

# Supervisor/HR Supplement Newsletter

September 2009

Helpful Resources From Your Employee Assistance Program

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## How to Manage the Workplace After the Death of An Employee



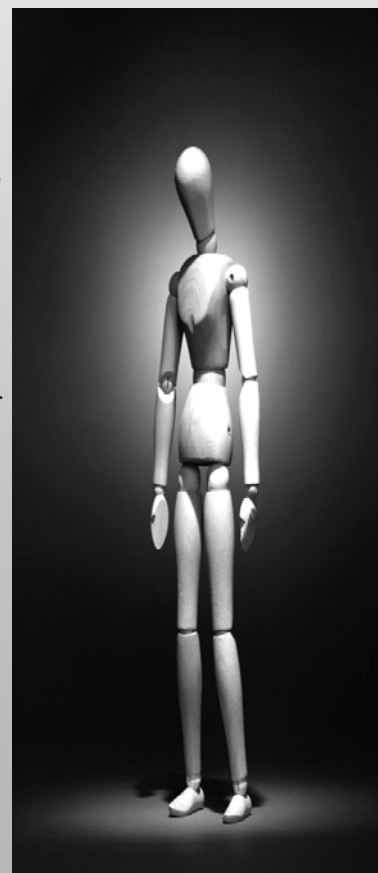
One of the most difficult situations you may face in your career is managing the aftermath of the death of an employee and the multiple repercussions that may affect your work group, department, or organization. Because an incident of this nature can result in a traumatic stress response, it is recommended that the supervisor or HR Department contact your EAP to facilitate a debriefing or critical incident stress management session for all affected employees within 24 to 48 hours after learning of the death. In times of crisis, make sure to get all of the assistance you feel you will need to effectively manage the situation. Next, no matter how you learn of the incident, react quickly by notifying immediate staff and close work friends directly, and the rest of the company through written communications, such as an email or memorandum. Remember to contact staff who are away or on leave and to arrange time for your staff to attend the funeral or memorial service if they would like to do so. Adapted from: [http://www.cope-inc.com/org\\_manager/pma/eedeath.shtml](http://www.cope-inc.com/org_manager/pma/eedeath.shtml)

## Key Things to Address

- ◆ **Desk and personal belongings.** Family members or a close work friend may want to handle the task of boxing up the individual's personal belongings.
- ◆ **Changing the voice mail message.** retrieving messages (voice mail and email), handling inquires intended for the deceased employee. These tasks could be shared or rotated among staff to ease the emotional burden of having to tell callers that the employee has died. Prepare a brief statement to assist those who reply to calls or emails.
- ◆ **Staff coverage for unfinished or future work assignments.** A temporary, short-term plan should be put into place as soon as possible to lessen the level of anxiety that is already present among the staff until a more permanent decision can be made. .
- ◆ **Office Moves** It is best not to make any abrupt moves in regard to space changes; people need time to grieve the loss of their co- worker before seeing his or her workstation dismantled.
- ◆ **The replacement employee.** Under the best of circumstances, a new employee needs to be prepared for possible negative comparisons with the deceased employee. If the deceased was particularly well-liked, the transition will be even more difficult.
- ◆ **Loss of work productivity and motivation.** You can expect the death of an employee to result in lower productivity and motivation for a brief time. A debriefing held soon after the announcement will ease the impact of loss, but it cannot be avoided entirely.

If 1-2 months pass and you notice that one of your employees has not returned to his or her normal level of functioning and appears to still be grieving, talk to that employee, and refer them to the EAP if appropriate. Often, a loss in one area of someone's life, triggers unresolved feelings about previous losses or anticipated losses. This person may need extra assistance in coping with these feelings.

Adapted from: <http://www.cope-inc.com/>



Deer Oaks EAP Services, your Employee Assistance Program, is always available to you and your dependents. If you are struggling with children, finances, or just want some practical advice on health or the mind-body connection, contact your EAP, Deer Oaks, at:

1.866.327.2400

[eap@deeroaks.com](mailto:eap@deeroaks.com)

[www.deeroaks.com](http://www.deeroaks.com)

## How to Hold a Difficult Conversation

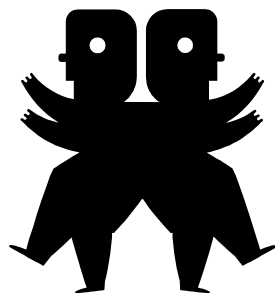


If you manage people, work in Human Resources, or care about your friends at work, chances are good that one day you will need to hold a difficult conversation. Have you encountered any of these examples?

- ✓ Inappropriate Dress
- ✓ Unacceptable personal hygiene
- ✓ Flirtatious behavior
- ✓ Disorganized workspace
- ✓ Vulgar language

They're just samples of the types of behavior that cry out for responsible feedback. *Susan Heathfield* from *About.com* offers these steps to help you hold difficult conversations when people need professional feedback.

## Steps to Provide Feedback in a Difficult Situation



### Seek permission to provide the feedback.

Start by stating you have some feedback you'd like to share. Ask if it's a good time or if the employee would prefer to select another time and place. (Within reason, of course.) Use a soft entry. Don't dive right into the feedback - give the person a chance to brace for potentially embarrassing feedback. Tell the employee that you need to provide feedback that is difficult to share. If you're uncomfortable with your role in the conversation, you might say that, too. Most people are as uncomfortable providing feedback about an individual's personal dress or habits, as the person receiving the feedback.

Often, you are in the feedback role because other employees have complained to you about the habit, behavior, or dress. Do not give in to the temptation to amplify the feedback, or excuse your responsibility for the feedback, by stating that a number of coworkers have complained. This heightens the embarrassment and harms the recovery of the person receiving feedback.

### The best feedback is straightforward and simple.

Don't beat around the bush. I am talking with you because this is an issue that you need to address for success in this organization.

- Tell the person the impact that changing his or her behavior will have from a positive perspective. Tell the employee how choosing to do nothing will affect their career and job.
- Reach agreement about what the individual will do to change their behavior. Set a due date - tomorrow, in some cases. Set a time frame to review progress in others.

### Follow-up.

The fact that the problem exists means that backsliding is possible; further clarification may also be necessary. Then, more feedback and possibly, disciplinary action are possible next steps.

