

Loss of a co-worker:

Help for managers handling grief in the workplace

It is hard to lose a co-worker, especially when they might have been close to some people while others might not have known them at all. Everyone deals with the loss differently. Many times people look to leadership to help them process the loss and grieve together while also maintaining stability in the workplace.

It is important to address the loss, help staff process their grief in a healthy way and identify those that may benefit from professional help. Following are some best practices for coping with the death of a co-worker:

- **Call an informal meeting.** Some co-workers may feel the need to talk about the deceased individual - what they remember, their last conversation, etc. A meeting can give co-workers an opportunity to grieve and talk about their feelings. If feelings are especially strong, it may be a good idea to have a grief counselor present.
- **Communicate funeral and memorial arrangements.** Make certain that affected staff know about the arrangements for the deceased. If the arrangements are during work hours, be clear about what staff need to do to get authorization to attend and express condolences.
- **Honor the person who died in an appropriate way.** Co-workers may wish to collect money for a charitable donation or create a memorial book or bulletin board. A tribute in the staff newsletter can also serve as a memorial. Another suggestion is to plant a tree in the company's courtyard. If the company is having a memorial program, it may be a good idea to invite the family of the deceased co-worker. This can give the family closure about their loved one's place of employment.
- **Talk to a grief counselor.** A professional grief counselor may be beneficial since they have not been personally affected by the death. Your company HR department should be able to direct you to resources.
- **Develop a plan to handle the personal items of the deceased.** Ask the family what their wishes are. Would they like to pick up the items or have them mailed to their home? Assign someone to gather the staff member's belongings. Note: If the family asks for the belongings to be thrown away, it might be a good idea to set them aside for a while in case they change their mind.

Losing a co-worker is never easy, especially when it is unexpected. However, using the best practices above can help the transition be a smooth and positive experience for everyone involved.

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