

Broken Hearts

by Shannon Warren for the September 26, 2016 Journal Record

Broken hearts can hurt more than the individual suffering the loss. Angst resulting from the passing of a loved one costs businesses an estimated \$37.6 billion each year. That's according to *The Grief Index*, a 2002 study by the Grief Recovery Institute. They concluded that 90% of those holding physical jobs had higher incidents of injuries and 85% of leaders had impaired decision-making abilities following the loved one's death.

Employees may initially experience shock, but then welcome the escape of work routines. Everyone seems fine at first, but recovery takes time. Employers may observe irritability, a lack of concentration, disorganization and restlessness. Sleep patterns are often interrupted, adding to the employee's exhaustion. Natural defenses break down and illnesses develop. Many experience prolonged depression.

Expecting the employee to "be strong" is not healthy nor compassionate. Grief tears are necessary to relieve the body of toxins. Below are some positive actions that employers can consider taking that may help a grieving employee adjust:

Show kindness: The boss is usually among the first to be called because he/she is an important part of workers' lives. It is important to understand the significance of the loss. Show up for the funeral. Have your group sign a card or donate money to the deceased's favorite charity. Consider providing practical help such as lawn mowing, meal preparation or babysitting services. (In doing so, be respectful of the employee's wishes. They may want privacy and prefer that the circumstances of the death not be discussed.)

Be patient: Don't expect someone to bounce back with immediate productivity. Employees may break down if receiving calls of condolences at work. Distracted thinking is normal and will probably continue for awhile. Consider sharing the workload among other co-workers.

Compassionate HR policies: Ensure that your Human Resources department is responsive in communicating information on bereavement leave, insurance benefits. Offer grief counseling if it is available through your employee assistance program. Check to see if your company allows employees to donate unused vacation time to someone needing extra time to adjust to their loss. (Typically, a few days off is inadequate.) Many funeral homes require up-front payments so an emergency loan may be helpful.

Model compassion and your employees will follow your virtuous leadership. Employees treated kindly typically demonstrate fierce loyalty to their employers and recover more quickly.

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