

Crisis in the Workplace

When unexpected traumatic events strike our nation, family or workplace, daily routines suddenly seem insignificant in comparison.

Oftentimes, workers may report a substantial loss of time spent doing their actual jobs as they wait to see what will happen, gather vital information and find solutions to the crisis. If the incident is major, radio and television reports may consume our attention for several days. Even after office environments resume 'normal functioning', many find it difficult to concentrate on immediate tasks at hand. Some report that their duties seem insignificant in light of the crisis faced.

Multiple emotions may be experienced. We may feel enraged, vengeful, want to lash out and strike back. Some workers may be in shock and disbelief. Events of that day and the days following seem surreal.

Some express fear of the future in terms of further assaults or crisis. "Am I safe in this building?", "Will this affect my job? Are other bad things going to happen because of this?" Others worry about loved ones and yet feel powerless about their safety and security. Insecurity, distractibility and anger are all felt.

Seek to re-establish a sense of normalcy at work; employers and managers would do well to strike a balance in dealing with their fellow employees. It's difficult not to be preoccupied with the events and aftermath of crisis or trauma, but employers should offer

assistance and opportunity to process feelings and thoughts of their employees.

Validation of feelings and their expressions becomes a powerful tool in healing. Allowing employees to be a part of discussions, while offering reassurance, development and implementation of personal safety plans within the workplace is valuable. Efforts to promote a sense of unity and solidarity, including counseling time and resources, also facilitate healing.

Managers may also want to include family members in discussions and meetings, as the experience will likely impact the entire family. In event of job loss, effective employers assist workers in preparation and options as they search for new employment.

Employers need to be aware that male and female employees may address the issues differently. Some employees will be tearful, others angry. Some may talk incessantly, while others don't want to talk at all.

By allowing and accepting employee's feelings, acknowledging one's own personal feelings and providing support and services, an employer models behavior which can be a powerful source of strength for employees. By becoming proactive rather than reaction, an employer creates security. By encouraging employees to redirect their anxiety and anger into productive channels to address the crisis (such as taking up funds to assist survivor's families, helping in local crisis centers as volunteers, serving on boards to address

future issues related to the trauma, etc.), a manager acknowledges an understanding of the need to regain some semblance of control and purpose in one's life.

Employer and employee alike must be alert for signs of stress, anxiety and depression. Increased use of alcohol, overmedication (by either prescription or over-the-counter drugs) overeating or decreased appetite, isolation, increased difficulty in relationships, missed days at work, physical illness, dissatisfaction or a sense of meaninglessness itself may all be important clues that help is needed.

Awareness of available resources is crucial. We may reach out to colleagues for support and encouragement, but also consider other opportunities, including community support groups, clergy and churches. Inquire about availability of E.A.P. services within the company. Counseling is available from public and private institutions. The workplace will become stronger and a source of support and healing by helping each other.

By providing support for employees during a time of national or personal crisis, employers reap long term benefits: increased loyalty, employee stability, conscientiousness, unity, decreased employee absenteeism, lowered medical and mental health costs, and a return to an active, industrious workforce.

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