

Coping with loss

10 considerations for managers

Businesses can be like families, so when someone is no longer there it can create an emotional vacuum.

The death of a member of your team can have a significant impact on the morale and productivity of your business and having a support plan in place should the worst happen is essential.

A compassionate approach shows that you value your employees. Here are 10 key areas you may wish to consider.



1. Understand the support available

In order to best help others, it is important to be aware of all the support tools that can help you to do this. Consider the benefit providers you have and their support services such as helplines.

Understanding your bereavement policy and how flexible it is will help provide guidance and a framework to help manage internal requests.



2. Providing immediate support

The news will have an immediate impact upon some people, whilst others will feel the impact at a later date. It's crucial to highlight the services and support tools you have available to ensure the right help is given to those that need it. For example Bereavement and Probate support, or grief counselling may be available. Line managers should be on hand to support staff who need to talk, or be aware of those who are finding day to day tasks in their role challenging as a result of trying to come to terms with the news. Be prepared for staff who may need to take sudden breaks if the impact becomes overwhelming at unexpected times.

3. Offering your condolences

Acknowledge the situation with your teams in an open and honest way, and offer your condolences – and to the family where appropriate. Keep teams updated and informed of any timelines or next steps: in many cases colleagues will want to attend the funeral, for example. Send your condolences on behalf of the business to avoid multiple touch points with the grieving family. Also, be mindful that different religions and customs will have different ways in which they may mark a death. It is helpful to understand what these may involve.



4. Managing time off work

Everyone handles loss in a different way, and grief can cause people to experience complex emotions such as guilt, helplessness, anger, emptiness and disbelief. These emotions can have an impact on the way your employees behave at work, and as a result their behaviour could become unpredictable and out of character. Be aware of this and acknowledge where staff may benefit from some time off work or working away from the office. Your company bereavement policy will provide guidelines on how best to manage this.



5. Communicating the loss to team members and clients

Putting words onto a page after an unexpected and devastating event can be hard, however communicating the loss is an important step. It needs to be handled sensitively and practically, and identifying an interim point of contact in case of queries can be helpful. This helps create the continuity of the client relationship and service, until an alternative or permanent solution is found.



6. Helping team members cope in the absence of a colleague

Often managers will need to react very quickly to help ensure the business continues to function despite the loss of an employee. Whilst recruiting for the role often comes at a much later date, you will need to consider redistributing work to keep on top of day to day demands. Identify those which are coping well, or who were further removed from the news to help support objectively. You may also find staff will come forward to ask how they can help given the circumstances so be sure to recognise and acknowledge any offers you receive.



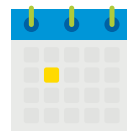
7. Make your bereavement policy clear

A company Bereavement Policy is an effective way to make coping with returning to work clear for you and your employees. It's easy to set up and isn't legally binding – it just ensures you have guidelines on how to treat each employee fairly and with dignity following a death. You should distribute it to your employees so they understand it. By making the process clear and transparent, you can help reduce employee anxiety about returning to work and strengthen staff loyalty. This is also a useful time to feedback to your Human Resources ('HR') team any further insight which you feel the policy may benefit from should it be required again in the future.



8. Managing a return to work

If you've granted time off work to a team member who has been particularly hard hit, think carefully about their return to work plan. Ensure they have had sufficient time to come to terms with the loss, and are not returning to work too soon. Often some can view work as a place to keep their mind busy, but it is crucial they have the support they need, for as long as they need it. Your company bereavement policy will help identify ways in which you can provide flexibility for the individual, whilst meeting the needs of the business also.



9. Consider adjustments for the short/medium term

Coming to terms with the loss of someone close can take time and each bereavement journey is a very personal one. Be mindful that even once back at work, staff may need ongoing support. Significant anniversaries or birthdays for example may mean that emotions surface. Any preparations you can make in advance will help ensure the team or individual team members have the support they need.



10. Possible Public Relations ('PR') and Media statements

Often this isn't needed, but in some circumstances this may be required. If the death made the news, for example, your staff may get queries and need talk points so they can respond to any questions from outside the company. A reactive statement may also be required for the media. Ensure staff are aware of procedures should the media try to call, and seek professional advice if your company does not have the in house expertise to draft the statement.

Want to find out more?

To learn more about the complimentary Bereavement and Probate service MetLife can offer you and your employees, contact your MetLife representative today.

Telephone: **0800 917 2111** or email **ebnewbusiness@metlife.co.uk**

Or visit **www.metlife.co.uk** to see the full suite of materials available.