

Loss in the Workplace

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How we process change, transition, cope and grief is unique to each person. No two people respond to loss in the same way and there is not a time table for healing. Relationships in the workplace are unique, to some the relationship to the person who has died was a working relationship, to others a deep friendship. When there is a loss in the workplace we are impacted individually, as a team, depending on our role and as an organization, providing us with opportunities to be supported and support one another.

If you have lost a colleague:

- Attend the funeral
- Create a memorial at home or in your workspace. (Light a candle on your desk, lead a fundraiser, plant a tree, display a picture of your colleague or one of their interests)
- Find a support person at work you can express your feelings too and talk about the person you lost
- Recognize “grief bursts” will happen and have a plan for when they occur at work
- You may have trouble concentrating and remembering information. Ask co-workers to write down, email or text important information
- Do not assume everyone is impacted and if people are not expressing themselves they don't care. We all had a unique relationship and grieve differently

Supporting a colleague:

- Make contact and check in. Do not assume your coworkers will reach out to you
- Listen with your heart
- Take the time, cancel the meeting or be late to the appointment if someone needs to talk
- Avoid clichés
- Don't be judgmental
- See the person as a person, not a task that needs to be accomplished

For Supervisors:

- Seek outside support. You, too, have lost a colleague and just because you are in a leadership role does not mean you can, or should, be the source of support for your team
- Adapt employee scheduling to allow time to honor the person who has died. Make it possible for employees to attend the memorial or funeral
- Create an environment that supports taking space, when needed. (Extended talks, short walks, emotions in the workplace, etc)
- If possible do not assign new tasks within two weeks of the loss. When new tasks need to be assigned, be mindful of who you are assigning them too

For Organizations:

- Remember people are your most important asset and while tasks can be reassigned, how we treat each other and honor those no longer with us creates a feeling of value within the organization, despite having jobs to complete
- Ensure policies are in line with supporting employees (Time off, employee assistance programs, insurance benefits for individual counseling, scheduling, etc.)
- Create space for a permanent memorial (Brick, bench, tree, memory wall or book etc)



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