

Tips for Managers in Times of Stress and Disaster

Managers and supervisors have a special role to play in helping their employees adjust in healthy ways after critical incidents, disasters, and during periods of prolonged stress. Here are some actions to consider, as the situation warrants:

Communicate with your employees.

- A message should go out to all employees from a senior manager.
- Communicate the importance of the situation, and reflect the normal fears and anxieties that we all share.
- List any steps the organization is taking to ensure the safety of its employees.
- Remind employees of resources available to them in the community and through their jobs, including the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Communication is a two-way process.

This can be done informally, by walking around chatting with people, or more formally through a survey, perhaps via email. Ask your employees how they are doing.

- What are their main concerns?
- What do they need from you?
- Provide updates, or access to information, as subsequent news breaks.

Expect productivity to be lower.

- Be patient and compassionate about it.
- Consider getting employees together for lunch or a snack, to tap into group dynamics for support.

Be aware that some individuals may have more intense reactions than others.

- Persons at risk for such intense reactions include:
 - Those whose lives were directly impacted by the event or similar events
 - Those who have experienced prior losses or traumas and for whom the current events serve to reactivate the emotions.
 - Those who are vulnerable to stress due to a mental, emotional, or substance abuse disorder.
- Employers should be sensitive to the fact that intense reactions may result from unseen personal factors such as the above. The best course for managers is:
 - Signal your willingness to talk.
 - Be patient.
 - Practice active listening.
 - Be supportive
 - Problem-solve with the employee around covering their work responsibilities.
 - Make sure they know where to get help. If they are already in treatment they should contact their therapist for an appointment. If they are not, a referral to the EAP may be a good place to start.

Use your resources available to you as a manager.

- If you have concerns about how individual employees are reacting, or the effect on your workforce in general, call your EAP for a management consultation.
- Consider scheduling a critical incident stress-debriefing group, through the EAP.
- Remember to take care of yourself so you can take care of your employees; use your EAP if needed.

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