

## **Happy New Year...Or Is It? A Message to Managers and Supervisors.**

Ring in the New Year often means ringing in fatigue, financial and emotional stress and, sadly for some, depression. If you don't think these feelings will migrate to the workplace...think again. Managers and supervisors take heed and be proactive. This is one of your best opportunities to engage with employees.

The first thing you need to do is be aware!

- The low productivity you may have experienced during the holidays will likely continue into the New Year.
- Recognize the signs of stress and depression.
- Know the resources available in your workplace – EAP program, access to services (counseling, massage, nutritionist, etc.) covered under your benefit program, wellness programs, etc.
- Understand that by January 24<sup>th</sup> the stress from winter weather, debt, holiday fall out, and low motivation culminates, making it what some people call “the most depressing day of the year”!

The second thing you need to do is plan for it!

- Engage with your employees.
- Book “touching base” meetings early in the New Year so you get a clear idea of where your employees are at and how they are feeling.
- Listen carefully, this is a good opportunity to gauge your employee's level of stress and offer support as required.
- Be flexible, and allow a reasonable period of time to clean up last year's lingering issues before you embark on new projects.
- Introduce initiatives but space them appropriately. Too many challenges at the outset and tasks become mountainous and far too overwhelming.
- Recognize that fatigue is a very real possibility for your employees, discourage overtime unless absolutely necessary.

Finally, start the year off right!

- Emphasize a healthy workplace and walk the talk.
- Encourage employees to take their lunch away from their desk!
- Advise employees to ask for help if they feel they need it.
- Recognize employee efforts. This is an opportune time to emphasize what is working well.
- Encourage physical activity. If you have a workplace wellness program, offer introductory programs that do not require involvement more than once or twice a week.

- Conduct workstation reviews with your employees. Do they have the tools they need, is the lighting right? Consider bringing in a professional (occupational therapist, physiotherapist, ergonomist or occupational health nurse) to conduct short workstation ergonomic reviews. Proper seating, and proper workstation set up will help reduce fatigue and encourage productivity as well as sending employees the message that they are valued.
- Bring in your EAP provider to conduct an introductory seminar. Many employees are not aware of the offerings available through their EAP programs. Additionally, take advantage of any healthy workplace seminars your providers offer.

The little things mean a lot in the world of stress and depression. As a manager or supervisor, being visible, available to your employees and understanding their concerns speaks volumes. Support is one of the hallmarks of a healthy workplace.

Common signs of employee distress:

- Acting out of character, are routinely irritable or down in the dumps a lot.
- Noticeably less laughter and smiling.
- Avoiding or struggling to participate in meetings.
- Presenting as uneasy and tired much of the time.
- Having difficulty concentrating.
- Missed deadlines or changes in attendance.
- Becoming defensive or sharp when someone asked if they need help with a task.
- Becoming easily frustrated with little things.
- Having more of a negative outlook in comparison to their usual behavior.
- Passive or negative in their approach to problem solving.

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