

Briefing



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Coping with tragedy in the workplace



It is difficult to imagine how you might react to a tragedy in your workplace. You would probably rather not even think about it. However, if you were faced with such a situation – colleagues in a fatal car crash, a manager with a terminal diagnosis or one of many events that cause distress – you would probably be shocked, stunned and disbelieving. This is often followed by a need for action but what action is appropriate?

As a manager, it is your job to over-ride these instincts, to take control, to act with sensitivity and professionalism to ensure that co-workers, senior managers and affected staff are all supported appropriately. The actions, communications and care of managers in the “golden hour” after the tragedy set a lasting tenor for ongoing recovery.

Fortunately tragedies such as these are not everyday occurrences

for most organisations. However, whenever the media reports disasters such as earthquakes, flooding, hostage taking, gun crime, or transport accidents, those involved in the tragedy will either be employed themselves, or their family members and friends will be linked to a workplace.

“Disasters focus the glare of attention on top management, if the company communicates well and shareholders and investors view the event as well managed, the impact on stock values is generally positive”

(Knight & Pretty 1996)

Clearly most organisations have policies and procedures that help guide actions at these times.

However, these tend to focus on the practicalities such as IT. Rarely do they emphasise the need to support staff and the importance of communication, compassion and common sense to aid organisational recovery.

“When employees have a supportive educational input from their managers post-trauma, their symptoms are lower at three months and their absence is lower at twelve months, compared with employees who did not have such an intervention”

(Report from Institute of Work Psychology 2006)

Some basic principles that can be applied in most situations to support managers during crisis and tragedy are:

- Collect as much information as possible about the situation as you will be asked a huge variety of questions. It is alright to say “I don’t know”; it is a very common experience in a crisis to be unable to satisfy everyone with the information given.
- Check that you personally are physically and psychologically well enough to continue to manage the task ahead which may take hours or days. Best practice is to work alongside a colleague.

- Communicate the information to staff utilising a “Facts, Feelings, and Future” template (see over). If you have time, practise saying the communication out-loud before you deliver it. Be prepared to repeat the communication several times as some staff may not believe it or be able to comprehend it.
- Educate employees about what their personal experiences might be. Explain that this tragedy may preoccupy their thoughts and reactions for the next few days or weeks. They may have difficulty concentrating or they may wonder what they could have done differently to prevent it. All of these reactions are usual, in unusual circumstances.
- Assess the level of impact of the tragedy. Those staff who were involved, who witnessed, or who were emotionally close to those most affected may well need extra support. Also staff who were not involved in this tragedy but have had similar traumas may be vulnerable.
- Encourage staff to talk about what happened with each other and with professionals. Promote the use of an Employee Assistance Programme (where appropriate) and perhaps organise for a trauma consultant to come on site and talk with staff individually or facilitate a group session. In a recent study, 80% of staff involved in an incident wanted to talk about their experiences, and 70% wanted to talk to a familiar person. (Orner et al, 2003)

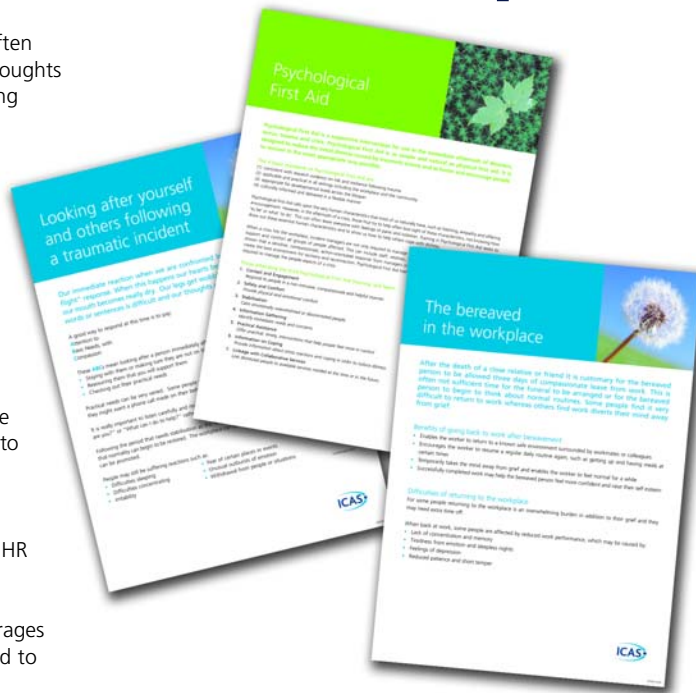
Continued overleaf

Tragedy in the workplace continued

- Provide an activity for staff. It is often helpful to channel feelings and thoughts into actions, for example organising a collection, a condolences book, or a memorial service.
- Take care to recover after you have finished. Remember to drink and eat regularly as your body, which is working on adrenalin, will not be alerting you to this.

Many organisations prepare and test their disaster recovery plans regularly. The integration of the human response is a central element to this and needs to be included in training courses, or scenario testing.

ICAS runs training courses on Psychological First Aid for Managers, HR staff and emergency responders. Psychological First Aid expands on everything discussed here and encourages an ABC approach in a tragedy; Attend to Basic needs with Compassion.



Mandy Rutter, Clinical Manager at ICAS, will be giving a presentation on 'Tragedies and Disasters at Work – the HR response' in the Showcase Theatre at the CIPD Conference and Exhibition in September.

Managing traumatic situations at work is a fine balance between sensitivity, compassion and common-sense. This workshop will provide guidance on practical and professional interventions in line with current research. Visit the Showcase Theatre on Wednesday 19th September at 3.15pm.

Facts, Feelings and the Future

Your priorities, will be:

To communicate **THE FACTS**.

- What has/is happening?
- People need to know all the information there is. Be clear about what is available - "We have no information about that now and we expect to hear at 6pm"

To empathise and normalise, as far as possible, **THE FEELINGS**.

Anxious, upset people may not be able to take in all the information.

It is important to empathise with the feelings in a way that "normalises" an abnormal situation and helps them to understand what to do next. Checking for understanding is important.

Give information about **THE FUTURE**.

- What will happen next?
- What they need to be aware of in themselves
- Any action they need to take
- Who will support them?
- Plans for meeting up with their support network



Online therapy

A new online therapy programme, **Beating The Blues™**, which integrates best practice in psychological therapies with advanced multimedia software, is now an integral component of ICAS services.

Common mental health problems are becoming a real concern in the workplace and currently cost British businesses an estimated £9 billion per annum. Beating the Blues™ is an ideal opportunity for ICAS corporate customers to offer their employees another way of accessing the latest, evidence-based treatments, either to help support them to stay in work or, where absence is unavoidable, return to work much sooner.

Beating the Blues™ is a computerised cognitive behavioural therapy (CCBT) programme and is the only CCBT product recommended by the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) for people with mild to moderate depression.

It is an 8-session, self-help treatment designed for use by adult individuals, regardless of age, gender, educational background or level of computer experience. During the 8-session programme users identify specific problems and realistic treatment goals. They work through cognitive modules which focus on the identification and challenge of automatic thoughts, thinking errors, distractions, core

beliefs and attributional styles. Interwoven with these cognitive elements are problem directed behavioural components where patients can work on any two of activity scheduling, problem solving, graded exposure, task breakdown or sleep management according to their specific problems. The final module looks at action planning and relapse prevention.

Although Beating the Blues™ can be used as a stand-alone therapy, ICAS is providing a blended counselling model. This incorporates thorough assessment by telephone counsellors and proactive telephone counselling support for those who use the programme. ICAS' existing quality clinical protocols highlight if the user is at risk, making it a unique blend of independence and security.

Employment update

Increase to statutory holiday entitlement

The government recently confirmed its intention to increase statutory holiday entitlement from the current 20 days (4 weeks) for workers in England, Wales and Scotland.

The increase of eight days is to be introduced in two parts: an additional four days on 1 October 2007 resulting in an entitlement of 4.8 weeks (or 24 days for those working a five day week), followed by a further increase of 4 days on 1 April 2009, giving a total entitlement at that point of 5.6 weeks (or 28 days for full-time workers), pro-rata for part-time workers.

The additional entitlement can include public holidays, so those workers currently receiving 20 days leave plus bank and public holidays will not see their entitlement change.

Payment in lieu of the first increase (up to a maximum of four days) may be possible until April 2009 if both worker and employer agree. From 1 April 2009 when the minimum entitlement rises to 5.6 weeks (or 28 days for full-time workers) any untaken leave cannot be exchanged for payment.



HOT TOPIC . . .

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is an approach used in working with people experiencing a wide range of emotional issues. The basis of this approach is the understanding that how we think affects how we feel and this in turn, impacts on our behaviour.

When experiencing emotional distress we can develop distorted thinking so that, for example, having made one mistake, we might believe ourselves to be worthless or we might find ourselves becoming anxious to the extent that we view everything in extremes – always anticipating the worst possible scenario.

A CBT practitioner works with the client to identify and then to change the extreme thinking. The process involves exploring the unhelpful thoughts that underlie beliefs and behaviour so that these can be viewed objectively and a realistic perspective reached. Working on the connection between the thoughts and the behaviour often means 'homework' for the client between sessions. This involves an objective being agreed and the client putting into practice what they have identified as a manageable change in behaviour at that point. The process is a gradual one. For example, for someone whose self confidence has plummeted to the extent that they feel worthless, the session might involve identifying strengths and the task involve something safely tackled at that point, building after further support to something a little more challenging. Depression is often accompanied by anxiety and/or social isolation. Someone who has felt too anxious to go out might practice walking to the end of their path, then to the end of the road, then further.

Though 'homework' is not exclusive to CBT, it is an aspect of the therapy that readily identifies the behavioural element in this approach and the level of active participation required by the client. Another important feature is the emphasis on the 'here and now' rather than on past history - whatever the underlying belief.

Diversity trends

There has been a recent spate of interesting facts and figures which may throw some light on the future of work-based diversity.

- An amendment to the Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations 2003 stating that lack of belief should also be protected has caught the attention of employment law experts.
- In Nuffield Proactive Health's survey 'Attitudes to obesity in the workplace', only 49% of managers surveyed said their companies employed significantly overweight employees, effectively discriminating against obese applicants.
- Some States in the US include alcohol and drug addiction within the equivalent of their Disability Discrimination legislation.
- The National Bullying Helpline has reported as many calls in the first four months of this year as occurred during the previous twelve months.
- Research carried out for last year's Ban Bullying at Work Day reports that 60% of respondents believe workplace bullying is increasing across the UK. One third believe it is increasing because their employer is not combating bullying behaviour effectively.

This increase in complaints about discrimination, harassment and bullying may be connected with other survey results which indicate that being treated with courtesy and consideration, particularly around work-life balance, is increasingly important to employees. It suggests that either this type of behaviour is becoming more prevalent, or that people are less likely to accept inappropriate

behaviour and are more willing to report it.

We will have to wait and see from Employment Tribunal judgements what the impact is of the changes to the Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations. However it is clear that there is a move towards extending Equal Opportunities legislation to include other minority groups that may be disadvantaged and a general increase in reported complaints about unacceptable behaviour. Who can say where this will end?

While potentially unpopular with employers, would including addiction in the Disability Discrimination Act and making it the responsibility of the employer to make reasonable adjustments, result in more support and treatment being available to employees with addictions?

The ICAS Diversity, Dignity and Inclusion Services (DDI) provide a behavioural approach to managing DDI. This is based on the premise that it is the difference in perception of whether a particular behaviour is acceptable or unacceptable which is the core reason for complaints, disciplinarys, grievances and conflict generally.

If you are interested in taking a more pro-active stance on managing behavioural difference in the workplace and wish to encourage a climate where employees at all levels treat each other with courtesy and consideration - regardless of any perceived difference - please call ICAS.

We can also help if you are in the middle of a conflict, and need a mediator, investigator or coach!



Maternity leave survey



Recent research undertaken by ICAS in partnership with Managing Maternity Ltd, makes it clear that many organisations simply do not know the size and scale of the maternity challenge.

However there are encouraging messages for employers: The factors which affect a woman's decision whether or not to return to work after having a baby can be greatly influenced by their employer, with issues such as implementation of flexible working and career development opportunities which allow work-life balance, being identified as important.

Respondents identified that there is scope for improvement as far as communication during maternity leave is concerned, and there is a particular need for enhanced guidance and support for managers.

For further information visit www.icasworld.com/surveys or to request a full copy of the report email managingmaternity@icasgroup.com

Dates for your diary



CIPD Annual Conference & Exhibition

International Conference Centre, Harrogate
18th – 20th September 2007
Visit ICAS on stand B96.

Seminars

Beyond Stress Management – ICAS Seminars

Developing resilient people for resilient organisations

Leading edge employers are embracing the concepts of resilience and positive psychology in their efforts to reduce work-related stress and increase productivity. To hear the latest thinking, together with practical suggestions on how developing resilience can be of benefit to both your employees and your organisation, make sure you book a place on one of our seminars.

- Manchester – 2nd October 2007
- Edinburgh – 12th November 2007

For further information visit www.icasworld.com/events or email adrury@icasgroup.com



National Campaigns

- Breast Cancer Awareness Month – October 2007
- Backcare Awareness Week – 15th to 21st October 2007
- National Stress Awareness Day – 7th November 2007

Performance Management survey

ICAS has 20 years of expertise in managing and reducing the costs associated with human behaviour in the workplace and improving employee performance has always been at the forefront of our work with our client organisations.

Performance management is the subject of ICAS' latest research project and we are inviting Human Resource Professionals across the UK to take part in a survey which will provide a unique and in-depth insight into good practice, and the costs of poor practice, in this area.

It will only take a few minutes to complete our survey. In return we will send you a copy of the results free of charge enabling you

to benchmark current practice, identify trends, and most importantly find out which policies work best.

To be part of this survey and to be eligible for a copy of the results free of charge visit www.icasextra.com/survey



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