

R. GLENN KELLY

TAKING YOUR GRIEFCASE TO WORK

A surreal illustration of a winding road that curves through a hazy, light blue sky. Four people in business attire are walking away from the viewer along the road, each carrying a briefcase. In the background, a city skyline with various skyscrapers is visible under a cloudy sky. The overall mood is contemplative and hopeful.

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*.



R. Glenn Kelly
rglennkelly.com



TAKING YOUR GRIEFCASE TO WORK

**RETURNING TO WORK AFTER
THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE**

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NON-FICTION

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 Forward in Grief

Grief Healings 365

Daily Inspirations For Moving Forward To Your New Normal

Grief in the Workplace – Employer Edition

*Recover Hidden Revenue and Productivity Loss Driven by Employee
Bereavement and Grief*

FICTION

Thursdays in the Grotto

An Inspirational Story of Coming Through the Fire

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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 caths 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.

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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- **YOUTUBE:** Grief Support Video Productions – search for: The Bring Your Own Grief Network Studio
- **WEBSITE:** www.rglennkelly.com

OTHER BOOKS BY R. GLENN KELLY

- **SOMETIMES I CRY IN THE SHOWER:** A Grieving Father’s Journey to Wholeness and Healing
- **THE GRIEFCASE:** A Man’s Guide to Healing and Moving and Moving Forward in Grief
- **GRIEF HEALING 365:** Daily Inspirations for Moving Forward to Your New Normal
- **GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE:** Recover Hidden Revenue and Productivity Loss Driven by Employee Bereavement and Grief
- **THURSDAY IN THE GROTTA** – 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.