

## For Managers

### When an Employee Dies

In the workplace, the death of an employee can be a devastating experience on both a personal and practical level. On the personal level, there are feelings of grief and loss, even guilt – “why not me?” or, “I wish I had been nicer to him when he was alive.” On the practical level, there are issues to deal with: redistribution of work, payout of insurance benefits, etc. For managers, the death of an employee in workgroup can come as a sudden shock, creating stress and uncertainty, in addition to personal feelings of loss. Here are some practical guidelines for coping.

### Sharing the News

Notify employees as quickly as possible. How you do it depends a lot on the logistics of the workgroup itself. Is it possible to call the entire group together for a few minutes? Or is it more workable to talk to groups of three or four employees at a time? Either way, face-to-face contact is best. A follow-up memo to all employees is a good way to deal with practical considerations and to address common questions employees are likely to have once the initial shock subsides – whether and where the memorial services will be held, if employees will be allowed to take time from work to attend, availability of counseling, etc. There is no cookie-cutter approach – much of your response should be based on common sense and your own sensitivity.

### Dealing with Grief

Everybody deals with grief differently. Managers need to be flexible and understanding in responding to employee emotions. Acknowledging employees’ feelings is important, as is allowing adequate time to grieve and move through the healing process. Look for opportunities to sit down with an employee to say, “How’s it going?” It helps to get some of their thoughts and feelings into the open.

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