

Managing Trauma, Loss, and Grief in the Workplace

Understanding this psychological experience,
recognizing the signs, and addressing the situation.

Introduction

When an unexpected traumatic event occurs at a business or an employee experiences trauma, loss, or grief in their personal lives, it can be challenging to manage the incident initially. It may also be difficult for employees to cope and return to their normal lives after the fact.

Traumatic experiences can evoke fear, shock, anxiety, depression, and other emotions for months to come after the event takes place. Everyone handles traumatic events, loss, and grief differently. For some, this might involve really immersing themselves into their work. For others, they might experience difficulty maintaining their daily routine.

For business owners and management, knowing exactly how to manage a critical situation and its aftermath is a crucial part of business management. Regardless of the industry, management needs to be knowledgeable in managing trauma.



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1. Understanding Trauma, Loss, and Grief

Businesses need to be prepared to manage trauma that occurs both inside and outside of the workplace. Just because it didn't happen on company property doesn't mean you don't need to worry about it. Anything that impacts business operations or your employees is your responsibility. The mental health of employees should be a priority for employers.

Types of Trauma

Many people associate trauma in the workplace as strictly workplace violence.

Here are a few examples of trauma that can occur in the workplace or negatively impact employees:

- Downsizing, layoffs, buyouts or mergers.
- Natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, tornadoes or volcanoes.
- Death, whether at the workplace or outside of the workplace.
- Human-caused events such as robbery, violence of any kind, explosions, fires or rape.
- Personal trauma such as death of a relative or friend, relationship or medical issues or witnessing a traumatic event.

Sign of Employee Distress

Knowing the signs that employees are having a difficult time coping with trauma is the first part of helping your employees overcome their emotions. Failure to pay attention to or recognize signs that employees are struggling can negatively impact the employee and the business.

Here are a few signs to look out for that indicate a situation with an employee needs to be addressed:

- Irritability, anger, or inability to control emotions.
- Declining productivity or difficulty concentrating on daily tasks.
- Absenteeism that is out of character.
- Complaints about headaches, loss of appetite, or increased heart rate.
- Disorganization
- Lack of emotion
- Overworking
- Becoming tired after completing basic tasks
- Sudden lack of self-care

Turning a blind eye to employee discomfort after a trauma or a major loss is ill-advised for employers. Just because the trauma isn't a result of a significant incident, such as a shooting, doesn't mean that it is any less traumatic. The University of Maryland defines trauma as "any experience that causes physical, emotional, psychological distress or harm. It is an event that is perceived and experienced as a threat to one's safety or to the stability of one's world."¹

Trauma Checklist

Use this checklist as a guide to determine whether or not management should assess a situation:

Was an employee in danger, or feel like they were in danger?

Has the incident had any media coverage?

Did an employee witness or experience a stressful event in or outside of the workplace?

Did an employee suffer a serious injury or die?

Has an employee experienced a loss outside of the workplace?

1. <https://www.govtech.com/em/health/Trauma-and-How-It-Can-Adversely-Affect-the-Workplace.html>



2. How Employee Distress Impacts the Workplace

It is the employer's job to be empathetic towards employees and caring about their overall well-being. A business's success depends on employees and their performance. Based on a Work and Well-Being Survey², less than half of working Americans reported that they feel their organization supports the well-being of its employees. If it's common knowledge that happier employees are more productive employees, why is that percentage so low?

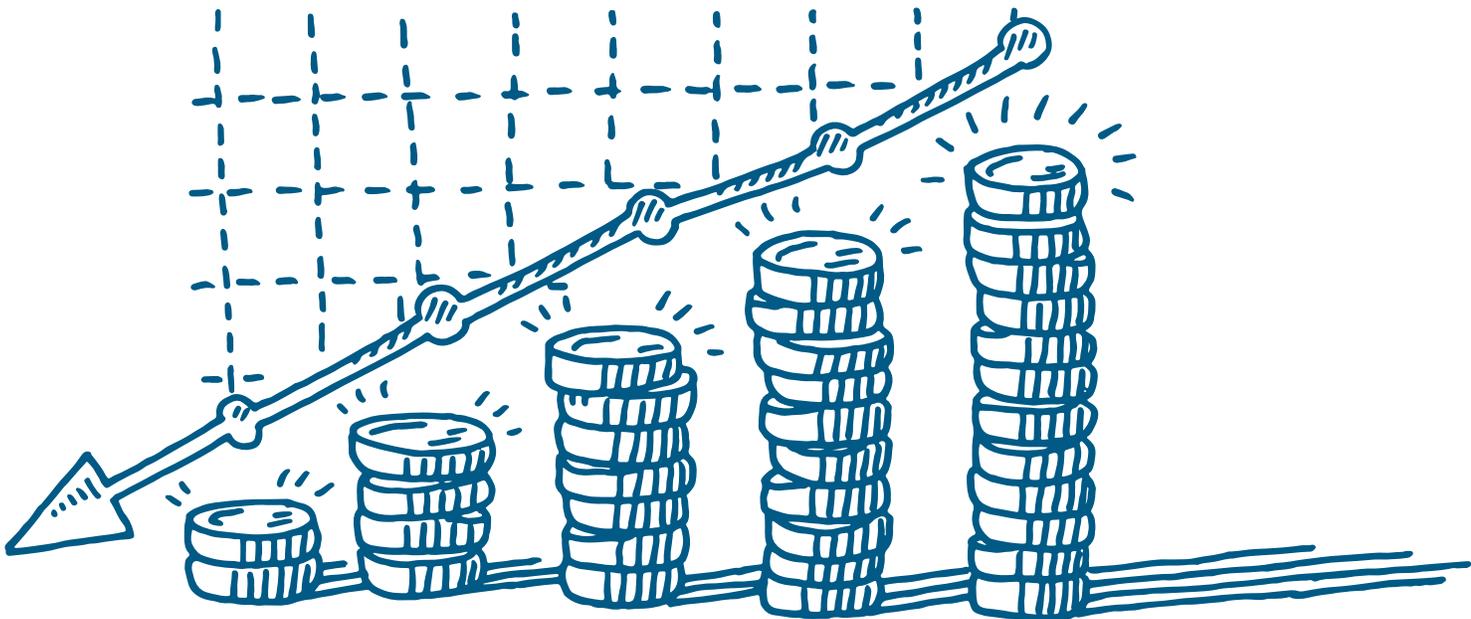
Impacts of Trauma in the Workplace

Whether it's a recent incident or a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from an event that occurred years ago, an employer must provide assistance to help that employee perform their job effectively.

Here are a few ways trauma can impact the workplace:

- Low productivity
- The cost associated with missed workdays
- Poor customer service
- The danger associated with untreated emotional issues

To prevent these types of impacts, address all situations in a non-threatening and non-judgmental manner.



2. <https://www.apaexcellence.org/assets/general/2016-work-and-wellbeing-survey-results.pdf>



3. Addressing Trauma at Work

Once you begin to recognize the signs of an employee who might be struggling to cope with trauma or grief in the workplace, you must address the situation as quickly as possible. You need to make sure that your business has a plan on how to assist employees after a traumatic experience. Addressing the situation will help ensure that your employees feel secure in the workplace.

Here are a few ways your business can assist employees struggling after a traumatic event:

- Provide grief counseling for employees who need it.
 - Offer vacation days or implement a work from home policy to allow employees time to process the traumatic event or loss in their own way before returning to work.
 - Be patient with employees as they cope with trauma, loss, or grief.
- Make sure to check on the employee often to ensure they are handling the event well.
 - Provide resources such as pamphlets or information on how to handle traumatic experiences if needed.
 - If an employee's workload needs to be adjusted for a period of time, consider having other employees help to make sure deadlines are met.

If ignored, trauma, loss, or grief can result in depression, which can lead to other, more serious issues such as homicide or suicide. The quicker you take action when an employee displays signs of discomfort, the easier the situation is to mitigate.

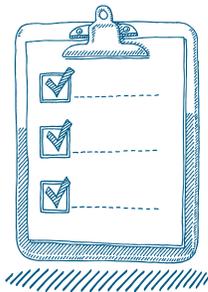




4. Holistic, End-to-End Business Continuity

1. BEFORE Planning & Risk Management

- 1. Onboarding
- 2. BC Plan Assessment & Refinement
- 3. BC Plan Organization
- 4. Testing
- 5. Data Backup



2. DURING Incident Management

- 1. Bi-directional Messaging
- 2. Conference Calling
- 3. Incident Management
- 4. Automated BC Plan Management
- 5. Confirmation of BC Plan



3. AFTER Recovery Management

- 1. Recover Space, Power, Data, Communications, Technology
- 2. Bi-directional Messaging, Analysis
- 3. Conference Calling
- 4. Post-Incident Management



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