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Practice Points

Crisis Care Network's Monthly E-Newsletter

Special Edition

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Tuesday, January 12 feels like a lifetime ago for US Haitian employees.

Although accuracy is tenuous at best, many of them have now received word that loved ones perished in the earthquake. All are dealing with the reality of symbolic losses. Psychologically, their experience is shifting from shock and fear to grief and anger. Feelings of helplessness continue.

At this time, business leaders and crisis response professionals must be aware of several shifting dynamics and recommended strategies to be helpful:

- Grief feels lonely and it saps energy. It distracts focus from necessary work and life duties.
 - o Take the time to lead visibly, connect, and promote a sense of “community”.
 - o Provide employees with concrete, attainable tasks that provide focus and a sense of efficacy.
 - o Triage employees toward adaptive functioning while realizing that they may not be at their best.
 - o Be practical in your support. The tedious stressors of everyday life-tasks can seem overwhelming at this point.
- The sum of hurt, fear, sadness, and powerlessness is often anger. Increased irritability and blaming behavior are predictable reactions that often occur in disasters. Emotional responses are magnified and self-protective as people attempt to grasp some sense of control. Trust often diminishes. Add these factors together and conditions are ripe for hostility and blame. Following tragedy, the allegations of blame need not be accurate to be powerfully destructive to individuals, workgroups, and the company as a whole.
 - o Acknowledge and “give permission” for all of the feelings noted above. Predicting the “symptom” often reduces it.
 - o Align with people by acknowledging your own shared feelings. Doing so reduces the likelihood that you will become the target of that blame.
 - o Communicate caring.
 - o Be alert to risk of violence targeted at self and/or others.
- The dynamic of Survivor Guilt now assumes added complexity as their own comparative safety is joined by reports of safety for their own loved ones while others are grieving. Under those circumstances it is

common to feel relief; and then feel guilty about that relief.

- o Gently remind people that self-punishment offers no additional respect to the deceased. Pursuit of life-giving activities and support of others within the circle of impact lends honor to those lost.
- o How people attribute meaning to tragedy is instrumental in their resilience in recovery from it. Encourage contact with those with whom they can comfortably discuss the incident within their life-view, faith practice, or philosophy.

Crisis Care Network has responded with on-site crisis response services to over a hundred worksites. Many of those responses involved deployment of Haitian Creole behavioral health professionals or interpreters. Due to the taxing nature of leadership in tragedy's aftermath, our efforts are often focused upon "caring for those who care for those". Leaders are human too.

CCN will continue to offer communications, support, resources, and strategies to empower leadership at all levels. Thank you for honoring us as your proven, trusted partner.

Bob VandePol
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