



Performance Management Resources

## **Manager's Guide to Dealing with Grief in the Workplace**

When employees are affected by the death of a co-worker, personal loss, or serious illness, managers and supervisors are faced with the challenge of insuring that employees are adequately supported while work responsibilities are being met. The following suggestions are intended to help supervisors when these difficult situations arise.

Employees working in departments who have lost a staff member due to death may experience a number of feelings over the days and weeks following the death. Strong personal bonds are often formed within work groups, and the experience of grieving a co-worker's death can be profound. The intensity of reactions will vary among individuals, but the following experiences are common:

- numbness, shock and disbelief
- decreased concentration and memory
- sadness, tearfulness
- irritability, frustration

### **Effects in the Workplace**

Departments which have recently experienced a loss due to death are presented with a number of issues. There may be difficulties with productivity and attendance for those most affected by the loss. If new information about the deceased emerges at the time of death, or if events surrounding the death are upsetting, some employees may be shocked, anxious or confused.

Decisions about the deceased employee's possessions, work space and job responsibilities will have to be made; it is important that these decisions are made with a sensitivity for all those affected.

It is important to understand that the emotional environment at work will be changed for a period of time, and that everyone will have their own unique reaction to the loss. Acknowledging and discussing the impact of the death can help with the process.

### **Be aware of each other**

If it appears that someone is having a serious problem coping with the death, express concern and encourage them to seek professional assistance through the EAP.

### **Accept that work may be affected**

Your co-workers' job performance and interactions may be affected by the stress. In time, things will return to normal.

### **Attend or organize a memorial service**

Whether conducted on or off the work site, a memorial service can be another important step for acknowledging feelings and coming to terms with the death.

### **Consider establishing a memorial at work**

Buying a bench or planting a tree are examples of ways to honor the deceased.

Grief can last quite a while. Don't expect a quick recovery. The process is different for everyone. The supervisor's job is to create an accepting environment, where the process of grieving is treated as normal, yet work still gets done. If an individual seems to be slipping into depression and you are concerned about the level or severity of their reaction, refer them to your Employee Assistance Program.

**❖ Call your Employee Assistance Program**

**❖ 912-692-0988**