GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE

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

EMPLOYER EDITION



Mitigate Revenue Loss and Improve Workforce Morale & Safety

R. GLENN KELLY

GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE

RECOVER HIDDEN REVENUE AND PRODUCTIVITY LOSS DRIVEN BY EMPLOYEE BEREAVEMENTAND GRIEF

A "Solutions-First" Leadership Coaching Edition

Over \$100 Billion in Lost Revenue

For American Businesses Each and Every Year!

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

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

What are the Direct and Indirect Costs of Grief in the Workplace?

Absenteeism
Accidents
Injuries
Hiring Costs
Turnover Rates
Lost Customers

Worker's Comp General Liability Errors in Tasks Low Production Training Costs Poor Branding

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

YES!

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



Keynote Speaker, Business Coach, and award winning author of several grief and bereavement healing books... R. GLENN KELLY

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



GRIEF In the Workplace

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DEDICATION

To Jonathan Taylor Kelly, in Memoriam.

In your light, I learn how to love.

In your beauty, how to make poems.

You dance inside my chest where no one sees you,

but sometimes I do,

and that sight becomes this art.

~ Rumi

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

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

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

ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE

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INTRODUCTION ~ HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

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

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

study Part One with the knowledge of *cause and effect* already in hand. In doing so, the responses and actions in Part One will be recognized as prudent and compassionate measures for use with the grieving employee.

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

CONTEXT OF GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE

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

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

THE TARGETED READER

Grief in the Workplace is specifically targeted at business owners, organizational principals, managing executives, human

resource personnel, and front-line supervision. It is *not* intended to be provided directly to employees or other business-related associates who are experiencing grief from a family death or personal crisis.

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

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

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

CHAPTER THREE

AND

CHAPTER TEN

TO FOLLOW

CHAPTER THREE ~ THE GRIEVING EMPLOYEE'S RETURN

EXAMPLE SCENARIO - EMPLOYEE'S POST BEREAVEMENT RETURN

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

MIND AND BODY INFLUENCES ON THE NEWLY BEREAVED EMPLOYEE In this chapter, the following mental and physical distresses that are typically observed in the newly bereaved employee, as well as any recommended response actions to be taken by organizational leaders, are presented in the following sections:

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

CHAPTER CORRELATIONS

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

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

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

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

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

GRIEF OBSERVATIONS IN THE BEREAVED EMPLOYEE

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

Lack of Concentration

- Unable to maintain long-term focus on tasks
- Inability to make decisions
- Appears restless at the workstation

- Frequently losses files, documents, tools
- Unable to complete a single task
- Attempts to self-resolve by moving to easier tasks

Forgetfulness/Absent-Mindedness

- Performs tasks while frequently but unknowingly omitting required sub-tasks within an established process
- Unwittingly absent from scheduled meetings or misses established deadlines

Confusion

- Frequently halts production or tasks when unable to comprehend instructions
- Unable to continue projects as levels previously demonstrated before the loss event
- Questions co-workers about standard workflow processes or routine procedures
- Frequently appears idle at the workstation for no evident reason

Impeded Memory

- Unable to recall new project instructions on task or project commencement
- Repeatedly unclear with details, skill levels, or processes once performed prior to the loss event

Lethargy

- Performs tasks but moves slowly and methodically
- Appears drowsy, dull, and unenergetic
- Frequently halt tasks to gaze into the distance

Lack of Desire to be Productive

- Appears busy, but with only smaller tasks within a project, or smaller tasks across multiple projects
- Infrequently achieves completion of the overall objective

Diminished Concern for Goals/Mission

- Performs assigned tasks without concern for acceptable quality levels in individual components or completed projects
- Is self-aware that completed tasks are sub-par but makes no effort in correction

High Anxiety Levels

- Displays nervousness towards perceived importance of tasks or projects
- Heightened sense of supervisory or deadline pressure in work
- May display aggravated levels of attention to detail in tasks

Rejection/Insubordination of Supervision

- Becomes verbally or visibly challenging to appropriate admonishments or reprimands from leadership
- Purposely avoids required interaction with senior members in authority

Frequent Mood Swings

 Experiences rapid changes along a spectrum of temperament ranging from cheerful to angry without notable cause or provocation Moods may be extreme in nature and sharply uncharacteristic in disposition as prior to the loss event

Quick to Anger

- Frequently becomes antagonistic during interactions with co-workers
- More prone to ignore usual tact and judgment in refraining from the escalation of disputes with subordinates, peers, and supervisors

Isolation from Co-Workers

- Untypically performs work independently without usual or required collaboration with others in the workplace
- Frequently relocates from group environments to more private settings to perform individual tasks

Loss of Creativity

- Works on tasks or future ventures without mentally thinking beyond the abilities of self or the organization
- Unable to mentally consider all options in new or troublesome assignments
- Frequently ignores new opportunities in existing assignments that become obvious to supervision

Decreased Ambition/Self-Motivation

- Performs or completes tasks without a passionate drive to do so at full capabilities
- Experiences a mental lack of purpose for achieving a high level of quality work

Low Morale

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

Questions Value to the Organization

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

Questions Spiritual Faith

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

RECOMMENDED RESPONSE AND SUPPORT ACTIONS OF LEADERSHIP

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

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

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

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

WORKPLACE IMPACT

A newly bereaved employee who is observed or reported to be impaired by grief emotions will present a potential for risk to any business entity. These impairments may well lead to workplace accidents that threaten the safety of the grieving employee, the co-workers in the workplace, and the company assets on the ground. There could be a risk for financial or administrative damages, as well as mistakes in production that lead to defective products or reduced delivery to clients.

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

MENTAL FATIGUE ASSERTIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RECOMMENDED RESPONSE AND SUPPORT ACTIONS OF LEADERSHIP

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL HELP WHEN APPROPRIATE

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

In all cases of physical disorder, the employee should be

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

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

The risk to workplace safety and productivity still exist when a bereaved employee's physical disorder appears minor or non-life threatening. These lesser types of conditions may include but are not limited to, sleepiness on the job or complaints of body aches and pains. Minor instances of poor physical coordination or nodding off at a workstation can seem trivial at first but quickly cascade into consequences of great jeopardy. Therefore, an immediate stoppage or reassignment of work should be considered by leadership in mid to high-risk assignments whenever a grieving employee displays or reports a physical disorder.

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

WORKPLACE IMPACT

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

lawsuits and litigious damage claims must always be included in any consideration when an employee is physically impaired by grief related disorders.

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING ASSERTIONS

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

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

Another negative impact to physical health comes when a newly bereaved individual fails to mentally progress through the painful loss and remains in the influences of intense grief. The powerful emotions of grief can include shock, fear, or anger, and continually invoke the "fight or flight" mode in the griever's mind. This mental mode releases stress hormones into the body that trigger many physiological changes, such as the heart pumping faster and greater responsiveness for the muscles. This mind-body response is pre-wired in all humans but is only intended to facilitate the immediate escape from danger. It is not meant to be long-term. Intense grief emotions that continue for an extended period of time, however, will continually dump caustic hormones into the body and disrupt many of the normal physical functions. As a result, heart attacks, strokes, and digestive orders are just some of the more common health maladies that result from intense and long-lasting grief.

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

3. SELF-AWARENESS OF THE NEWLY BEREAVED EMPLOYEE

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

It would be simple if all newly bereaved employees could be found at either end of a *ready or not ready* scale. For example, one grieved employee is mentally and emotionally prepared to return to work and does so successfully. Another bereaved worker knows with certainty that work would be too difficult in the current state of grief. These two types of bereaved employees both have a good sense of self-awareness and respective management can make appropriate decisions about each griever's return to full duties.

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

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

considered along with self-awareness when determining the fitness for work of a returning griever.

The self-awareness category list is intended to aid organizational leaders in evaluating workplace risk in the initial return of a grieving employee. The recommended response and support actions, as well as more detailed potential risks to the organization, will be addressed after the list.

SELF-AWARENESS CATEGORIES FOR NEWLY BEREAVED EMPLOYEES

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

• Knowingly Unprepared (High Risk)

- Returns to work out of requirement or need while still attempting to begin, or failing within, the healthy processing of grief emotions
- Fully aware of an inability to perform tasks due to constant moderate to severe grief emotions
- Unable to self-initiate action to mitigate adverse impacts of acute and severe emotional waves

Misperceived Preparedness (High Risk)

- Returns to work before a reasonable time for healthy progression in grief healing and with the mistaken perception of full preparedness to resume tasks
- May not be prepared to self-initiate actions to mitigate the unanticipated impacts of acute and severe emotional waves

• Self-Deceived Preparedness (High Risk)

- Quickly returns to work before progression into grief healing in an attempt to avoid experiencing the acute and severe emotions of grief
- Will not be prepared to self-initiate actions to mitigate the unanticipated impacts of frequent acute and severe emotional waves
- Will be delayed in the healthy healing process of grief

RECOMMENDED RESPONSE AND SUPPORT ACTIONS OF LEADERSHIP It is recommended that leadership conduct a face-to-face meeting with the newly bereaved employee on the first day the

employee returns to the workplace. This should be done at the start of the workday and before the griever attempts a return to previous tasks or projects. The leader who conducts the meeting should speak openly and tactfully to the grieved employee about the concerns of safety and productivity in the workplace. While compassion and empathy will be appreciated, directness and honesty are more essential to the progressive healing processes of the griever.

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

Any newly bereaved employee who presents or reports mannerisms that indicate an inability to perform usual tasks (*Knowingly Unprepared category*), should immediately be removed from all assignments. The affected employee should be directed to take additional days off from work to seek support in coping with the loss. The number of additional days should be flexible and include regular progress updates between leadership and the employee. If the employee has no paid leave available, leadership should inform the employee

that the days off are mandatory even if they must be taken without pay. Leaders should check with in-house human resource or other appropriate personnel for guidance with employment laws or internal policy before mandating unpaid leave. However, employee removal for demonstrated or suspected inability to perform tasks is typically in accordance with most rules and regulations.

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

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

and solitary environment that is conducive to grief healing. In addition, it may also aid the financially challenged griever, as well as serve the entire organization through continued productivity.

One high-risk category of greater concern is "Self-Deceived Preparedness." This type of bereaved employee has either consciously or unconsciously opted to hold back the painful emotions of grief by concentrating all mental focus on the job. This temporarily allows the painful emotions of the loss to be avoided by the griever. However, the emotions of grief are only delayed. Multiple clinical studies have proven that repressed grief will only strengthen over time and eventually expose the griever to more intense emotional responses in the future. When and how intense those emotional responses will be is unknown to anyone, including the griever.

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

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

WORKPLACE IMPACT

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

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

While errors in judgment by the newly bereaved employee can result in physical accidents in the workplace, the concern also exists for mistakes in the administrative, financial and management arenas. These areas of business can hold both short and long-term risks that not only impact front-line productivity, but also a broad spectrum of financial and business relations matters. An incorrect keystroke or an unintentional omission of protocol from a mind overwhelmed with grief emotions can cause non-physical harm to the organization as a whole.

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

FINAL CHAPTER DECLARATIONS

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

It is not typical for an employee who has recently

experienced the death of a spouse, life-partner or child to *just get over it*. There is no instant cessation of severe, acute, and often mentally debilitating emotions. There is no chronological timeline when painful thoughts will suddenly stop influencing the grieving employee, either. No two bereaved individuals will grieve alike. Even those who are progressing healthfully through early grief may be unexpectedly hit with frequent waves of emotions on the job.

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

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

CHAPTER TEN ~ DEFINING GRIEF, MOURNING, AND BEREAVEMENT

CLARIFICATIONS OF GRIEF, MOURNING, AND BEREAVEMENT

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

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

GRIEF

For the purposes of *Grief in the Workplace*, grief is particular to the death of someone where a bond or affection was formed with the survivor. Grief is most frequently defined simply as *the internal, emotional responses to a person's loss*. That is all. Unfortunately, the popular definition fails to mention that those emotional responses are painful and have the potential to

become intense. If not processed healthfully by the survivor, grief can quickly become harmful to self and others.

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

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

Leaving your personal life at home is just an old and empty concept. A strong, experienced leader is always aware that the values carried in personal life are the very same characteristics that make for a strong, mediocre, or weak employee. Any organization that expects a newly bereaved employee to instantly return to high levels of performance is just turning a blind eye to the definition of grief.

MOURNING

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

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

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

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

BEREAVEMENT

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

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

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

GRIEF WORK

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

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

Grief Work must be actively performed by the griever to ease the emotional pains of loss. That demands much more than just experiencing the reactions. It also requires the griever to actively perform mental tasks and undertake specific courses of thought. To do so successfully will allow for the griever to gradually release the intense emotional pains and begin to experience the present in a healthy manner. It also serves the important function of transitioning the bereaved for life in the future.

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

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

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WORKSHOP

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