief Work*.

Great! Another new phrase, right? Grief Work. But Grief Work is real and coming to terms with that is important in our journey. The phrase Grief Work was first used by psychiatrist Erich Lindemann in 1944, to describe the many tasks and processes that the newly bereft must successfully complete to progressively heal after a loss. And *progressively* healing when it comes to grief is hard work. It requires great exertions of physical and mental energies that are no less strenuous than digging a ditch or being tasked with solving an almost unsolvable riddle. After all, we not only grieve for our late loved one, but also for our own unfulfilled hopes, dreams, affections, and needs we once shared with them.

Grief work must be actively carried out to ease the pains and demands much more than just experiencing the reactions. It also requires us to

actively perform mental tasks and undertake specific courses of thought. In doing so, we'll gradually release the intense feelings of grief, and begin to experience our present life in a healthy manner. To do grief work, however, we need good tools, and one of the best can be our Griefcase.

What are the immediate benefits of actually accepting and managing our Griefcase? Well, managing it, processing what's inside, can certainly lighten our emotional burden and ease a transition back into all areas of our life. That is the ultimate benefit. First, however, we must understand that the deeper the love, the heavier the Griefcase. I don't need to explain that further, do I? Just recognize that with deep, unconditional love, there will be a lot of emotional manilla folders inside, with each one holding page after page of intense and painful feelings. Yet, we'll open ours and consciously acknowledge each one. When we do, we'll make purposeful efforts in confronting and reconciling the often-debilitating contents found inside.

Using our Griefcase as a progressive tool, however, means so much more than just looking through the emotional folders to insure nothing spills out. Yes, initial acknowledgment is a big part of healing. After all, we've lost a loved one and must confront that reality head-on. But we also need to lighten the needless burdens inside our manilla folders to help ease our journey. And, in a large way, removing anything false can go a long way to that end.

Unfortunately, in the confusing fog of traumatic loss, there's often a plethora of false feelings that can become erroneously filed away in our folders. But just how does that happen? Well, let's look at the Anger and Guilt files, which are notorious for collecting and holding bad data. And if you'll allow, I'll also use the example of the unexpected passing of my son, who was born with a rare congenital heart defect. At the tender age of sixteen, he was in a pediatric hospital for a normally low-risk,

exploratory heart catheterization. His doctor just wanted to take a peek inside my son's chest so we could later discuss some possible interventions that would improve his cardiac efficiency. A few hours after the successful procedure, however, my son's heart suddenly crashed while in the recovery room, and the doctors were unable to revive him. Yes, there are always risks in medical procedures, but that wasn't supposed to happen to him. After all, my son had been through several heart cath in the past and his quick recovery was never an issue. And this one, which ultimately took his life, was performed in one of the most preeminent pediatric cardiothoracic centers in the country. How could the doctors just let my son die?

After my son's passing, I had a great deal of intense anger for the medical staff who had worked on my son, as well as the entire hospital, for that matter. And I considered my anger to be well-justified at the time. Also, when there were no real immediate answers, I began looking back over our lives leading up to my son's death. I thought of things I did or did not do for him, and even words I said or did not say to him. My mind was frantically searching for something, anything, that might have caused such a horrible tragedy. I needed answers. I needed a cause for his death. And surely, I quickly deduced, had I been a good father and maybe fed him better, made him go to bed on time every night, my son would have been healthier during his surgery and still be alive, right? With that and so many other thoughts in my mind, I began to experience intense guilt for not being a better parent. Does that sound familiar in some ways? It might. Regardless, I was feeling very angry and very guilty about his death and as a result, responded so negatively in all manners of my life. Because of anger and guilt, I simply failed to emotionally move forward in a healthy manner for some time to come.

Fortunately, it would not be too long before I recognized my Griefcase

and its ability to help me move forward. I would confront some of the individual angers found inside my folders by meeting with the surgeons, physicians, and hospital personnel who were involved with my son's medical care. As a result, I eventually learned that the hospital staff had truly performed above and beyond the call of duty in their efforts to revive my child when his heart crashed. There was, I discovered, nothing they did or did not do that would have changed the traumatic outcome of his death.

Had my Anger folder been avoided altogether, there would not be the peace I now feel in knowing it was, regrettably, just my son's time. Without opening the folders there would still be my intense anger for the hospital and the staff today, as well as great bitterness in my life. My Griefcase, however, truly allowed me to step over a major threshold when, just over a year later, I accepted a humbling invitation to serve on an advisory board at the very hospital where my son died. Because of my Griefcase, I emotionally went from hating to helping in my grief journey.

Looking back now, I also recall acknowledging the Guilt folder in my Griefcase. Doing so, I soon came to the heartfelt surety that there was nothing I would ever do or not do to purposely jeopardize my child's life. Had that folder not been faced, I might still be living with a large measure of unhealthy guilt, with no way to process that pain. Thankfully, because I purposely confronted my emotional folders, I realized that two incredibly heavy emotions carried within my Griefcase were *false-anger* and *false-guilt*. Well, they've been removed from their respective manilla folders and summarily tossed away, lessening my emotional burden.

You don't need that which is false in your life right now, either. So, visualize yourself opening your Griefcase and pulling out one of your many emotional folders. You may find yourself holding a file for Anger or Guilt as I did. Of course, you might not even have the same ones as

me. Each of our losses is so unique, after all. Instead, you might be holding Fear, Sorrow, Disparity, or any number of other debilitating emotions in your hand. It doesn't matter. Right now, you're going to face whichever one you have there. Think of yourself opening that folder to simply begin looking through the papers, or perceptions, that you find inside. You can study them for a while if you like. There's no hurry. At first, you're just going to acknowledge them. You're just going to spend a little time with them, is all. And if, at the moment, you're not ready to do anything else, well, that's just fine too.

You'll know you're ready to do more with your folders when you begin wondering why you feel a certain way. What's creating that fear or anxiety in your mind? What's causing you feelings of despondency or no hope for your future? Yes, now it's time to open your Griefcase and purposely go through the emotional folders inside. Examine the thoughts, the individual paper, and bring them out into the light. Remember, though, this is grief work. It'll take time and effort to either organize them or remove anything that doesn't belong in each one. If and when you do find a false or redundant feeling, simply toss it out and lighten your burden. It really can be that easy.

When you do recognize those painful feelings in any emotional folder that you know in your heart to be true, that's great. Just envision yourself neatly arranging it back inside where it belongs. Truth be told, some painful stuff is just going to stay there forever, no matter how much it hurts. See, *Sorrow* is certainly one of my very, very painful but true folders. I'd be a monster if I didn't feel that way about my son's loss, right? So, that folder, and most of the pages inside, are never coming out of my Griefcase. I recognize that and live with it now. I just let that lift me up instead of weighing me down. After all, it's the unconditional love I have for my child that makes me feel that pain, and I can live with that.

After all, I wouldn't have the pain if I never had the joy of his love.

Incidentally, and this is a big deal here, when I openly acknowledged that I would live forever with what's inside my Sorrow folder, it automatically lightened the burden in my Confusion folder too. The importance of that cannot be overemphasized here. Confusion is just an ugly, unnecessary folder all the way around, yet it's always present in almost every Griefcase. For us, it was created that horrible day when all the traumatic emotions hit at once. But now, each time we either acknowledge or remove unneeded pages from any other folder, we lose a page or two from *Confusion*. Actually, the very act of just addressing our emotional manilla folders can help release some of the mental fog of grief and bring more clarity to our lives.

We need to keep in mind that working through our Griefcase is paramount to healthfully moving forward, yet also remember that it's incredibly strenuous grief work. There's no doubt about it. As stated before, grief work is demanding, and there are certainly are some serious cautions that come with the task. For one, we can't just sit down at first and go through our Griefcase whenever we like. Early on, it's just not realistic. After all, when the loss first happened, we probably weren't thinking of ourselves or our own future. Most likely, we weren't able to think about much, right? After all, those nasty emotions of grief were furiously bombarding us and didn't care that we weren't prepared. They came in relentless, seemingly never-ending washes of pain.

It was hard to just catch our breath after the loss, much less sit down and consciously process our feelings, right? Besides, the painful emotions didn't just hit one at a time, did they? Oh, no. Early grief is not so kind. Instead, they frequently came two, three, or even more emotions all at once. One moment we might've been deep in longing for our lost loved one when suddenly that longing was joined by dark despair. Then, before

we knew it, the emotion of intense regret suddenly appeared while we were still frantically dealing with the others. That's a lot to deal with.

With so much emotional turmoil going on, early loss may not be the right time to expect great strides in transitioning forward into our jobs or our lives. Frankly, the first few days are not right for grief work at all. It's more a time to just survive with the support of family, friends, and faith. The right time, however, will soon come. And we'll know when it does. To that end, if we're here seeking answers, then there's a good chance we've already moved forward from that initial time when the painful emotions of grief were an all-consuming torrent. Today, the grief waves probably hit with less frequency, although still powerful and just as debilitating each time they crash down. Yet, we're now getting short breaks in between each wave to catch our breath, aren't we? And it's in these short breaks that we must make concentrated efforts to address and organize the folders in our Griefcase. That'll give us purpose and allow us to better deal with our feelings. That'll also help us become more aware that each emotion is truly a separate entity and can be effectively processed, even when they hit two or more at a time.

We also have to know that even with all our diligent grief work, we'll never be able to completely remove an emotional folder from our Griefcase. We can lighten each, but once it's there we can't get rid of the folder itself. But we really don't want to, either. After all, these folders, or emotions, were actually created by the unconditional love we feel for our late loved one. We'll remove false and redundant feelings, alright, and we'll use love to ease the pains of the ones that are true. But when all that's left is truth, the painful emotions will mold us into someone so strong, so compassionate, so filled with purpose, that it will amaze even the worst cynic among us.

I can tell you that I carry my Griefcase with pride today, and joyously

open it up for anyone willing to look inside and talk about my late son. It's much lighter now, and no longer the burden it once was. I now recognize that what's inside came from the love I have for my dear son. Progressively moving through it, I was able to take my Griefcase to work, and everywhere else, and it helped me rediscover a life of peace and purpose. I do hope you'll use your Griefcase in the same healthful, healing way.

Oh! There's a special folder in each of our Griefcases that has not yet been mentioned, and you'll find it safely tucked into that long pocket in the lid. It's filled to the brim with emotions, but always neatly organized. What is that one? Well, it's our folder of *Unconditional Love*, and it contains all the emotions and memories of that dear loved one who has passed away. Whenever we find ourselves having difficulties going through the other painful folders in our Griefcase, we can always, always, pull out that precious folder and hold it to our hearts. There *is* love in our Griefcase, along with so much hope and healing. With all that, we're sure to rediscover peace and purpose along this journey.

CHAPTER TWO ~ OUTLINING YOUR RETURN TO WORK

Grief should be the instructor of the wise. Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most must mourn the deepest.

Lord Byron

It's a cold reality that no matter what personal devastations may come, the world continues to turn, right? In real life, bad things just sometimes happen to good people. And, as someone who's lost a dear loved one, there's just no escaping the fact that we're now included in that cold reality. We've joined a club if you will, that no one wants to join.

Sadly, studies show that many times when we've experienced a traumatic loss, we're actually right at the peak of our professional lives. And for us, that probably means we grab hold of our jumbled, confusing Griefcase and just get right back to it, back to work, even though it may be way too soon for our own good. In some cases, our inherent human traits tell us to be responsible, do the right thing, and take care of others, even while trying to get our minds wrapped around what happened. So, we quickly head back to the job.

Quickly returning to work can actually be okay for some, and we'll cover that in greater depth later. In most cases, however, we'll return too soon only in attempts of avoiding or repressing our pains. And in far too many instances, we prematurely return simply because company policy dictates that we do. Many of us can't afford not to, right? We need the income. Regardless, when we return to the office, job site, factory floor, or classroom desk, it can be incredibly difficult at first.

RETURNING TO WORK

“Leave your personal life at the company door.” We hear that all the time, don’t we? But nothing could be farther from the truth. Even before our loss, we went to work each day carrying with us all the emotions, motivations, and de-motivations that take place in our personal life. It’s human nature. Now, however, we have the ultimate burden are lugging our Griefcase back to the job with us.

Now, the very first thing we must do in preparation is *be easy on ourselves*. We have a lot on our hearts and a mind that’s spinning like a top. We should expect to be more distracted and less productive for some time to come. And as we begin moving forward through our grief, we’ll yet need to be aware that our brains and our reflexes may not respond so quickly for a time. If we feel fatigued, overwhelmed, or unfocused, we should let others know it.

Let’s not do anything on the job unless we’re sure we can do it safely, accurately, and with total competency in our abilities. A commissioned study of thousands of employees who returned to work following the loss of a loved one found eighty-five to ninety percent experienced significant errors or injuries on the job for up to six months after their loss. When surveyed, each bereaved employee reported their mishap was directly related to the influences of grief. That study will be detailed in a later chapter.

Once we’ve returned to work, we’ll want to get together with our supervisors and teammates and be honest with them about how we’re doing. This is true even if we happen to be the boss. Sure, tasks need to be completed, but it doesn’t matter if you’re a heavy equipment operator or a financial analyst, some jobs can be dangerous or have sensitive consequences if the mind is not focused. All the updates you can give others will allow for moving resources around as needed.

We absolutely need to recognize that our performance at work can greatly impact others in negative and harmful ways too. There's the true story of a fellow bereaved father who served as an auto mechanic with a major passenger bus line. Nearly two years after the loss of his son, he had just performed a brake repair job on one of the busses in his company's fleet. After bolting the wheel back on and walking away, it suddenly struck him that the entire time he was working, his mind had been besieged by a deep wave of grief for his late child.

Again, this was some two years after the bus mechanic's son had passed, and the waves of grief still easily overwhelmed his mind. Well, after this recent wave, as he stood scratching his head, he realized that he didn't remember anything he had just done during his repairs. His mind had been deeply occupied, and deeply trouble, after all. Thankfully, he had the fortitude to go back and unbolt the wheels and inspect his previous work. There, he discovered a small but very important spring clip on one axel hub that he had earlier failed to reconnect. Surely, as he well knew, had the bus been put back into service, his grief-induced fog could've resulted in a huge catastrophe. The ripple effects of his grief to the health and safety of many others, as well as the potential damage to his organization, are something, gratefully, he could only imagine.

Getting back to it, we should consider allowing our employer to discuss some of the details of our loss with others on the job before we first return to work. We might want our privacy, but there's a good reason for preemptively sharing at least some of the minor info. See, many of us will spend more awake time with those at work than we do with our own family. Co-workers, even those we rarely interact with, may still care a great deal for us. And if they have little to no knowledge of what happened, they'll probably just come right out and ask us when we first get back. That means we'll often find ourselves repeating the painful story

of our loss over and over again whenever a new, well-wishing co-worker comes near. Now, if this does happen with some frequency, we can always politely say we don't care to discuss it at the moment. After all, we never want to go beyond our emotional comfort zones, do we?

When considering those well-wishers on the job, we should try to be patient and understanding with them. Many will be unsure how to interact with us when we first return and feel awkward or uncomfortable around us. They want to be supportive, but often feel uncertain of how to approach us. And if they do, they may not know what to say. Now, if they do say the *wrong* thing, just consider that it's not said in malice. They really don't know what to say, or even what not to say. Regardless, try not to be offended or angry at them. Then, some co-workers may say nothing to us at all. On top of general concerns about feeling awkward, they're not comfortable with mortality in general. When they consider our loss, it mentally puts them right in our shoes and brings thoughts of what it would be like to lose someone of their own. Basically, they might avoid us to remain in their own safe emotional world. Let them. It's okay.

If a co-worker actually has lost a loved one in the past, they may even have some of their own unresolved grief issues. Facing us may bring back some unprocessed pain that they're not yet willing or prepared to deal with. While we hate to consider anyone stuck in grief, our immediate return to work is not the time to address someone else's complicated grief. Let's forgive them. However, it would be rare for someone who has experienced the loss of a loved one to actually shy away from any newly bereaved co-worker on the job. If they've moved healthfully forward through their own grief healing process, they might respectfully give us our space, but they'll certainly not avoid us altogether. They've been through the fire, after all. They've been through the pain. They may actually be a strong support advocate for us in the future, but more on

that in a later chapter.

As we move forward through our own grief healing process, we need to keep in mind that many of those at our job will be well ahead of us. As a matter of fact, it'll seem that in just a short time our loss is all but forgotten to them. See, those at work, including both supervisors and peers, don't go home with us at the end of the shift. They don't live the new, unfamiliar life we now unwillingly live. They don't experience the unwanted change in what was once normal for us. For them, nothing at home, or even at work, will be different than their previous day's version of normal. Eventually, since they're not directly affected by it, our loss will fade in their minds. So will the idea that we could still be experiencing debilitating pain. And it's not really their fault. After all, if we're healthfully moving forward in our grief, we'll slowly begin functioning again at higher levels. To them, that means we're "getting over it." Well, we'll never get over it, but we'll often give the impression to others that we're doing okay. And from their observations, they can begin to relax, since we *appear* to no longer be a giant pile of grieving goo, right?

On the plus side, appearing okay, if only for a short time, means we're actually entering a part of the healing process where we can actually manage life for brief periods at a time. At this point, we're finding that maybe for a few hours each day, the pains of loss no longer weave themselves into our every thought and action. What others around us can't see, however, is that for some time to come we're never completely without the deep pain of losing our loved one. We're that duck that seems to be effortlessly gliding across a pond. We appear somewhat graceful to watch, but no one sees what's really going on under our surface.

When our grief pains come, we'll do our best to mask what we don't want others to see. And those who've never experienced a traumatic loss simply don't understand that. To them, we've experienced our loss, lived

through the hurt, and are obviously back to who we were before, or at least well on our way. So, if we're doing what we actually need to be doing, healing, we can't be surprised if some, including our bosses, begin to believe that we've "gotten over it." They're wrong, of course, but again, is that really their fault?

We need to let those at work, whether supervisor or peer, know that grief doesn't just go away. We will never be "over it," but we'll soon be back to previous levels of proficiency on the job. And it's perfectly okay to tactfully inform our bosses that there may be times when we need some considerations in our workday. This could include an occasional, unscheduled day off, some brief time for a walk to clear our heads, or even requesting reassignment of any sensitive or hazardous tasks.

Proactively speaking to the boss about our grief should actually increase our value in a forward-thinking organization, not diminish it. Quite frankly, if there's no understanding by leadership for the potential impacts of our grief to ourselves, the company, and to others, we should actually consider seeking employment elsewhere. Now, that's so much easier said than done though, isn't it? While it may not be practical at the moment, though, if we're working for an employer with no consideration for our grief, it should certainly be a future goal.

The emotional waves of pain from the loss of our loved one are going to continue for some time. That includes happening when we return to the workplace. The intensity of emotional waves and their power may decrease over time, but we don't want them impacting our safety or that of others on the job. While we might be returning to the workplace far too early after our loss, we certainly don't want this interfering with our healthful healing. When we consider what we've learned about *grief work*, there's already so much to do at home. Now, we're packing our Griefcase and taking it with us to the job. Are we going to be ready?

CHAPTER THREE ~ READY, SET, GO TO WORK

"Hold on to life even when it is easier letting go. Hold on to my hand even when I have gone away from you."

Pueblo Blessing

JUST WHAT IS NORMAL?

When considering our return to the workplace, it could actually mean doing so within just a few short days of our loved one passing. Yet, even if it's going to be a few weeks before we return, it's still going to come at a time when we're really just beginning to squint through the mental fog of grief. Regardless of when, there's a good chance we're not ready, no matter how much time has gone by or how prepared we consider ourselves.

How *ready* we are to return to work will be greatly influenced by whether we're a *Normal* griever or a *Complicated* griever at the time. Understandably, normal and complicated grief might be clinical terms that many of us weren't familiar with in the past, right? And it's pretty repulsive to think of anything in our loss now being considered *normal*. Good or bad, it *is* the truth, though. Just know there's a good chance here that you *are* a normal griever. Eighty to ninety percent of us who've lost a loved one are, you know. If not, there'll be more on that in a later chapter. And it's perfectly fine to say that being a *normal* griever still stinks. It does. Loss stinks. But truth be told, *normal* is where we really want and need to be right now in our journey.

Immediately following our loss, that journey, our grief healing journey,

actually began in the *Acute Grief Phase*. Typically, this acute phase immediately follows our loss when we're experiencing the relentless, overwhelming, and debilitating wash of painful emotions that seem to be never-ending. This phase is the initial hours or days of non-stop tears, the constant yearnings for our late loved one, and the frightening feelings of confusion and uncertainty. It is the time when we just put our face down in our hands, or maybe just curl up in a fetal position and tell the world to go away. This is our *Acute Grief Phase*, and it is expected, healthy, and very normal.

For some early grievers, the acute phase will last until we gradually progress into what's known as the *Integrated* or *Abiding Grief Phase*. Here, the painful reflections of losing our loved one no longer seem relentless. Yes, our grief *will* remain with us at some level for the rest of our lives, but now we slowly begin to transition into a state where the debilitating emotions from our loss no longer overwhelm our every thought. Now we can somewhat function again. Many of us in this Integrated or Abiding phase begin to find a better outlook on life, live more intentionally, and rearrange life's priorities.

We progressively begin to move forward into a new, reshaped future that is, unfortunately, without our loved one physically by our side. Yet, we learn to live knowing their cherished love and memories are forever with us. And we must understand right now that *moving forward* never means leaving our loved one behind. No. We absolutely move forward with them always in our life.

On the other hand, *Complicated Grief* is never good, and can come in many bad forms. For instance, one newly bereaved soul with complicated grief may be stuck in the incapacitating *Acute Grief Phase* for an excessive period of time and need professional intervention in moving forward. Another might be in complete denial of the loss, while

yet another bereft soul seeks every possible way to avoid even the slightest emotional pain, even running back to the job too soon, right? In reality, the latter two are only delaying or deferring their grief. They are merely stuffing the hurt back inside where they believe it won't interfere in their day-to-day life. These grieverers are creating entirely different, and often dangerous, pitfalls to healing, much less their safe return to work.

Eventually, repressed grief will come out. It's far too powerful to be held in forever, you know. In fact, psychological studies show that delayed or repressed grief typically becomes much more emotionally and physically harmful before it finds its ultimate release. And grief *will* find its release. When and where that happens, however, will no longer be up to the complicated griever. But we won't be complicated, right? We'll grieve. We'll hurt. We'll move forward in emotionally normal, healthful ways in our loss journey. That's why we're here.

THE NEW FRONTIER AT WORK

As the vast majority of us are normal grieverers, let's focus on being just that for the time being. What pitfalls could possibly be found in returning to work when we're healthfully transitioning through our grief? Well, whether we return after three short days or three short weeks, we're going to find the workplace to be a new, unexplored territory, even if we've worked there for years. It's a new healing challenge in our transition, you see. In those early days after our loss, we healthfully began to transition out of the Acute Grief Phase. We were no longer constantly overwhelmed by never-ending pain, fear, and confusion, and maybe began to somewhat think and function again. Yet, we probably achieved that emotional transition while in the safe familiarity of home, and often among the compassionate love of family, friends, and faith. Every time we broke down, every time it was all just too much, we had a quiet place

to hide or someone we could lean on. In other words, there's a good chance we began our journey moving away from acute grief while within an emotionally safe harbor.

Returning to work after our loss means leaving our safe harbor and venturing out into a new world. It's the same job, alright, but *we're* different now. We're somewhat vulnerable and maybe still confused, often prone to waves of emotions that seem to come out of nowhere and suddenly shut us down. Away from the job, in our safe harbor, we learned to retreat, hold our breath through the waves of emotions, and allow them to wash over us. But on the job now, even in the most compassionate, forward-thinking companies, we don't yet know where to seek shelter. Where is our emotional safe harbor? It may be there, but we've never had to look for it before, and in many organizations, it's never been created.

THE UNEXPLORED GRIEVER

In a good organization, the workplace is often a second home for many of us. We might have once considered it as safe and secure as our own home, right? But for many new grievers, it may be some time before we find it that way again. There may well be kind, compassionate co-workers there, and over the years we might have developed deep relationships on a professional, and sometimes personal level. Yet, in even the most employee-friendly companies, there simply are no provisions for proactive or reactive care for the grieved. Sadly, nor is there measurable grief peer support training for teammates and co-workers on the job. And this is true even when clinical studies have shown that a majority of grieving employers will turn to co-workers for emotional support while at work.

Is the employer at fault for not creating a safe, healing environment

for the bereft employee? Well, yes and no. As can be imagined, mortality is an uncomfortable subject, and not one often discussed in board meetings and planning sessions at the office. After all, thinking of grief in the workplace means thinking about death, and let's face it, no one voluntarily wants to think about death, do they?

On the flip side, when it comes to employee morale and welfare programs, organizations in America now provide some of the most generous benefits to their staff. Beyond compassion, leadership has come to understand that business revenue can be saved by developing and offering employment perks that both attract *and* retain the best available talent. Yet grief and bereavement support, obviously a major morale and welfare issue, somehow doesn't rise to the need for future planning in most business models.

In many ways, that ugly uncomfortableness with death surely has a great deal to do with the lack of grief support in the workplace. That, and maybe it's just not a good sell for the potential candidate, right? We're simply not going to find a help wanted ad out there that reads, "*Great benefits, including Two Weeks Annual Leave, Six Paid Sick Days, 401k Match, Stock Options, and an exceptional Bereavement Support Package in case you lose your spouse or a child while part of our team.*" Nope. And let's face it, fantastic bereavement support is not exactly something we candidates think to look for in a prospective employer, is it?

Truth be told, even the subject of Bereavement Leave is rarely spoken of by most prospective employers, whether it exists or not. And if it does exist, it's typically far from *fantastic*. Believe it or not, the average number of both paid or unpaid Bereavement Leave days offered by American businesses is just three. That's it. Three days! Now, an employee and spouse can bring a precious child into the world and take as much time off from work as deemed necessary. Maternity Leave falls under the

Family Medical Leave Act, or FMLA. However, should that same employee and spouse sadly experience the unthinkable and lose that dear child, all they are offered, on average, is three days to deal with it.

To give full disclosure, there are certainly many, many good organizations that will work with a newly bereaved employee after a loss when it comes to time off. Beyond the mandated three days of leave, employers may allow the bereft to use any earned but unused Paid Time Off. They may even tell the employee to take as much unpaid time off as needed. But still, there is no federally mandated regulation to *protect* the job of the bereaved employee, as there is in FMLA.

When it comes to regulations, we, the bereaved employee, must recognize that successful organizations will have established company policies that must apply to every worker across the organization. Now, it's a rather litigious world out there, isn't it? And if an employer strays from established policy, such as giving five days of Bereavement Leave to one employee but only three to another, the business faces the risk of showing favoritism, and even accusations of discrimination that could lead to legal actions against the company.

Do we blame businesses for not considering our emotional state after the loss of our loved one? Do we blame the federal government for not stepping in and mandating Bereavement Leave? Or do we blame society as a whole? At this point, we're going back to work for one reason or another. Yes, three days off after our loss is woefully short and downright unfair. But, right or wrong, that's what it is, and we'll deal with what we've been dealt. Again, for many of us, it doesn't matter whether we've had three days or three weeks away from the job, it's rarely going to be enough.

CHAPTER FOUR ~ PREPARING YOUR AWARENESS OF SELF

"Grief is perhaps an unknown territory for you. You might feel both helpless and hopeless without a sense of a 'map' for the journey. Confusion is the hallmark of a transition. To rebuild both your inner and outer world is a major project."

Anne Grant

Without question, we've been through a train wreck with the passing of our loved one, haven't we? And if we're on our way back to work, there's no question that the mental and physical after-effects will influence our performance on some level. Our sleep patterns may have changed, or at least been somewhat disrupted. Eating properly has not exactly been a priority lately, has it? As a result, our normal nutritional intake has probably suffered, and so has our strength and energy reserves. Our mind has been spinning like a top too, and at speeds we didn't know possible.

Whether we realize it or not, there's a good bet that we're both physically and mentally fatigued. We should now be aware that we're not going to immediately operate at our previous norms. So, when preparing to return to the job, we must have a foundational understanding of what may influence our abilities to fully function on the job.

While it's not the intent within the sections that follow to make anyone a mental health professional, the content is incredibly relevant for our transition back to work, as well as moving forward in life. It provides a look at what may or may not be going on inside of us as we grieve our loss. It gives us an awareness and understanding of self. And with that awareness and understanding, we can recognize signs and be proactive or

reactive to actions or thoughts that may be delaying our healthful grief journey.

THE EMOTIONS OF GRIEF

Right now, emotions may just seem crazy, chaotic, and confusing after our loss, right? We're all as unique as snowflakes and fingerprints, and no two of us will necessarily share the same emotions from it, though. And even if we do share one or more, they certainly won't be at the same intensity levels.

Regardless, let's look at some typical grief emotions we might face and understand that some may impact us on the job in uncomfortable, and even unsafe, ways. When considering each, we should also understand that typical grief emotions will generally be more intense during the immediate days and weeks that follow our loss. Therefore, they also have the potential to be more mentally and physically impairing during these times as well, even if we've transitioned from the Acute to the Integrating phase of healing. If we are healthfully healing, however, the intensity of the more destructive emotions we experience should gradually diminish over time and lose their influence over our lives.

Shock

An injury to the psyche after living through an extremely frightening or distressing event and may result in challenges to normally functioning or coping afterward.

Shock can be both emotionally and physically debilitating, often requiring immediate but temporary aid from others. While each person who experiences a traumatic event will react differently, many recover quickly from shock with proper support and don't experience long-term problems. While our shock may have subsided before a return to work, its effects can often return early in the Integrating Grief Phase, when

unexpected waves of emotions strike. Don't be caught off guard.

Denial

The refusal to accept a past or present reality and is most commonly self-employed to unwittingly protect an individual from their own negative thoughts about a traumatic event or action.

Denial in grief is the refusal to accept the facts of the loss, either consciously or unconsciously. Immediately following the event, the unconscious mind may feverishly seek a return to "normal" in defense of our overall mental health. Normal, in this sense, means life before our loved one passed away. In this normal, the loved one is still alive, although just not present with us. This response is usually short-term in nature but may frequently repeat in our mind. Denial can be prolonged by refusing to deal with the consequences of the loss, such as visiting the gravesite, getting rid of personal belongings, or even filling out necessary paperwork. Within the healthful grieving process, denial should soon fade to reality, and reality is where we need to be.

Emotionally Overwhelmed

The mental state of being beset by intense emotions that are difficult to intellectually manage.

Being emotionally overwhelmed can often affect our ability to think and act rationally or perform in an efficient, functional manner. In the recent death of a loved one, we may not only feel overwhelmed by the painful emotions, but also by the responsibilities of 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 during your grief healing journey. As emotions are sorted out over time, as described in the use of our Griefcase in Chapter One, being overwhelmed will gradually subside.

Confused

A feeling that one does not understand something or cannot decide what to do.

When considering loss grief, we may often experience periods where our ability to concentrate will be severely limited. This failure to concentrate is simply a result of the numerous emotions, questions, and concerns that are constantly overwhelming our thought processes. Confusion is typically a short-term emotional condition and should diminish reasonably soon in our proper healing processes.

Fear – Being 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 response to our loss, as we might be faced with an unfamiliar life and an unknown future without our loved one. There can also be fear in adapting to dramatic changes in all our former familiar habits, behaviors, and feelings. Fears after the passing of a loved one can diminish without serious aftermath if our grieving processes continue in a healthy manner. This means we must, sadly, become familiar with a future without our late loved one physically here. Early in grief, however, fear can often combine with other painful emotions and unexpectedly overwhelm us at any time.

Panic - Anxiety Attack

A sudden, uncontrollable fear or anxiety, often causing wildly unthinking behavior.

After the death of a loved one, we may become overwhelmed by questions about a 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 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 our grief, the resulting physical reactions can create risk to our safety and health. Like other early grief emotions, any panic or anxiety episodes should lessen in a reasonable amount of time through our successful grief work and healthful healing journey.

Anger

An intense emotional state of mind caused by displeasure.

Anger can result when something of value has been taken away against our desire or control. In the death of our loved one, there may be numerous reasons to feel anger. We might feel anger toward ourselves for being unable to control what took place. We may be angry at God, or the universe, for the death, feeling that we've been personally targeted or punished by an uncontrollable supreme power. The anger might be focused on other parties involved in the loss, such as an emergency room doctor who failed to revive a terminally injured trauma patient. As long as we're not harming ourselves or others, however, anger is a healthy and normal response to our loss. Anger from loss has actually contributed to society in positive ways. The organization Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), for example, is the result of the anger felt by a surviving mother whose child was killed by an alcohol-impaired motor vehicle operator. For us, any outward displays of intense anger should lessen in a reasonable amount of time through successful grief work. We must, however, keep in mind that our anger must not harm ourselves or others.

If this becomes the case, it is highly recommended to immediately seek intervention through mental health professionals.

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 we somehow failed in our duties and obligations to protect our late loved one. Guilt may also stem from believing that some action or inaction by us resulted in the loss. It's typical for the human mind to quickly find fault for the loss, as it desires answers for that which is unknown. When fault is unknown, we may incorrectly assign blame to ourself to satisfy our immediate need for closure. And even when fault is known, we may often consider our actions, or lack of actions, to be a contributing factor in the loss, resulting in feelings of guilt. However, long-term impacts of guilt are not common. Over time in a healthy grief journey, we'll usually recognize that there were no self-initiated actions or inactions that led or contributed to the passing of our 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 us before our loved one passed. It might have been an argument just before the tragedy struck, or simply not having said, "I love you," during our last conversation. It's a natural and normal emotional response after loss. Regret is actually meant to be helpful in the development of our personalities. It's 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 on us 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 with us until self-forgiveness is achieved through our healthful grieving processes.

Shame

The painful feeling arising from the consciousness of doing something dishonorable or improper and believing others know or will discover and disapprove of the act.

After a loss, a parent may feel shame for not being the protector of a child who died. At work, we may feel shame for appearing weak by openly crying or displaying our uncontrollable grief emotions. Shame after a loss, however, rarely involves an actual bad action. Instead, we typically only self-perceive the action as bad. Early after our loss, shame may not have any outward indications but can combine with other intense loss emotions to overwhelm us. Shame, however, should certainly lessen over time through our 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, we 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 themselves as an inferior nurturer and protector of any surviving children. While inferiority may not be highly observable, the impacts to us may carry over into a lack of confidence in other areas. Inferiority should normally be a short-term condition if we're progressing healthfully through our grief work.

THE DARK EMOTIONS OF DEPRESSION AND DESPAIR

Regardless of whether we consider ourselves to be *Normal* or *Complicated* griever, the emotions we feel from our loss can be extremely complex. One of the great questions that must be answered individually is whether to seek professional help in our journey. Even in Normal Grief, many of us find incredible help in speaking with counselors, clergy, or mental health professionals. Their use could greatly ease our grief healing journey. Is it mandatory? No. But please recognize that if we are harming ourselves or others, or if we are in the Acute Grief Phase for an excessive amount of time, we are absolutely in the area of Complicated Grief and *must* seek competent intervention to help resolve our destructive feelings.

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 we feel, think, and behave, including interacting with others. It can lead to difficulties in performing necessary day-to-day activities. Further, we may come to feel that life is no longer worth living in more severe and/or long-term periods of depression. Grief can be a major trigger for depression, but please understand that not all griever experience depression.

Grief and depression can share remarkably 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, and even 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, and getting a diagnosis and seeking treatment can be lifesaving. If we believe we're experiencing signs of depression, we are again strongly encouraged to seek immediate mental health intervention.

Despair

The feeling that there is no hope and that nothing can be done to improve a difficult or worrying situation.

The acute emotion of *despair* can certainly lead a newly bereaved soul to harmful or suicidal thoughts. When the passing of someone we love brings uncertainty and insecurity in our future, we might want to just give it all up. Just like grief and depression, grief and despair can seem similar in their symptoms. Feeling grief, however, is a healthy, productive, and adaptive response to loss. Feeling despair, on the other hand, is unhealthy and destructive. It is a maladaptive response to the death of a loved one.

Despair includes such exhibited symptoms as feeling hopeless and empty inside, self-loathing and feeling worthless, believing that life is not worth living, persistent sadness or irritability, loss of joy or pleasurable feelings, an inability to control negative thoughts, anxiety/mood swings and aggressiveness, short-temperedness with well-meaning people, isolation and decreased social interaction, and 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. Regardless, if we're experiencing any signs of despair, or someone we know and trust is telling us that we are, it is strongly encouraged that we seek immediate mental health intervention.

Again, we're not here to get mired down in clinical details. Yet, this awareness and understanding of our potential emotions can be an important step in preparing ourselves for the workplace and preparing ourselves in our grief healing journey. After all, awareness and understanding are two particularly important factors in so many areas of our life.

CHAPTER FIVE ~

BODY AND MIND IMPACTS OF GRIEF

“Living is death; dying is life. We are not what we appear to be. On this side of the grave we are exiles, on that citizens; on this side orphans, on that children.”

Henry Ward Beecher

PHYSICAL & MENTAL IMPACTS OF GRIEF

So, we’re preparing ourselves to go back to work after our loved one passed, or we’re already back there. Either way, we’re lugging our Griefcase with us, like it or not. And we’ve now learned what we carry inside that thing, too. Emotions. Some of them big, powerful, influential emotions, right? To that end, we need to become aware of their potential influences and understand how they can impact our return to work.

Everyone experiences emotions. We all know that. Arguably, humanity wouldn’t survive without having and responding to internal feelings in some manner. Some of these emotions are ones that bring joy, while some certainly bring intense pain. And we know the painful ones, don’t we? When it comes to profound loss, we even take that a step further. We’re either suffering extreme emotions we’ve never felt before or we’re feeling familiar ones at levels of intensity once never imagined possible in our past.

Just so we’re all clear, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Emotion as *a conscious mental reaction subjectively experienced as strong feelings usually directed toward a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes in the body.*

Of importance in that lengthy definition is the last part where it

indicates an emotion will typically be accompanied by physiological (physical) and behavioral (mental) changes. These are changes to our body, as well as to the mental processes of our mind. For the Normal Griever, the more severe physical and mental influences are usually temporary and more prevalent early after our loss. However, complicated, prolonged grief can extend that period of time where the severe influences of emotions can actually cause long-term harm.

What follows are some of the possible physical and mental influences of grief from our loss. Before getting into them, however, let's touch for a minute on how they could both interact with our body. After all, we might wonder how emotions in the mind could somehow influence our physical health, right? But we can just cut to the chase now by stating that the mind was not meant to be in a prolonged period of distress or dis-ease. We simply aren't wired to be at heightened levels of emotion, good or bad. Our natural state of being is to be at *ease* and not in a prolonged state of dis-ease. And yes, the medical term *disease* actually originated with our ancestors, who believed that the physical body was more prone to illness when the mind has been in a long-term state of dis-ease. Dis-ease in the mind creates disease in the body.

Regardless of disease origins or beliefs, it is fact that when the human mind senses fear, anger, confusion, or so many other adverse feelings, it instantaneously dumps a cocktail of chemicals into our bloodstream. It does this to physically help us remove ourselves from a dangerous situation, such as coming along a lion, tiger, or bear on the trail ahead. Fight or flight time, right? Adrenaline, in this example, is instantaneously flushed into our bloodstream to give us a flash of heightened strength, sharper eyesight, greater concentration, and more. The mind doesn't care if we're going to stay and fight or run away. Either way, fight or flight, we're going to need that physical boost to survive. And the subconscious mind

gives it to us whether we ask or not. It really only knows it wants us to survive. The subconscious mind keeps our lungs pulling in air. It keeps our heart beating. Given time, it will heal our wounds. It does all this and so much more without ever asking us because we need those actions to survive. The subconscious mind is just doing its job, after all.

The chemicals dumped into our bodies when commanded by the subconscious mind, however, are only meant to be temporary. They're intended only to help remove us from an alarming situation and are immensely potent. And many, such as adrenaline, can actually be extremely caustic to the body with prolonged exposure and damage our vital organs over time.

When we grieve and are in heightened states of emotion, such as fear, anger, or anxiety, the subconscious mind is busy dumping the chemicals into our bodies it believes we need to survive. If our heightened state of emotion continues for prolonged periods, the subconscious will continue to feed us those powerful, caustic chemicals, which eventually begin to take a destructive toll on our bodies. While this is more prevalent in the Complicated Griever versus the Normal Griever, we should all be aware of what prolonged mental dis-ease in the mind can do to our overall health.

Let's the time now to go over the following body and mind influences of grief. We may recognize one, all, or none of the ones presented. Yet, as with the emotional review in the previous chapter, awareness and understanding are necessary for our grief healing journey.

PHYSICAL IMPACTS OF GRIEF

Insomnia

It is common for us to experience a change in sleeping patterns after the loss of a loved one. This may not only be during the immediate time

afterward but could go on for weeks or even months. We may have trouble falling or staying asleep. The reasons include intrusive thoughts, anxieties, and fears that come from the loss. We may be anxious about recurring dreams of our traumatic event or maybe avoiding a bed once shared with our late loved one.

Loss of Appetite

The nasty, negative feelings associated with grief can leave us with a lack of appetite and disinterest in food or eating in general. From a nutritional perspective, this leads to undernutrition, malnutrition, and weight loss. Also, the physiological effects of depression, as well as isolation and our possible denial of social support can have further negative impacts on our dietary intake, and therefore, our physical health.

Restlessness

After our loss, we may be unsure of what to do next. We might feel hesitant and unsure of our ability to make decisions. Often, our loss can seem to take away our control, and there's a resulting need to *do something*, even when that's not possible. Restlessness could result in short periods of hyperactivity when we can find busywork, such as cleaning, or putting away things in an almost manic fashion. This can then be followed by periods when we just sit, yet feel anxious, nervous, and unfocused.

Fatigue

Extreme fatigue and exhaustion are common experiences for many of us following our loss. The obvious reasons can be our lack of sleep and malnutrition. However, stress is heavily present in our grief and can be another major contributor to fatigue. Stress overworks the body's adrenal glands, which specifically deal with human survival responses in that *fight or flight* mode we learned of earlier. Prolonged stress simply leads to

adrenal exhaustion, and if unchecked, to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

Muscle Weakness

After our loss, the ability to exert physical effort may be reduced even without feelings of exhaustion. Tension from anxiety alone can leave us physically weak. Add in possible nutritional deficiencies, insomnia, as well as prolonged periods of emotional stress, and our body muscles do not receive adequate fuel or rest to recover. We may well be willing to perform physical tasks but are sometimes unable to do so on the same levels as before our loss.

Body Aches and Pains

We may complain of aches and pains in the body, although we weren't recently involved in physical trauma or increased activities. One accepted theory is psychosomatic, meaning adverse bodily symptoms caused by the mental or emotional influences of the mind. Aches and pains are felt when our 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

For some time after our loss, we 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 us these nasty headaches and migraines.

Overall Health Issues

The emotional distress from the loss of a loved one can result in lifestyle

changes for us. We may move from, or even give up such behaviors as maintaining a healthy diet or exercising regularly. Further, we might actually go beyond the physical limitations of the body during the emotional confusions that result from loss. As a result, any existing medical conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes can be exasperated, especially if prescribed medications are missed or halted due to forgetfulness or other emotional stressors.

Heart Palpitations/Tightness in the Chest/Shortness of Breath

In that intense period just following our loss, we might suddenly complain of symptoms that normally indicate a possible heart attack, with pain and tightness in the chest, as well as shortness of breath. In these cases, we absolutely must quickly rule out a heart attack by summoning immediate medical intervention. Per the Mayo Clinic, however, this may be a physical response to grief known as stress-induced cardiomyopathy, or *broken heart syndrome*. These symptoms may be brought on by our heart's reaction to the surge of stress hormones that cause a part of the heart to temporarily enlarge and not pump as efficiently. Again, per the clinic, the condition is treatable and typically reverses in short order. Regardless, either condition requires immediate attention *by proper medical personnel*.

Gastric/Stomach Pains

Those changes to our eating habits that we experience may well influence the gastric functions of our 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 our body's immune system. This could lead to more frequent illnesses for us, such as colds and flu. However, the emotional stress from our grief can also interfere with the body's ability to fight the more severe bacterial infections, like pneumonia, meningitis, and food poisoning.

A Final Word on the Physical Impacts of Grief

As is obvious with the adverse physical aspects presented, many of them are well within our conscious ability to control. As offered earlier, the most important thing that we can do as grievers, whether we're returning to work, or moving forward in life, is to take it easy on ourselves. We must do our very best to eat well, sleep as best we can, and willingly turn to the caring support of others to help us recognize when the physical impacts of grief are taking their toll on our health.

MENTAL IMPACTS OF GRIEF

Lack of Concentration

For us, a lack of concentration is often associated with the *Fog of Grief*. It's when our mind may be unwittingly attempting to process so many emotions or other related stressors that it overwhelms our conscious efforts to focus on any one specific task. Often, we can't concentrate and will gaze off into the distance for long periods of time. At other times, we may begin a project, only to shortly lose concentration and quit whatever we're doing.

Confusion

How could this happen? How could I have stopped it from happening?

These are typical questions of confusion. See, grief events are

unexpected. That usually leaves us with so many questions about the loss, as well as about our life to come that have no easy or immediate answer. And our mind may repetitively ask such questions until they are answered, or until it eventually accepts that there is no answer. This unwillingly consumes a great deal of our conscious thought normally reserved for receiving outside input. We might even appear to be paying attention to others, or even reading the directions for something that needs to be done, but the details from most of these inputs can often be overshadowed by those persistent, unanswered questions bouncing back and forth in our mind. As a result, we attempt to go back to something we were recently told or reviewed, only to find we can't recall what we took in earlier.

Memory Loss

Every thought and emotion from the passing our loved one can take up enormous space and energy inside our mind. As a result, our 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 even develop, and we may experience 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 our minds following loss. These and so many similar questions surrounding the tragedy can have no easy or immediate answer. This inability to come to an answer can create fear in our mind, and unalleviated fear creates unease and nervousness, often leading to extreme levels of anxiousness.

Distractedness

Initially following our loss, a lack of concentration, possibly combined with confusion, memory loss, and anxiousness may all, individually or collectively, give us the inability to focus on almost anything. Also, our grieving mind can typically be challenged with extreme emotional pains that present themselves whenever they want and overwhelm all our other thoughts, causing further distractedness.

Mental Exhaustion

As an early result of our loss, we may experience the cumulative mental impacts caused by excessive and prolonged stress. This typically occurs when we feel overwhelmed and emotionally drained, yet face the ongoing demands of life and work. Mental exhaustion may also increase our physical exhaustion and negatively influence our body's ability to function at once normal levels.

Lethargy

The emotional stress of the passing of our loved one often leaves us feeling tired, fatigued, and just lacking energy. This is the result of our overwhelming emotional stress, altered diet, and a disruption of normal sleep patterns. Lethargy may cause us to constantly feel sleepy, physically and mentally drained, and sluggish. This sluggishness can be in terms of both movement and in our cognitive thinking abilities and can lead to concerns for our safety as we move about the workplace.

Mood Extremes

Our loss creates so many negative emotions, including anger, confusion, and despair. These negative feelings can potentially be at levels of intensity that we've never experienced in the past. We're not used to dealing with them at this level, are we? And while the processing of our grief emotions is generally done internally, they can become

overwhelming and expressed more outwardly. As a result, we may be casually speaking with an acquaintance about a mutual interest when we suddenly burst out in tears, only to then become angry for a few moments before suddenly returning to a friendlier mannerism. All the while, we're seemingly unable to control our outward burst of emotions.

Denial of Realities

The passing of our loved one was absolutely an unwelcomed and unwanted event, and denial of our loss can often be a common conscious coping mechanism for us. Although deceptive, it mentally provides our overwhelmed mind with short-term relief. Even though only temporary, this coping mechanism may actually carry over into other areas in our life, such as dealing with difficult issues or day-to-day problems that could pop up along the way.

Withdrawal

Fears, unanswered life questions, guilt, and other troubling emotions often contribute greatly to the anxiety levels in our mind early after our loss. Anxiety is also a leading cause of social withdrawal, as our new apprehensions can become overwhelming. We can sometimes feel concerned that others will observe and judge us negatively for our expressions of mourning the loss. Further, we may feel isolated in our suffering and think we can no longer relate to others. As a result, we begin to withdraw from others, including those who only desire to support us.

Distrust of Self and Others

This horrible loss was outside our control. Yet, the control over our responsibilities in every area of life can be a very instinctive trait for all humans. After the sudden and unexpected death of our loved one, we may have feelings of personal inadequacy and distrust in our own ability to manage the other responsibilities in our daily life. Conversely, we may

also have found fault, right or wrong, in another party for the loss of our loved one, and we determine that we can no longer trust others. Either distrust reaction can transition to daily life, where we refuse offers of help or support from others. We can even stop seeking usual advice or guidance from those we once held in high regard.

Loss of Faith

The majority of people around the globe believe in a higher power, and religious beliefs can be an integral part of our self-worth. The unexpected loss of our loved one can often cause us to question and lose our convictions of faith. Feelings of hopelessness, despondency, and despair can be typical when we become uncertain of our deep-rooted spiritual beliefs. A loss of religious faith can also lead to a loss of faith in ourselves, as well as our faith in others. This can certainly lead to withdrawal from others and sap our ability to interact, be creative, or have any motivation for purpose in life.

Depression

At some point after our loss, we will, and must, begin to fully contemplate life without our loved one physically there by our side. And this new life is certainly unwelcome. Because of this, our mind may unwittingly struggle for ways to return to how it was before the tragic event. When we can't find ways to do this, we may falsely come to believe that life will never be good again and nothing can be done to change that outlook. That false belief can lead to an overall depressed state-of-mind. And when depression is transitioned to daily life, we constantly feel fatigued and lack energy. We may become isolated and avoid socializing with others. As long we're not harming ourselves or others, know that some levels of depression in our grief is normal, short-term, and a part of the grief healing process. We are emotionally coming face-to-face with our

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 certainly lead to harmful feelings. If we suspect we may be experiencing symptoms of severe or long-term depression, we should immediately seek supportive intervention through compassionate mental health professionals.

CHAPTER SIX ~

GRIEF, MOURNING, AND BEREAVEMENT

“They that love beyond the world cannot be separated by it. Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas; they live in one another still.”

William Penn

Grief, *Mourning*, and *Bereavement* are words often used interchangeably when speaking of our state of mind, or state of being, after the loss of our loved one. While each term has its own separate and specific meaning, there’s really no social indignation or scorn when used out of context by us or others. However, it can be advantageous in our grief work 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 to expound even further on its important references throughout many chapters in this book. It also provides an outline of the mental healing processes we must experience to healthfully move forward after the tragic event. As with the definitions of grief, mourning, and bereavement, we would do well to have an awareness and understanding of these Grief Work processes.

GRIEF

For the purposes of our loss, 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’s It. Unfortunately, the popular definition fails to mention that those emotional responses are painful and have the

potential to become extremely intense. If we do not process them healthfully, 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 our loss. Grief is not external, however. Further, grief is not an emotion. It's not felt by us, as the feelings of anger, guilt, or despair can be. As we now know, taken figuratively, grief can be considered the mind's Griefcase, holding all the painful emotions consciously present after our loss.

To adjust healthfully to a new life without our lost loved one, we must face and learn to cope with the challenging feelings of grief. This internal mental struggle, or processing, of the intense and painful emotions within the mind is *grief*. It only becomes externally observed when we're overwhelmed by the internal struggle. Early in our loss, the internal pain can easily and often become powerful and spill out for others around us to see. But when this happens, it's technically a form of mourning.

Grief can also come from other profound loss events that undesirably alter a person's life. 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.

MOURNING

While grief is the internal emotions we feel for the loss of our loved one, *mourning* is the external actions we might take after the profound event. Mourning is mostly our shared, outward response to the loss. It externalizes our loss in the form of actions, symbols, ceremonies, or rituals that activate social support. The activities of mourning are intended

to aid us 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 a newly bereaved soul should reenter society. Once, this also included the long-term wearing of certain mourning symbols or accessories in public to let others know we may need a little space or support. These declining indicators of being in mourning are no longer deemed important to the emotional healing of the survivor in the world today. In more recent societal norms, transitional healing may go unconsidered in the workplace, where it's not uncommon to expect a grieved employee 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 survivor to accept the reality of the loss while also integrating the life and love once shared with the one who passed away.

Although greatly in decline, mourning can be essential in our healthful healing processes. It's also important for those who surround us to understand mourners are not *over it* when the black suit or dress comes off. We're only beginning to transition into a new life, which doesn't happen just because a mourning ritual has concluded.

BEREAVEMENT

The source word Bereave is commonly defined as *depriving, taking away,*

seizing, or robbing another of something of value. That rings a bell for us alright, right? Yet, the term Bereavement in a more relevant context to us can be defined as *being deprived of our loved one through a profound absence, especially due to a loved one's death.*

While grief is internal and mourning is external, bereavement is actually the state of *being* that begins immediately with the loss of our loved one. Put another way, we are *bereaved* because we are simply in the position of having been deprived of our loved one. And it is the actual state of being *bereaved* that results in the actions of grief and mourning.

Of importance is that 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 our being deprived of a loved one who passed away cannot be lessened or reversed. That loved one will not physically return. We are, therefore, in the state of being *bereaved* for the remainder of our lives.

Bereavement, by definition, is certainly different from grief and mourning. Yet, again, it's not a bad thing to unwittingly interchange the words when speaking with others. After all, most of society doesn't know the difference, right? Now we do, and maybe that'll help a little in our healing journey.

GRIEF WORK

As stated earlier, the phrase Grief Work was first used by psychiatrist Erich Lindemann in the year 1944, to describe the many tasks and processes that we, as griever, must complete to successfully move forward after our loss.

Healing through our grief is difficult work. It requires exertions of

physical and mental energies that are no less strenuous on us than digging a ditch or being made to solve an almost unsolvable riddle, remember? Typically, we not only mourn and grieve for the lost loved one, but also for the unfulfilled hopes, dreams, affections, and needs we once shared with them.

We must actively perform our grief work if we're to ease the emotional pains from the loss. And this demands so much more than just experiencing the reactions. It also requires that we actively perform mental tasks and undertake specific courses of thought. To do so successfully will allow us to gradually release the intense emotional pains and begin experiencing the present day in an emotionally healthful manner. It also serves the important function of transitioning us to our life of peace and purpose with our late loved one with us, a part of us, but not physically by our side.

Many times, others who have not experienced loss are unaware of just how much work is involved in moving beyond the emotional pains. This may also include many co-workers on the job. In fact, today's society has unrealistic expectations for the influences of grief. There can often be many unhealthy suggestions in the workplace from supervisors, peers, and subordinates when we first get back. Well-meant phrases such as "*Be strong,*" "*Time heals all wounds,*" or "*You'll be over it soon,*" can actually conflict with the healing concepts of grief work. This conflict can cause us to avoid the healthy expression of emotions. These types of suggestions to avoid or repress our feelings can result in the very problematic disorder of *Complicated Grief*. At the very least, it can certainly delay our healing processes.

When it comes to learning more about grief work, we'd certainly do well to spend some time researching the works of those such as Dr. Erich Lindemann, and more recently, Dr. J. William Worden, noted

psychologist in the field of bereavement. We might embrace Dr. Worden's processes of grief work in which he prescribes four fundamental tasks that we should purposely achieve in our healthful healing processes. The first and most important of those tasks is *accepting the reality of our loss*. The second is willfully processing the pain, as we could certainly do using the concepts of our Griefcase, right? The third is adjusting to our current world without our lost loved one with us, which we all know isn't an easy task at all. The fourth task is establishing that lasting connection with our late loved one that will remain with us forever. Putting it all together, it is grief work that can allow us to move forward in our lives without leaving our late loved one behind.

As we return to the unfamiliar territory of our workplace, we bereaved souls must be aware of how much real effort it will take to move forward in our loss. Unfortunately, grief work has been a concept rarely known outside of clinical circles. That may be because so many of us won't seek out professional help, right? Regardless, we should certainly look to become familiar with the tasks within *grief work*. It will absolutely aid in rediscovering a future life that's filled with peace and purpose.

CHAPTER SEVEN ~ THE NATURAL FLOW OF YOUR EMOTIONS

“Say not in grief that she is no more but say in thankfulness that she was. A death is not the extinguishing of a light, but the putting out of the lamp because the dawn has come.”

Rabindranath Tagore

Sadly, far too many of us who’ve lost someone will simply return to work too soon. We may not have to, yet we’ll choose a fast return because we believe it’ll help us avoid the pain. Yet, we learned earlier that the emotions of loss are far too powerful to be held back forever, right? Those strong feelings from traumatic and profound events that are forcibly held inside will only fester and become much more powerful. One way or another, they *will* find their ultimate release. It’s only a matter of time. We have to have some measure of control over these powerful emotions, as allowing them to come out unchecked will usually have devastating consequences.

Although it doesn’t get the attention it requires, acknowledging and processing our emotions is extremely vital to our well-being. See, in nature, everything that enters the healthy, balanced human body is also meant to flow back out. Food, water, the air we breathe, all enter the body and exit as energy, whether that be in the form of thought, movement, growth, mending wounds, or at least a thousand other ways we could list here. Anything entering the body that is unusable is later expelled as waste, right? And when we take in too much of even the good stuff, the body tries to store it away for later, and usually to the detriment of our

overall health. We mostly see that in obesity, or excessive body fat, which often brings poor health conditions along with it. A healthy body requires a balance of flowing in and flowing back out. Balance, see? Ease. A natural flow.

In our case, we took in the sense, or knowledge, of our loved one's death. That produced the energy, or emotions, within our mind that must flow back out again. If they don't, they'll absolutely eat us up inside. Actually, it's not much different than picturing a gentle stream running through a forest. As the flowing water winds through the woodlands, it provides nourishment and a natural balance, supporting the beautiful flora and fauna inside. But then let's imagine a busy little beaver who comes along to build a dam across that stream. Once built, the normal flow of water is held up, and it backs up behind the dam. There, it floods the surrounding forest and drowns out all the bountiful vegetation. Beyond the dam, beauty fades as well, as the once plentiful wildflowers and ferns no longer receive water and nourishment, and slowly wither away. It's not hard to see, after all, how damming a natural flow in can permanently scar, and even destroy, a once beautiful, productive, and thriving ecosystem.

The beaver dam scenario deals with holding back the flow of water in a stream, right? But again, it's incredibly similar to our own need to allow our human emotions to flow in and out again. So, let's go to the emotional dam we've built. What happens when the pressure to hold back the pain becomes too much? After all, the flow of emotions is still coming, right? But it's backing up deeper and deeper. There's more and more destruction happening inside too. It's drowning out our self-esteem, our confidence, and even our desire to thrive. Beyond our dam, downstream, the waters no longer flow as they did before, and maybe we're not nourishing our family, our friends, or all that once brought us joy.

Eventually, the pressure behind our dam will become too much until, without warning, it explodes. The resulting burst will be an uncontrollable cascade of raging, raw emotions that rush frenzied downstream and outwards towards others. There, it could destroy everything in its path, including any remaining friends, passions, and the potential for a joyous life.

The bottom line, we must let our emotions flow out, even if we're only doing so internally. And we remember that internally means we're acknowledging them, right? That's all. We're feeling them. We're giving them conscious thought. Let's do this and control the flow. Let's keep it from exploding out from any dam we might've constructed. Doing so will certainly ease the journey along our healing pathway

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CHAPTER EIGHT ~ COMPLICATIONS IN RETURNING TO WORK

Only the soul that knows the mighty grief can know the mighty rapture. Sorrows come to stretch out spaces in the heart for joy.

Edwin Markham

There very well may be some watermarks in grief, such as the *Acute* and *Integrating* phases we've covered earlier. However, many of us won't really be able to base going back to work on any hardcore measure of where we are along our healing journey. Not only are we each so unique, but the policies of our employer, as well as our own financial needs, can certainly play contributing factors. Yet, as we learned earlier, unless we're hurting ourselves or others, we're probably going to be okay, even if we must return too soon. When there's no danger of harm, there's no wrong way to grieve. We just want to do so as healthfully as possible.

What we do need is a good understanding that grief healing doesn't run along any linear path or achieve a series of chronological stages. There are absolutely no calendars or clocks in this ugly grief thing. Unfortunately, grief isn't exactly a rare and isolated event, either. Since the dawn of time, pain from the loss of a loved one has been a part of human life. And with that, some helpful generalities in when many of us might hit a certain place along our journeys have developed over the years. Even with that in mind, though, we must remember that moving forward is on our time, and our time only. We *own* our own grief. No one else does. So, let's be cautious with those who might say, "I thought you'd be doing much better by now."

FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF

One of the first *measuring* concepts we can cover for our journey needs to be simply dispelled altogether. It's the infamous Five Stages of Grief model we often hear so much about. Well, we'll just toss this one aside because it was never actually intended for those of us who've survived the death of a loved one. Instead, it was based on the studies and observations of medical patients who were informed of a terminal illness. Now, we're not emotionally well at times, but we're certainly not terminally ill, are we? We don't need those stages.

Even though we're putting the Five Stages model aside, it might still serve us well to know how it came to be used with the bereaved, right? Well, in the year 1969, Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross published the book *On Death and Dying*, based on her research with, as we just learned, terminally ill patients. She was studying subjects who knew they were dying. And in her studies, Dr. Kübler-Ross observed that after learning of their imminent death, the patients typically followed five progressive emotional *stages*. Those stages usually began with a *denial* of the prognosis, successively followed by *anger*, *bargaining*, and *depression*. Eventually, the unfortunate patients reached the final stage of *acceptance* for their pending death.

Originally, Dr. Kübler-Ross named her study model *The Five Stages of Receiving Catastrophic News*. However, before her book, *On Death and Dying*, was published, she changed the model name to *The Five Stages of Grief*. Almost immediately following the book's release, however, mental health professionals and grief caregivers across the land erroneously morphed the model to include counseling those of us who've lost a loved one. As tragic as the anticipation of certain death can be, however, it's far, far different than the emotions we feel, right?

Even today, we unfortunately find the *Five Stages of Grief* concept

used by those who counsel or support us in loss. Could this be a problem? The answer, unfortunately, is yes! In one example, a newly bereaved soul who is introduced to the Five Stages model may falsely believe it's the only healthy way to heal from the loss. Yet, when the griever fails to progress along any of the prescribed stages, it could depress them, making it seem like it's not possible to healthfully achieve healing. Without question, this could greatly impair and delay the true healing processes of those using the Five Stages model.

We can also go back to the more relevant *Grief Work* concepts that we've learned of in this book. In our grief work, we now know that *acceptance* of the loss is something that must come right up front. In the Five Stages model, *acceptance* is the fifth and final stage of grief for the terminally ill. For us, however, it's almost impossible to move forward without acceptance coming first.

Just like in the Five Stages model for the terminally ill, we grievers may certainly have some initial denial early in our loss. We might've gone through a bargaining stage as well when we asked the powers-that-be to take us instead of our loved one. And there's little doubt we're all angry at some point, and maybe a little depressed too. But most loss survivors initially experience all these *stages* of grief before breakfast, only to experience them all over again before dinner. And if we want to call them stages, then we have stages that we don't even know how to describe, right? And that's okay. Regardless, let's keep in mind that the one thing we must take away here is that *acceptance* must come first in healthful healing.

PHASES AND TIMELINES OF THE NORMAL GRIEVER

As for phases and timelines in healthfully moving forward in our grief, there's really nothing set in stone. Sorry. There are, however, some of

those generalities we'll want to consider here, as we can benefit from what's been observed in others who've been through the fire before us, right?

Even with all the *norms*, *typicals*, and *generalities*, we simply DO NOT just *get over it* when we've lost a loved one, do we? Neither does time heal all wounds. Time can never fully heal the pain, as life will never again be the desired *normal* it once was for us. Time will, however, lessen our pain. It might be hard to believe sometimes, but we can count on that. But it certainly isn't going to happen overnight. So, it's important to know that our initial return to work absolutely represents the period of greatest temporary risk to our capabilities, productively, and yes, personal safety on the job.

Make no mistake, safety to ourselves and others in the workplace is paramount, so those of us with hazardous jobs, or jobs with equipment or materials that can be dangerous without our full focus or physical abilities, need to take great heed. Yet, the unfortunate influences of our grief can have major consequences regardless of whether we're an accountant, a fork-lift driver, or a Chief Executive Officer. No matter what we do, we can present some level of risk not only to ourselves but to the business and everyone working there for some time to come.

Certainly, not all of us will present a high level of risk to ourselves or others when we first get back to work. Approximately eighty to ninety percent of us should be capable of performing our previous tasks when we first get back. We've transitioned from *Acute* Grief, with its usual debilitating emotional shock, to *Integrating* Grief, where we've begun to somewhat deal with life again. But even then, we must remain cautious. As we learned earlier, we can't just expect to perform at the upper levels of our abilities right off the bat. With time, and hopefully with support both on and off the job, however, we should soon be back to our usual

standards in a reasonable time.

The term *normal* is used for those of us who are moving forward in the healthful manner that's required when emotionally healing from a loss. There is never complete healing, and there are no exact timelines or stages. And healing from our loss remains an individual process where no two of us will manage our grief in the same manner. Yet, there are some common watermarks. Generally, we can spend one to six weeks in the *Acute Grief Phase* following the passing of our loved one. During this time, we'll continually work through such painful feelings as anger, guilt, and regret. Obviously, all these feelings and more can certainly be both mentally and physically debilitating for us.

As our acute grief fades, we've learned that we typically transition into the *Integrated or Abiding Grief Phase*, right? There are those in the mental health professions, however, who consider this phase to be one of the endpoints in the grief healing processes. In this Integrated phase, reflections of the loved one and the loss remain present within us, but no longer overwhelm our mind. Many of us who have reached this phase report a better outlook on life, live more intentionally, and rearrange life's priorities.

Yet even when we transition into the Integrated Phase, there's still so much to do in our journey. The painful emotions of our loss can still have deep impacts well into our future. Even if we're a Normal Griever in the Integrated Phase, we can temporarily re-enter the Acute Phase several times in the first six months or so beyond the transition. Each re-entry may hit us without warning, and result in experiencing the pains of the loss as if it had just happened. And in these instances, we may again experience difficult emotional impacts that are similar to those we had in the Acute Phase.

THE COMPLICATED GRIEVER

We've covered the Normal Griever a great deal so far. How about the Complicated Griever? After all, for so many of us, grief just seems complicated no matter where we might fall on someone's imaginary scale, right? Well, it might somewhat simplify things if we compare our emotional state to the physical state of our body. We might all be familiar with what happens when a physical wound, such as a cut across our hand, is left untended. There's a good chance it becomes infected and inflammatory, and over time becomes more painful and often threatens to cause further health issues to our body. At this point, it's no longer just a simple, or normal, wound. It's now a *complicated* wound that requires immediate medical intervention if we want it to heal. See, Complicated Grief is a griever's mental equivalent of a Complicated Wound to the body.

For those of us who've experienced the loss of a loved one, ten to twenty percent may well find ourselves with some form of Complicated Grief. If so, we may be *avoiding*, *delaying*, or *repressing* our painful feelings from the loss. Or we may be moving forward in our healing, but after several months we seem to frequently bounce back and forth between the Acute and the Integrated Phases. This is considered a complicated form known as *Prolonged Grief*.

While there are many more categories of Complicated Grief, the results are similar to that of that untended wound to our body. The mental wound in our mind becomes inflamed, and infection begins to spread and delays the healthful healing processes. The pain only grows, and there is a risk for our future emotional health. Because of this, like a festering wound to the body, professional support is needed to return our emotional state to Normal Grief. And yes, it still stinks to consider anything *normal* in our loss, but again, it's where we need to be.

Regardless, Complicated Grief can be difficult to see in ourselves for the first several months after the loss of our loved one. During our Acute Phase, we may find ourselves exhibiting many, many signs of Complicated Grief. Yet, deep grieving during this time is not necessarily a sign of any emotionally harmful issues. If our acute grief behaviors seem to only intensify as more time passes, however, or persist for six months or longer, we should indeed consider the intervention of professional counseling for tending to our wounds.

It's certainly not the intent in the section to say we can always self-diagnose Complicated Grief. But we can certainly rely on those around us, right? That not only includes our family and friends, but also those we work with every day. After all, most of us probably spend more awake time with those in the workplace than we do with those at home. Because of this, maybe we can include our workmates in our healthful healing journey.

CHAPTER NINE ~ GRIEF'S IMPACT ON WORK PERFORMANCE

Time is too slow for those who wait, too swift for those who fear, too long for those who grieve, too short for those who rejoice, but for those who love, time is eternity.

Henry van Dyke

The loss of our loved one can absolutely put a crimp in our physical and mental health. That's because this is just tough stuff, right? And there can be no doubt that this nasty grief business can influence how we're going to perform when we first get back to work. As we learned earlier, the more *acute* impacts usually surround us for the first few days after our loss. And sometimes, for some, it can go on for weeks. Take heart, though, as it should gradually lesson over a reasonably short time.

There's no one size fits all in grief healing, however. How soon we transition out of our Acute Grief Phase into the Integrating Grief Phase depends on many aspects, including how the loss happened and how intimate, or close, we are to the one who passed away. Certainly, compassionate support from family and friends, as well as a safe environment to begin healthfully healing at work, can have tremendous impressions on us.

We should, however, also anticipate that some negative influences to returning to full speed may remain with us for some time to come. In a commissioned study that we'll cover in more depth later, there were over 25,000 bereaved souls who were actively employed when they suffered the loss of their loved one. As part of the overall research, each one was directly questioned about any negative job performances they may have

experienced following their tragic event. The results found that eighty-five percent of those grieverers who were in management positions at the time admitted to experiencing significant errors in judgment that went on for up to six months following their loss. Further, ninety percent of those who identified as front-line employees attributed major accidents and injuries on the job to the adverse influences of their grief.

We should all be very aware of our limitations when we return to work. We should absolutely watch for those times when we're just not capable of accurately and safely performing any of our assigned tasks. One difficulty with that, however, actually may be our own lack of self-awareness. See, concern for self is usually not a consideration in our early grief, is it? We're hurting for our late loved ones, and sad for them. We're sad that they're no longer here to enjoy life. Our hearts may also ache for other family members who are suffering this horrible grief, and our minds become occupied with thoughts of how to support them.

When it comes to self-awareness on the job, it may be difficult, but still possible, to recognize any adverse behaviors we might be experiencing from our grief. As stated earlier, awareness and understanding are key to so many things in our grief healing journey. And with awareness and understanding, we can always better respond to anything we might discover.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT MENTAL FATIGUE

Just so we're clear, *mental fatigue* is a quite common condition any of us might experience after the passing of our loved one. Unfortunately, it can sometimes be mistaken for mental illness. For that reason, it's important that we briefly address the two so that we can be more self-aware of our own mannerisms on and off the job.

Mental Fatigue is *a temporary decline in cognitive performance*

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

Many of us who've lost a loved one will initially experience the emotions of anger, guilt, fear, and confusion at levels of intensity we've never felt in the past. These emotions create mental stress and anxiety in us, as we not only struggle with the shock but also with the uncertainty of a future without our loved one. At the same time, we might be faced with a myriad of responsibilities, such as funeral arrangements, legal and financial adjustments, as well as that return to work. Without question, these activities can mentally fatigue and overwhelm our grieving mind.

It's safe to say that we might anticipate a few signs of mental fatigue that could influence us on the job. Yet, they should ease in a reasonably short time as we move forward in our healthful healing and the waning of emotional stress. While we all go through the healing processes in our own time, we should consider that if any symptoms of mental fatigue carry on for more than four to six weeks, we should seek help through mental health professionals.

MENTAL FATIGUE INFLUENCES ON OUR JOB PERFORMANCE

Let's take a look at some of the heavier mental fatigue impacts that might present themselves to us when we get back to work. While the list that follows may seem dry, as if created by a process writer, it was directly taken from one of my other support books, *Grief in the Workplace*. That work was published for, and in use by, those forward-thinking business

leaders who want to be more proactive and supportive to their bereaved employees. And it may actually be helpful here for us to see some exchanges of grief observations through the eyes of our employers.

To that end, some potential mental fatigue impacts of grief we might experience on the job are:

- **Lack of Concentration**
 - Unable to maintain long-term focus on tasks
 - Inability to make decisions
 - Appears restless at the workstation
 - Frequently loses 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 toward 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 lack of 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

From the list we just covered, it's not difficult to see that many behaviors of mental fatigue could represent potential risks to us, to our co-workers, and to the business as a whole. These influences can lead to workplace accidents that threaten safety and security. There could be a risk for financial, legal, or administrative damages, as well as errors in production that lead to defective products or reduced delivery to clients. That's a lot, huh? Our risks from the influences of mental fatigue or exhaustion may range from high to low, but even the possible low-risk influence is well worth investigating before it rears its ugly head.

RESPONSE TO OUR MENTAL FATIGUE ON THE JOB

Honesty is something we must always hold to during our grief healing journey. Most of all, this means being honest with ourselves. If we recognize any mental behaviors that might create a risk to self, others, or the company, we should quickly react and halt the risk. This may mean asking for an unscheduled break to clear our heads, or maybe taking the rest of the day off, if possible. We might consider asking a teammate to work alongside us on a buddy system so there's someone to watch our backs. There's certainly no shame in recognizing our temporary weaknesses, is there? Nor is there shame in requesting for hazardous or super-sensitive tasks to be temporarily reassigned to another co-worker. It won't be long, after all, before we're right back to our usual capabilities in our crafts.

Lastly, if we're on the job and recognize the influences of mental fatigue, we might consider taking our employer up on any offerings of company-sponsored support. Many organizations provide such benefits as an Employee Assistance Program, where mental health professionals are available for confidential assistance. If offered, it is strongly encouraged that we take advantage of these programs. If not, there are many local, regional, and national bereavement support organizations that can be easily located through social media. We can also seek out compassionate care and guidance through our local houses of worship, hospitals, and hospice organizations. Help is out there. We're never alone in our journey if we chose not to be.

PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT IMPACTS ON OUR JOB PERFORMANCE

With the usual change in sleep patterns, lack of appetite, and sometimes busy days following our loss, it's not difficult to think we may be physically exhausted. To give us something to look for, a list of the more typical

conditions and potential causes will follow. We should be aware that some of these physical impairments may not be readily noticeable to ourselves and others. That's why becoming aware of them here may be of great help. Some potential physical impairments may be:

- 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
- Increased illnesses from a weak immune system
- Worsening of current health issues
- *Increased blood pressure*
- *Heart attack and stroke*
- *Chest pains and shortness of breath*
- *Heart palpitations*

RESPONDING TO RECOGNIZED PHYSICAL IMPACTS OF GRIEF

There is no intent in this section to diagnose physical health conditions or to provide recommendations of when we should seek medical care. However, it is highly encouraged that we pay close attention to the symptoms that are italicized in the previous list and seek immediate medical attention if one or more are present.

In all cases of physical disorders, we could represent a risk to ourselves, other employees, and the company as a whole. If experienced, our response might be that we remove ourselves from a hazardous or sensitive task. The condition may seem small and non life-threatening at

first, like a little sleepiness while at work, or body aches and pains that we ignore at the time. Yet, even a small impairment can cascade quickly and cause great jeopardy. While we might have concerns about losing our jobs, it's far better to let someone know we might be temporarily unable to work versus proving that point and suffering the consequences.

Like the influences of mental exhaustion, many physical disorders will ease in a reasonable rate of time as we progress along our journey. If we find ourselves physically impaired on the job after the loss of our loved one, we can certainly present some level of risk to the entire workplace. Our conditions could lead to accidents that threaten lives and property, cause financial or administrative damages, and reduce delivery of products to our customers. In addition to other risks, legal liabilities, such as lawsuits and litigious damage claims against the company, and even against us, must always be included in any consideration when we find we're physically impaired on the job by grief.

SELF-AWARENESS

It's a rare job out there that doesn't require some level of mental and physical skill. We're going to return to those jobs after the loss of our loved one, and let's face it, a great tool we can take with us is *self-awareness*. Our negative influences and impairments from grief may not be evident to others, and unless we're self-aware, they may not be evident to us, either. We need to take care of ourselves and always be in a self-evaluation mode if you will, especially in early grief. It's well worth it given the risks, right?

To help us recognize, or become more self-aware, let's take a look at the several common levels of actual *preparedness* typically found in those of us who return to work after the passing of a loved one. There is also a

level of risk placed beside each one, and the list begins with the lower risks.

We may return to work after our loss and be:

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

A FEW FINAL WORDS ON PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

There are many ways we can fall into poor health after the loss of our loved one. Sleep difficulties are common, after all, with insomnia being the most prevalent issue. It's not uncommon for us to avoid falling asleep at night for fear of the nightmare of loss replaying over and over in our minds. And if sleep does come, it's often interrupted by those dreams we tried to avoid, or by the many other pains, anxieties, and concerns that come with this ugly grief mess, right?

Malnutrition is another frequent disorder we find coming to us in early grief. A loss of appetite is common, as our emotions can just overwhelm the hunger impulses in our body. On the opposing side, some of us may actually overeat our favorite comfort foods when fighting the emotional pain. Unfortunately, most of our so-called comfort foods are usually

comprised of those with little nutritional value. Another possible cause for our poor diet might be that we're so busy with funeral or other loss-related tasks that there's no time to eat. Well, we must find the time, right? We need our strength to carry on.

WORKPLACE IMPACT

Following our loss, there probably will be some level of mental and physical impairment we suffer when first returning to work. It may be minor, but it's still well worth paying attention to. Of course, how much we're impacted, and for how long, is dependent on many factors. Yet, any degree of impairment increases the probability of workplace accidents, injuries, and errors in judgment.

We can greatly reduce the risk from our grief-fogged brains and exhausted bodies through awareness and understanding. Awareness of self, right? We may find ourselves with temporary impairments, however, these will diminish in a relatively short time. So, let's be patient. Let's be easy on ourselves. Not only are we important to others in our personal lives, but we're also a valuable asset to our employer. We're not going to just *get over it*, and we need everyone, including ourselves and our co-workers, to be aware and understand that fundamental truth.

CHAPTER TEN ~ GRIEF COSTS TO ALL ORGANIZATIONS

“Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the o-er wrought heart and bids it break.”

William Shakespeare – Macbeth

The following chapters, Ten and Eleven, are chapters directly excerpted from my book, *Grief in the Workplace: Recover Hidden Revenue and Productivity Loss Driven by Employee Bereavement and Grief*. That book was published, offered, and remains an invaluable tool for business leaders around the globe. It expressly provides organizations, small to large, with experienced guidance in how to support our return to work after we’ve lost our loved one.

We might find that these chapters come across with a little less compassion for our grief than we’d like to see our employers read. Yet consider that it’s often more persuasive to talk dollars and cents when coaching business leaders. In short, sometimes it’s just easier to hit ‘em in the wallet versus trying to pull on their heartstrings. We also read earlier that it can be extremely beneficial for us, the newly bereaved, to look at grief issues through the eyes of our employers, right?

To that end, what follows in its entirety is *Chapter Five: Grief Costs to All Organizations* from my business coaching book *Grief in the Workplace*.

GRIEF COSTS TO ALL ORGANIZATIONS

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 the year 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
Total	\$75.1 billion

\$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 is 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 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 do exponentially multiply for grief impacting an employer.

The U.S. Census Bureau places 3.14 as the average number of persons per household. This helps in accounting 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 will 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 adds 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 will have 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 ELEVEN ~

GRIEF IMPACTS TO YOUR EMPLOYER

“Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing. And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb. And when the earth shall claim your limbs, ...then shall you truly dance.”

Kahlil Gibran

Again, this Chapter Eleven is directly excerpted in its entirety from Chapter Six of my business coaching book, *Grief in the Workplace: Recover Hidden Revenue and Productivity Loss Driven by Employee Bereavement and Grief*.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT COSTS OF GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE

The once-coveted model for an organization was that personal problems brought to work only present 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 fades 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 consider grief to be a risk not only to productivity but to 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 for 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 thirty workdays are lost each year by **employees going through loss without employer and co-worker support**. Further, twenty 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, as 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 griever who identified as front-line employees, ninety percent reported injuries that were directly related to the influences of grief after returning to the job. 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 grievors 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 nineteen 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 the 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 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.

This ends the excerpts of Chapter Five and Chapter Six from my book *Grief in the Workplace*. What these two chapters did not give us, however, is the true message presented throughout that entire book. That message offered organizational leadership the knowledge that reducing the impacts of grief brought to the job didn't have to cost the company a single penny. Like much of what we're learning as bereaved employees in *this* book, much can be accomplished just by gaining an awareness and understanding of grief. With awareness and understanding, organizations can certainly take a different look at grief support. They'll want to be proactive, reactive, and always aware of grief in the workplace. After all, if they change the way they look at our grief, maybe the grief they look at will change, right?

CHAPTER TWELVE ~ HOW RESPONSIVE IS YOUR EMPLOYER?

“The soul comes from without into the human body, as into a temporary abode, and it goes out of it anew it passes into other habitations, for the soul is immortal.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Now that we’ve taken some time to look at our grief through the eyes of our employer, let’s get back to our own perspectives. One thing we certainly need to consider when returning to work after the loss of our loved one is the way our employer looks at grief. Do we know? Can we anticipate what to expect? Maybe. Sometimes maybe not.

COMPASSIONATE, INDIFFERENT, OR HOSTILE TOWARD GRIEF

The three ways grief is generally responded to in the workplace can be with *compassion*, with *indifference*, or unfortunately, with *hostility*. For many of us, we might find the concept of hostility toward grief hard to believe, right? Thankfully, however, it’s the exception today and no longer the rule. The few businesses that remain hostile to an employee’s needs still operate under the old industrial-style credo that says personal concerns have no place on the job site. The job must be done, after all, and if someone can’t function at full capacity, then they’d best get out of the way and let someone else do it.

On the other hand, can *indifference* to our grief be any better? With indifference, no one wants to recognize our loss, or even dare speak of it. After all, if no one brings it up, then there’s no problem, right? Well, there’s a problem. There’s a huge, emotional elephant in the room that everyone’s trying to ignore. But what happens when we get hit by that

giant, unannounced wave of grief and we just can't function for a time? With indifference present, we have no idea what will happen to us. Where can we go? Is there a place we can hide for just a minute or two until we get ourselves together? And what is our boss thinking of this? What are our co-workers thinking? All of this, and more, are frightening unknowns that simply places so much more anxiety on us at a time when we just don't need it.

That leaves the compassionate workplace. Our supervisors, peers, and subordinates at work are all a tight-knit family, right? We've received supportive contact from the company administration during our Bereavement Leave, and we've been told the job site will be an open, healing, and healthy environment on our return. Great. This is the workplace that more and more businesses are gratefully leaning towards these days. And it's hopeful that with the right advocacy from us, it'll continue to become the greater norm.

THE HOSTILE WORKPLACE

For any number of reasons, we might not be able to avoid returning to work too soon after the loss of our loved one, and maybe a hostile work environment too. Perhaps we don't even know it's hostile until we get back, right? Either way, how do we deal with it? How do we survive and continue to move forward in our grief healing?

First and foremost, we should acknowledge to ourselves upfront that there probably isn't a whole lot, if anything at all, we can do to change a hostile workplace. That old, industrial-era concept of immediate production results and instant profit is probably too deeply seated in the company's culture of most front-line, mid-level, and even upper-level employees. Not only is brute force management deep in the mindset of most leaders within the organization, but also blindly followed by many

subordinates through loyalty or fear of the old guard.

The ugly truth here is that we have no contract with our employer, nor is an employer legally required to give us employment. Actually, the company we work for has every right to expect us to immediately return following our loss within their prescribed and normally brief timelines, and to perform our jobs at their required production levels. Sound cold? It is, but it's the ugly truth. In the case of a hostile employer, there's little we can do about it when we voluntarily come back to work after our loss.

It's also cold for someone to say that if we're working for a grief-hostile employer, we should just find another job. Unfortunately, immediately changing jobs may be very unrealistic right now. Changing jobs is not like flipping a light switch, and simply walking off the job is not usually an option. Far too many of us today live paycheck to paycheck, don't we? So, as mentally and emotionally difficult as it is, we'll probably make the conscious and necessary decision to go back to the job we had before the loss, even if we know, or soon discover, that the leadership has no sympathy, understanding, or considerations for what we're going through.

Loss is something many of us have never been through before, and because of that, we have no way of knowing beforehand just how our workplace will react to us. In a company hostile to grief, or really to any employee's personal issues, what might we find? We'll find limited or no Bereavement Leave allowances, either paid or unpaid, even for the loss of an immediate family member. Recognition and condolences will be sparse, if expressed at all. We might be scrutinized, disciplined, or even terminated for slower production at first, or for missing deadlines after being back on the job for only a few days? And how about a direct supervisor who continually asks us, "What's wrong with you? Why aren't you over that yet?"

So, some of us may find we're returning to a place where, if not

prepared, the healthful transitions of grief healing can be slowed in harmful ways, or even halted because of the job. The big question is, therefore, how do we deal with a boss, and sometimes the majority of the workforce, who respond to a bereaved employee with open antagonism? In a nutshell, a very hard nutshell, we're just going to have to suck it up.

After the loss we've been through, we should never be lied to, right? Truth is a major healing element in our healthy grief journey, and most times, well, it isn't always comfortable. In that light, another uncomfortable truth originates with us. That's right! See, we're the ones *choosing* to return to that job we had before the loss, aren't we? And whether it's because company policy says so, or because we can't afford to be away from a paycheck, it really is *our* ultimate choice to go back. No one forcing us to work for a hostile employer. In most cases, we work *at-will* for an employer, meaning we have no binding contract and are free to walk away at any time.

On the flip side, *at-will* employment typically goes for our employer as well. Except for a few possible restrictions, such as union bargaining agreements, implied contracts, and a few other legalities, an employer has the right to terminate our employment at any time. It sounds so cold, but even we know we're temporarily returning to work a little less than who were before, Yet, just by returning, aren't we really telling our bosses we're ready to come back and be part of the company's successful mission?

The bottom line here is that so many of us aren't independently wealthy and need our income. So, we voluntarily return, at-will, regardless of the environment. Is there a magic bullet to immediately dealing with a hostile one? Other than quitting and finding another job, no. Consider that in such an organization, however, we're not truly valued, and we'll find no safe harbor there for our healthful healing. If the organization doesn't value us, we'll have no value in the organization's future. Maybe

we should also have no future with the organization, right?

THE INDIFFERENT WORKPLACE

In far too many companies today, employee grief is usually avoided, and any response to it is sorely limited. If our grief is even acknowledged, it's often brief, and then quickly outsourced away from the company through offers of outside support. Unfortunately, this indifferent approach to grief in the workplace can actually exacerbate its influences on how quickly we get back to our previous capabilities. It can also have some pretty negative sway on our overall healthful healing processes as well. As we learned earlier, many of us, before our loss, considered the workplace to be a second home, and our co-workers somewhat family-like. Our job was another safe harbor in our life, right? In the indifferent workplace, however, this all changes after our loss.

The average employee in the United States will spend over 92,000 hours at work during their lifetime. That's a whole lot of time working with others, isn't it? Because of the uncomfortableness of mortality, many leaders are unaware of studies that show over sixty-five percent of newly bereaved employees will turn to co-workers on the job for support. Nor are they aware that grieving employees who are supported by the organization are far more likely to later support others on the job who face difficulties in their personal lives. Working for an indifferent company, we'll certainly miss out on some excellent opportunities in mutual support and healing with others who we often spend more awake time with than we do with those at home.

We can consider the true story of Deanna, who tragically lost her two teenaged children in a car accident while they were driving to a family gathering without their mom. At the time, Deanna was a long-termed and well-respected accountant with a large, regional construction firm, and

was dearly loved by everyone she worked with. While she was away on Bereavement Leave, her employer recognized that the staff was visibly despondent over what happened to their office mate and, as a result, work almost ground to a halt in the office. To help, the Human Resource Director brought in grief counselors to give the staff support, in hopes it would bring the business back to its feet.

Grief counselors brought to the job site certainly helped the staff, and in just a short time business was back to its usual hum. Yet, when Deanna returned to work following her leave, she was left wondering why she, the grieving mother and devastated employee, was not offered the same on-site support. Instead, she was only advised she could seek assistance through the company's Employee Assistance Program, where she could obtain outside mental health counseling if she liked. Deanna did take advantage of the Employee Assistance Program, but quickly exhausted the free sessions she was offered. Beyond that, she was unable to locate counselors who could fit her in their schedules or were so expensive that Deanna was unable to afford the services. Afterward, she floundered on the job for several months and eventually resigned from her employment, as she felt she would eventually be terminated for poor work performance.

Was Deanna's company indifferent to her loss? Was the company leadership just protecting her privacy? Or was the company actually being hostile toward grief by only bringing in compassionate support for the staff just to quickly recover productivity? Well, for now, let's just go with indifferent, okay?

What are some other examples of how a company can be indifferent to our grief? Maybe it's a company that makes no attempt to reach out to us while we're away on Bereavement Leave. Perhaps it's one that doesn't meet with us on our return to discuss our capabilities and even their own

expectations of us? How about that offer of company-sponsored counseling? If we do take them up on it, after all, grief is pushed right out the company door and we'll soon be *over it* and right back to our old selves, right? Wrong! Or how about a supervisor who is so uncomfortable with our loss that we see them cross the warehouse floor to avoid walking past us? Like pushing grief off to that outside support, there's that elephant in the room and everyone's hoping it'll just go away. It won't, though. Will it?

What frequently occurs in the indifferent workplace is that we, the grieving employee, believe everyone can feel our pain, but they're really just ignoring us. Some of us will find ourselves alone at our desk, openly sobbing as a wave of grief suddenly washes over, while supervisors and co-workers just seem oblivious to it all. They just scurry right on by as if nothing is happening. Usually, the staff is just too uncomfortable to stop, and the supervisors too uninformed to know we may simply just need to take a little walk or go find a quiet place around the job site for a breather.

Like the hostile workplace, we're probably not going to be aware that the company we work for is indifferent to grief following our loss. We may just have to go back before we discover that too. And while we won't be hit in the face with hostility, believing our pains are being ignored in a once-safe harbor can have dire consequences on our grief healing journey. Sadly, the indifferent company doesn't realize the dire consequences it has for the entire organization, either.

So how do we deal with our grief when no one around us on the job seems to care? First, let's remember that we, and we alone, own our grief. We're pursuing that primary goal of taking care of ourselves, and that means recognizing the environment around us at all times. And yes, that means adapting to it. Yet, that doesn't mean we have to just sit back and be ignored. The workplace is indifferent, not hostile, and indifference

may well come only from a lack of awareness and understanding, right?

Does your employer know that the American Hospice Foundation estimates that, at any given time, one out of every four active, U.S. employees is suffering from grief on some level? Are they aware that the average age of thirty-five is the prime age of productivity in an employee, but also the average age a working parent will lose a child? Have they been shown that every year over one million working-aged women experience a miscarriage, and another twenty-six thousand suffer the stillbirth of a precious baby? Has someone even shown them that businesses across America are losing over \$100 Billion in annual revenue due to grief in the workplace? If so, they might know that they can greatly reduce their share of this enormous deficit by simply changing how they address our grief.

We have so much on our minds and in our hearts right now, but we might consider becoming our own advocate for our grief at work. We could meet with our supervisors early on, or even before our return, and inform them of just how we're doing. We should let them know it may take some time before we're back up to full speed, but we will be. It's alright to tell them that occasionally we might need to take a walk away from our workstation and have risky, sensitive, or hazardous tasks temporarily reassigned to other workers. If nothing else, we could provide the leadership in our company with a copy of the book *Grief in the Workplace*, or let them read chapters Ten and Eleven from this book. In doing so, they can certainly begin gaining some much-needed awareness and understanding of just how grief can impact the business.

What if we can't become advocates of our grief when we get back to work? What if we're simply faced with an organization that wants to ignore our grief and the impacts that may come to us and to the company as a whole? Well, we don't hold it against them, do we? After all, they're

uninformed and probably uncomfortable with the thought of mortality. We'll just have to continue our grief work in every other avenue available to us, right? We'll grab our Griefcase and continue to move forward. When we're doing really well, however, maybe we'll come back to our indifferent employer and advocate the benefits of awareness and understanding for grief in the workplace.

THE COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

For those of us who've experienced the loss of a loved one, there are very few things we'll probably consider as fortunate right now. Returning to a workplace that's compassionate and understanding of what we're going through *is* fortunate, however. One of the greatest advantages to this, of course, is being afforded the ability to continue our grief healing journey in a more healthful manner, within an environment that promotes that safe harbor we need.

We've covered so much about our co-workers being a second family, and the desirable workplace being almost as safe and secure as our homes. And that safe and secure feeling can mean so much for us right now. Actually, one of the findings in the commissioned study detailed earlier in this book found that a bereaved employee will take, on average, an additional thirty days of unscheduled leave in the year following the loss of a loved one. Why? Well, when the mind is in distress, as it often is in our grief, we want to find a quiet, safe place to deal with it. We want a mental safe harbor when we're in trouble, right? And when the really debilitating waves of grief hit us and the mind knows there's no safe harbor at work, it'll urge us to avoid that mean old place altogether and just shelter at home. So, we tend to more frequently call out sick from work when we're in emotional pain because the job site provides no safe harbor.

Unscheduled absence from work, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, is already costing American businesses over \$375 Billion in revenue each and every year. A wise, forward-thinking leader knows that creating a caring and compassionate environment for the needs of the employee is advantageous to the whole organization. It must be noted, however, that grief from the loss of a loved one still remains a subject that all but a few great organizations have taken on.

Regardless, we often know in advance if we're returning to a compassionate workplace after our loss. There usually are signs everywhere of the organization's employee-first business model. Yet what are some of the indicators that our workplace will be that safe place where we can continue to move forward in our healthful grief healing? One example is that leadership, immediately following our loss, will recognize our need for personal space, yet maybe give us a brief phone call or short personal visit at home, just to let us know we're in everyone's thoughts.

Before we move to other examples of a compassionate workplace, let's elaborate a bit on the recognition of our *personal space* by employers. See, we may have strong relationships with co-workers on the job that may or may not carry on beyond the workplace. We might even have great respect for our leaders, and maybe consider them as mentors in our life, not unlike our own parents in some ways. Yet, we tend to mentally draw a thin line between our personal and professional life, don't we? We might share our family joys and sorrows at some level with others at work, but when something as profound and traumatic as the loss comes along, we tend to shut off work relationships and singularly focus on home. We don't forget but temporarily put aside our professional life.

Leaders in an employee-centric organization will be respectful of that line between our personal and professional lives. If we're working for one, we might have received that brief condolence call or visit right after our

loss and been told to forget about work and focus on family. We were probably assured that our position with the company would be there when we get back as well. We might have been asked about any upcoming funeral ceremonies or services, only to find out later that flowers or food had been delivered there by the company out of respect. During those same services, perhaps a supervisor, or even a senior leader or two can be seen in attendance, yet they don't force themselves upon us, do they? That's because they're aware that just being there lets us know we're in their thoughts. It also gives us peace of mind in knowing that we can keep that part of our world turned off too, if only for a little while longer.

In a compassionate organization, we return to the workplace and are greeted by members of leadership who genuinely want to know how we're doing, and actively listen when we tell them. We're reminded that we're a valued member of the company and if at any time, we feel like we're having troubles concentrating on the job, we can let our supervisor know without fear of reprisal or disciplinary actions. If we're asked about accommodations, we're able to let them know we might need an occasional break from the workspace just to clear our minds when the grief waves come. Actually, a company that's proactive toward grief in the workplace will probably offer us several places around the job site where we can go to get some quiet time whenever needed.

If it wasn't offered while we were away on Bereavement Leave, our Human Resource Department might provide us with any company-sponsored employee support programs, along with the details of what's available through the plan. In a really good organization, a list of local resources that we might take advantage of has already been researched and prepared in advance of any staff needs. In a really great organization, there will be an established, company-sponsored peer-to-peer grief support group we can join when we're ready, and we'll discuss this

concept deeper in a later chapter of this book.

In reality, there are so many things a compassionate employer can do to make the workplace a safe harbor for any grieving employee returning to work after a loss. It's obvious that the hostile workplace is not exactly where we want to return to, but let's face it, we may not have a choice, right? The indifferent workplace, on the other hand, might not seem as abrasive toward our healthful healing needs, but does ignoring our grief help us in any way? For that matter, does it help the company in any way? The answer, of course, is no. In actuality, it greatly harms the company.

We all wish we could return to a work environment that's more compassionate to our grief after loss. But if that's not the case, perhaps, when we're feeling up to it, we can do something about it. We can talk to our leaders about grief in the workplace, right? After all, the sad reality is that there will be other grieving employers returning to work after us. We're already walking down our path of healing, and they will be just beginning. If we can help pave the way and somehow ease their journey, we certainly should.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN ~

GRIEF RESPONSE FROM WORKMATES

"The boundaries between life and death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where one ends and where the other begins?"

Edgar Allen Poe

ARE WE OVER IT YET?

Whether we return to work after the passing of our loved one to a *hostile*, *indifferent*, or *compassionate* workplace, the one commonality in all three is that we're going to come face to face with our others. Further, these leaders, teammates, associates, customers, and more will get to unwittingly play a pivotal role in our grief healing journey. For that reason, it's wise if we devote some time here to mannerisms and behaviors that we might expect from those we spend so much time with in our day.

First and foremost, we must recognize that those at work will naturally "get over" our loss and quickly move forward on their own. That's not to say they're dispassionate or cold toward what we've experienced. On the contrary, they may truly hurt for us, but nothing has really changed for them, has it? They don't go home at night to a world that's turned upside down as we do. They don't awaken to our ugly realism of the unwelcomed changes in our life each morning, either.

Simply put, the folks that we work with don't face our grief twenty-four hours a day, do they? They may surely have genuine sympathy, and they may deeply grieve for us, but it's just a basic human instinct to move away from hurt as quickly as possible. And that's fairly easy to do when they only confront the pain when they confront *us*, right? Since they don't

experience our never-ending triggers and reminders of profound loss, their minds easily and swiftly move on from the pain.

Another important aspect to consider is that our workmates, whether boss or co-worker, simply don't share the same high level of personal connection we have with our late loved one. Even within the family unit, the level of intimacy, or closeness, plays a large role in the level of emotional impacts from the death. Not to be cold or heartless, we probably don't feel the same depth of hurt over the loss of an extended family member that we feel for our own spouse or child, do we? And those in our workplace typically don't share the same level of intimacy, or closeness, we have with our family members. As a result, our co-worker's grief is more for us, the survivor, and not the deceased spouse or child. Then, as we begin to show signs of moving forward, our co-workers become more relieved, and their concern for us rapidly diminishes. If only they knew we're only giving the false perception of being okay. After all, perception is *reality* to the observer, isn't it?

In that light, we can also inadvertently help our workmates quickly move on from our loss, too. See, we're prone to put on a brave face in front of others and hide our pain. We do this to show everyone that we're okay, even though we're not. It's the *Grief Mask* we wear in public. We tend to put it on whenever we leave the house, right? Well, our co-workers see our mask and soon believe, because they want to believe, that we *are* better. They want us to be better, don't they? They care for us and hurt for us, and when we're better, they're relieved and can move forward themselves. Sadly, when we put on our masks so often in public, we end up the only one who knows what the pain is doing to us.

Another common pitfall in returning to work after loss comes from the personal influences of death itself. Mortality is such an uncomfortable subject for most folks, isn't it? No one really wants to think about death

unless they must. It's scary and unknown. And often, when a co-worker is faced with our loss, the thoughts of "what if that were me" pops into their heads. That's scary too, and something that just needs to be put right out of the mind. But it can't be when we're around. We're there and our loss creates a constant reminder for some that bad things can happen to anyone at any time, and no one wants to think of that.

The easiest way for someone we work with to avoid the *what-ifs* is to simply avoid us at all costs, right? So, we shouldn't be surprised, or even angry, if we see an approaching workmate duck into an adjacent doorway just to avoid coming in contact with us. We might notice someone oddly cross a warehouse floor, or suddenly pull a mobile phone out and pretend to take a call when we come near. It may seem dispassionate, but it's an unconscious mental defense mechanism when they're faced with something uncomfortable. We should try to be understanding, if possible. It's a tough time for us, no doubt, but forcing an uncomfortable co-worker into interaction with us can have some influences that do little for our healthful grief healing.

HANDLING MISGUIDED CONDOLENCES

Mortality, again, can certainly cause an uncomfortableness in others. We know that now. At times, and especially around the newly bereaved, that discomfort can foster an awkwardness in even the best of friends, not to mention our colleagues when we return to the job. To that end, this section seems to be an appropriate place to discuss the oftentimes misguided condolences offered by some of our co-workers when we first return to the job.

Since the very moment that our losses happened, we began taking on a verbal barrage of well-meant words from so many well-meaning people, including both friends and strangers alike. Some are thoughtful and touch

our hearts. Too often, however, it seems others are not so filled with thoughtfulness, are they? We often hear such insensitive utterances as, “*You’re still young, so you can always remarry.*” Another is, “*I know how you feel. My wife lost her Aunt five years ago.*” Of course, there’s always the most frequent of condolences, “*Don’t worry. They’re in a much better place now, ya know?*” Actually, during the funeral services for my own teenaged son, an awkward well-wisher attempted to console with a condolence of, “*Hey, at least you don’t have to worry about his college tuition now.*”

Obviously, some attempted condolences don’t go over so well with us, do they? We might wish to respond to the most egregious words with something snarky, like, “*I can have another child? Really? I kinda loved the one I had and I’m not looking for a trade-in.*” We also know that whenever we hear about that all too frequent utterance of, “*They’re in a better place now, ya know,*” we just want to bark back that the better place is right here, right now, with us.

Would a rational mind be able to tolerate such seemingly thoughtless words, often from strangers, but also offered by those known to us on the job? Probably not. Almost thankfully, however, most of us are trapped within the fog of early grief and the words go right over our heads, right? Either that, or we’re just too nice to respond with anything snarky. But if there’s one thing we all need to understand, it’s that any condolences, no matter how misguided or hurtful they may seem upfront, are not said out of malice or ill-will. See, as humans, we simply have the inherent instinct to come to the aid of another in distress. We have that inner urge to give comfort, especially to those we know or care for. That drive, a natural care reflex, is usually the genuine intent of any condolence giver. And when it comes to loss, friends and co-workers might believe that words are the only means of comfort at their disposal. It’s just too bad that they

don't know it's best to say nothing at all.

Almost along the same lines, many well-wishers aren't exactly prepared in how or how not to give comfort to someone grieving a loss. Outside of mental health professionals and clergy, not many people are, unless, of course, they've been through the fire themselves. Again, mortality is uncomfortable, and no one wants to face it unless there's no choice, right? So, that leaves a large population of well-wishers that have absolutely no idea that there really are no words that could bring comfort to us in our loss. They don't know that the best thing they can do is to just let us know we're in their thoughts.

When misguided condolences do come to us on the job, we might actually consider the difficulties that the well-wisher overcame just to say anything to us at all. It's kind of commendable if we think about it that way. See, the well-wisher is probably uncomfortable with mortality, right? Most people are. Then, there's the awkwardness of not knowing how to approach us. Next, there's the challenge of not knowing what to say. Yet, despite all that, the co-worker overcame every one of those anxious roadblocks to attempt the act of comfort. Maybe we can all agree, then, that even the most misguided condolences can be considered as selfless acts of humanity. Okay, so that's a stretch. But still, we would do well to remember that any seemingly insensitive condolence is often not meant as it's spoken.

We sometimes find ourselves in trouble after returning to work and hearing receiving so much attention. This is something we should be prepared for in advance. These misguided words may be meant to console and comfort, but they could actually lead into a wave of debilitating grief emotions that leave us frantically searching for a safe harbor in a strange land.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN ~ IS THE WORKPLACE PREPARED FOR YOU?

"It is dangerous to abandon one's self to the luxury of grief; it deprives one of courage, and even of the wish for recovery."

Henri Frederic Amiel

Previously within this book, we've read excerpted chapters from my business coaching publication, *Grief in the Workplace*. This was done to give us somewhat of a glimpse of the employer's side of a bereaved employee returning to the job. And in this chapter, we'll be reading another excerpted chapter for the same reason.

What follows is *Chapter Ten: Preparing for the Returning Griever* from the book *Grief in the Workplace*. The intent here is for us to recognize what an employee-focused organization can do to support us when we return after such a devastating event as loss. And if we really pay attention, there's much in this chapter that we'll want to consider for ourselves when we return, or even if we've already been back on the job for a while.

Again, the sections below are a full excerpt of Chapter Ten from the book *Grief in the Workplace*, without the chapter header.

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 a result of a manager's delayed notification of Laura's loss, a very important milestone was missed in the timeline of 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 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 over 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 also 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 the 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 allow more time for all employees to process their own emotional reactions to 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 on 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 an

extremely 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 should 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 a 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 greatly 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 by 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 griever, 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 positive influences for the newly bereaved employee, all

leadership personnel, from team leaders and front-line managers 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 to be alright, 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.

This ends the excerpt of *Chapter Ten: Preparing for the Returning Griever* from the business coaching book, *Grief in the Workplace*.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN ~

BEREAVEMENT LEAVE, FMLA, AND EAPs

“I, schooled in misery, know many purifying rites, and I know where speech is proper and where silence.”

Aeschylus

BEREAVEMENT LEAVE AND THE FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

Unless we're independently wealthy, at some point after the passing of our loved one many of us are going back to work. The big question, of course, is when? The answer to that greatly varies, and unfortunately is often driven by our employer and not by us.

In an earlier chapter, we learned of the limitations of Bereavement Leave, but we'll touch on it briefly again here. See, the average amount of both paid and unpaid Bereavement Leave across America is only three days. That's it. Three days for an employee who experiences the death of a spouse, child, sibling, or parent. And the average is only two days of unpaid leave for an extended family member.

When we've lost an immediate family member, many good companies may grant paid Bereavement Leave and also allow us to exhaust any unused vacation or sick days we have on the books. Some may even allow other employees to donate their earned time off for us to use. Remember, though, our employers must be careful to treat all employees equally or risk legal challenges. Typically, whatever can be granted to us must also be available to all others employed by the organization. Let's keep that in mind that when it seems our employer is being inflexible to extending or supplementing either paid or unpaid time

away for our loss.

When it comes to extending us any unpaid time off for Bereavement Leave, what are we talking about here? A week? Two weeks? Is that even enough? Maybe. But even then, just how long can we go without income, right? After all, so many of us live paycheck to paycheck today. Unfortunately, dealing not only with the emotional pains from our loss, but maybe also funeral arrangements, other mourning family members, financial and estate issues, and so much more, doesn't exactly happen in a day, does it?

What about FMLA, or the Family Medical Leave Act? Is that any help? No. Well, probably not yet anyway. See, over the years, there have been repeated attempts in the U.S. Congress to have the death of an employee's immediate family member fall under the FMLA. While these attempts seem to always sputter and die on the floor, some individual states are slowly coming around and mandating the law below the federal level. If it's a consideration, we need to check the FMLA rights within the state where we reside. Perhaps we live in one of the few forward-thinking states, or soon will.

Emotionally, Bereavement Leave falling under FMLA certainly seems like the moral thing to do, right? After all, a mother and father can take as much as twelve weeks of leave away from work with the birth of a newborn baby, and deservedly so. The obvious joy aside, it's certainly a health issue for the mom and newborn child, as well as a lot of logistical efforts for both the parents after their blessed event. But what if, sadly, those two parents experience the passing of that child at some point down the road? What do they get through FMLA? Nothing. Instead, they must hope they work for an employer who offers them at least three days of Bereavement Leave to deal with the loss.

Just so we're clear, however, FMLA might allow for extended time off

from work under certain conditions, but it does not mandate pay while an employee is out. It really only protects an employee's job and position with an organization for up to twelve weeks. In any case where one might qualify for FMLA with an employer, they must still exhaust any and all earned but unused paid time off to that point. After that, they'll move into an unpaid status for the remainder of their absence. At least, however, an employee granted FMLA is guaranteed to have their previous employment and position held until they return. For now, there's no such guarantee for us under Bereavement Leave.

We know that during such a horrific time as our loss it's difficult to think of, but the reality remains that many of us simply cannot go long periods of time without income. To that end, it's the need for income, or maybe even keeping our much-needed job, that drives us back to work. And many times, at least for now, that return is probably going to be way too soon.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

An EAP, or Employee Assistance Program, is an outsourced service that can be contracted by our employer to provide personal services to all employees. The typical programs provided are designed to offer employees confidential assistance in dealing with a range of what's considered *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 employer, an EAP is an effort of preventing an employee's personal matters from carrying over onto the job.

Our use of an EAP, if offered by our employer, is a wise choice for us following our loss. However, in the business coaching book, *Grief in the Workplace*, organizational leaders are cautioned that these EAPs are only a single tool for use in supporting a grieving employee. The false

assumption that it's the total solution for mitigating the loss of over *\$100 Billion* in annual business revenue in America only furthers the truth that grief is still something not taken seriously in most organizations.

Early EAP services actually began just after World War II, as a means of helping the huge number of returning soldiers who sought and found employment in civilian life. Unfortunately, they also brought a great deal of alcohol abuse with them as well. War is tough, right? Regardless, the tremendous growth of these helpful services really began in earnest during the 1970s, and as of today, there are over 7,000 direct employees of EAP companies in the United States.

The use of these private EAP providers is extremely popular in today's business. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) recently reported that over ninety-seven percent of U.S. companies with more than 5,000 employees contract out to an EAP provider. Another eighty percent with 1,001 - 5,000 employees use one, as do seventy-five percent of U.S. organizations with 251 - 1,000 employees.

With the outside support offered through an EAP, it's not uncommon for a business leader to erroneously discount the concepts of more internal support for our loss. If approached with the suggestion that all management personnel in their company should be coached in grief awareness and understanding, many unwise leaders respond by saying, "*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 to companies 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 emotional support for us after our loss. This is due, in part, to *mortality* being that uncomfortable and sensitive topic we've discussed many times earlier, right? The thought of death can be uncomfortable to

the mind, so naturally, it's not often voluntarily considered in most business planning sessions. Also, the old business model in some organizations yet remains that employees should not bring their personal issues to work. The death of an employee's family member is certainly personal, and anything related should remain away from the job site. For these reasons and others, it's easy for an employer to feel they're helping with EAP programs and professional counselors. In reality, however, they're only relegating our grief away from the job site and to an outside, outsourced, support system.

Providing the availability of mental health services through an EAP is certainly commendable on the part of any organization. Yet, it bears repeating that there's a misconception that once offered, all that can be done for us as newly bereaved employees has been done by the company. Yet another mistake is believing we'll take the company up on the offer and soon be *over it*. Yes, we'll go get help outside the job and quickly come back to be our previous selves. However, the company's goal of supporting us, as well as reducing revenue loss, is rarely achieved by relying only on an outsourced solution to solve internal problems.

It's also essential to understand that EAP providers are third-party, *profit-based* business entities. And in the past, EAPs typically contracted 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. Now, that changed 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 third-party EAP phone number and be referred to a fourth-party mental health professional. Not only is this far too many layers, but it can also result in a possible claim on an employee's health care plan. And the last thing we need after the loss of a loved one is health

insurance claims to deal with, right?

One thing we should consider as grieving employees is our potential for actually accepting an offer of EAP support from our employer. We absolutely should, but there's a historically low employee participation rate with them in America. According to another recent SHRM report, only three to seven percent of eligible employees ever take advantage of these offered services. That means that for every one hundred employees that could use help, only three to seven of them will accept it through their company's offered program.

One reason for this extremely low EAP participation rate can be attributed to the negative stigma of the service itself. See, we as employees often think of EAPs as an intervention tool used only by those with deep mental health issues or substance abuse and alcoholism. Not only that, but we also think of EAPs as something our bosses tell us we must do when a bad personal issue comes to light on the job. It's something we don't just seek out on our own, right? And no matter the assurance of confidentiality, many of us wrongfully believe that any involvement with an EAP might be discovered and chastised by our subordinates and peers.

Even though we should find EAPs incredibly beneficial, another negative is the infrequency in which we can receive their help. If we do take advantage of the offering by our employer, we'll only receive that support on some fourth-party counselor's time. Our sessions might be scheduled weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or even more infrequently, and probably limited in the number of visits under the plan. Our grief emotions, however, do not follow any prescribed schedule or expiration dates, do they? And life can become pretty anxious when we could use a little help, but it's still days or weeks away.

Again, it's not the intent here to discount or discourage the use of these

popular EAP services if our employers participate in one. Yet, a forward-thinking and compassionate employer should know that support must also exist on a daily basis within and across the organization. That's where we spend so much of our time, and where we can find ourselves so vulnerable to the waves of grief that hit without warning. After the devastation we've been through, EAPs are not the only answer. A truly compassionate workplace should certainly strive to provide additional support within the organization.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN ~ ACTIVE AND PASSIVE GRIEF SUPPORT

“She was no longer wrestling with the grief, but could sit down with it as a lasting companion and make it a sharer in her thoughts.”

George Eliot

Each and every year, ten to fifteen percent of working-aged parents will experience the death of a child. These sad findings are the result of a study commissioned by *The Compassionate Friends*, a large, non-profit organization that supports grieving parents in the United States and around the world. These findings show us that with child loss alone, a company with 1,000 employees could face the potential of 100 to 150 new influences of grief in the workplace every year.

While those child loss numbers may seem high at first glance, let's consider that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports an average of over 57,000 deaths of U.S. children under the age of 19 every year. Let's also add the astronomical number of over one million working-age women in the U.S. who annually experience a miscarriage or stillbirth. Even though the CDC doesn't add those two categories together, isn't it common sense to think that these additional losses further increase an organization's exposure to grief brought to the job? Oh, and let's not forget how many working-aged adults experience the death of a spouse, life-partner, sibling, or parent each year. All combined, that's a lot of loss that could impact an organization every year. And that's a lot of us poor souls who'll join this club that we never wanted to join, right?

In the previous chapter, we just learned that only a few of us who've recently lost a loved one will seek or accept offers of outside support through our employer, right? However, we need to become aware that there are also more passive styles of grief support available to us too. And studies have shown to these passive support programs can be drastically beneficial to our grief healing journey.

The sections that follow in this chapter will outline the various forms of grief support, including both the professional and the peer-to-peer style. In addition, the last section will provide some of the potential benefits that seeking support can bring to our grief healing journey. I do hope we'll all find an avenue of support that brings us further along our path toward peace and purpose.

ACTIVE GRIEF SUPPORT

Active grief support can be considered as any organized grief support program that's available to us and provided more often by those in the mental health field. This is more structured support, usually delivered in formal, scheduled sessions, either one-on-one or in groups moderated and overseen by licensed professionals.

Aside from possible EAP provided counseling offered through our employer, there is also the active grief support we can independently seek through local clergy and certified grief coaches, as well as many local hospice services and even funeral homes. For the most part, all active grief support generally comes with a fee, except for maybe those provided through our church. The majority of these services can be found by simply searching available internet directories for local grief support and navigating to the information provided on the links. We might also check the home websites of local churches, hospice organizations, and funeral homes. Many times, either their grief support programs are listed, or they

provide a grief resource area on their site.

PASSIVE GRIEF SUPPORT

There are also many large, well-structured national, non-profit grief support organizations currently in existence in the United States. Many of these peer-to-peer support groups have long-standing regional chapters located in almost every city throughout the country and are typically free of cost to the bereaved. Each regional chapter maintains appropriate local leadership, along with dozens, or more often hundreds, of close by members who regularly gather in space rented from local businesses or civic organizations.

During the meetings of the more dynamic grief support organizations, the members often share personal loss and healing experiences with other grievers in a safe, local setting. Guest speakers and highly organized healing workshops are also typical for regional and national chapter meetings. And many of these larger non-profit organizations hold annual conferences around the country. During these gatherings, thousands of grievers typically gather for three or four days of grief-related seminars and presentations given by renowned grief support experts. The vast majority of these organizations also maintain a very interactive presence on all popular social media platforms and make grief support materials available to members twenty-four hours a day on their websites.

One of the major benefits of regional peer-to-peer support groups is the healing opportunity they afford in physically being among others who have experienced the passing of a loved one. Many of them can be long-term loss survivors, commonly referred to as *seasoned* grievers, who often contribute a great deal of insight in our journeys.

Many of us who've sought support through peer-to-peer organizations often tell how it's more favorable to discuss emotional hardships with

someone who's also "been through the fire," even though not a professional counselor. Actually, many support group members who initially received professional counseling after a loss eventually turned instead to peer-to-peer support. It's not uncommon to hear a griever comment on the difficulties of talking with a mental health professional, or even respected clergy, who've not personally experienced the loss of a loved one.

Internal company-endorsed support groups are another highly successful use of the *peer-to-peer* model. An employee grief support group sponsored within an organization is a formidable method in supporting bereaved employees on the job. Of interest within the same Compassionate Friend's study cited earlier is the finding that almost sixty-five percent of grieving employees will turn to other employees on the job for emotional support. While already substantial, a company-sponsored support group would certainly help increase that percentage.

A company-sponsored peer-to-peer grief support group would consist of employees who have experienced the death of a loved one and voluntarily wish to gather with other bereaved co-workers. Regular gatherings are held before or after work in a private area provided by the company and moderated by a selected group coordinator. The coordinator, also a bereaved employee, would arrange and oversee the meetings, as well as liaison with company leaders who would expectedly want to monitor the effectiveness of these gatherings.

While very few and far between, there actually are large organizations that currently have internal peer-to-peer grief support groups in place. While these known companies are experiencing incredible success with the programs, the release of details in this book is prohibited through their need for non-disclosure of internal information. 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. Their measured results of success, as well as outlines of program models, are typically available to the public through their participating governing bodies.

At the very least, an organization can provide passive grief support simply by gaining the awareness and understanding of what we'll go through as grieving employees who are returning to work. Once properly armed with this knowledge, company leadership can become more proactive, as well as correctly reactive when needed, to all employees who need support after a profound loss.

CLOSING THOUGHTS ~ OUR RETURN TO WORK AND LIFE

“Suppressed grief suffocates, it rages within the breast, and is forced to multiply its strength.”

Ovid

There’s nothing tougher than what we’ve been through. Please know that I am sorry for your loss, as I know you are for mine. We’ve been through the fire, haven’t we? But if you’re here, then you’re already walking along our journey toward re-discovering peace and purpose. You just may not have realized it yet. As I’ve said throughout this book, we’ll never completely heal from our loss, but there will be healing, and there will be a life of joy ahead.

It’s can be said that the profound passing of your loved ones is like losing the blueprints you had made for your future. Now, you’re left to re-draw a new set of plans that sadly exclude that dear soul no longer physically by your side. Yet, they are here with you today and make up so much of who you are now and who you will become.

You’ll go back to work when you have to, or when it’s time. Whether you’re facing a safe harbor or finding that no one seems to care, you must still move forward. There’s no doubt in my heart that it’s what my late son wants for me. So, you need to actively do your grief work, don’t you? You need to tighten the grip on your Griefcase and carry on in life and on the job.

It’s unfortunate that you even had a reason to pick up this book. If you take nothing else away from it, always remember that you’re not alone in this journey. The loving spirit of that dear someone you lost here on Earth now walks beside you every day. Knowing that, there’s nothing to stop you from re-discovering joy, peace, and purpose in life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R. Glenn Kelly is first and foremost a bereaved father. After beginning 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 his loss, R. Glenn would use the study and research of grief and human emotions to begin his own personal healing journey. As his healing healthfully 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 publicly speak from national and international organizations that compassionately serve the bereavement support community.

As a rare male who openly expressed his emotional pains of grief in public, 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, late child 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 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 grieverers who returned to work after a loss, R. Glenn also coaches business organizations in recovering over \$100 Billion in lost annual revenue due to grief in the workplace. In doing so, he also continues to support his brothers and sister in grief, as well as the bereavement support community at large.

Today, along with traveling to publicly speak and present workshops, R. Glenn enjoys creating and recording bereavement support productions from his “Genesis Grief” studios. He faithfully considers serving others as the true legacy left behind by his late son and inspirational hero, Jonathan Taylor Kelly.

CONTACTING THE AUTHOR

R. Glenn Kelly is a dynamic and experienced Keynote Speaker, Workshop Presenter, Grief Coach, Corporate Trainer, Author, and Bereaved Father to Jonathan Taylor Kelly.

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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
- **GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE:** Recover Hidden Revenue and Productivity Loss Driven by Employee Bereavement and Grief
- **THURSDAY IN THE GROTTO** – An inspirational fiction novel about recovering from the loss of a loved one

All books are available in paperback and eBook at Amazon.com, rglennkelly.com, B&N.com, and retail bookstores everywhere. Audio versions of Sometimes I Cry in the Shower and The Griefcase are available at Audible.com.