

Mass layoffs cause stress to managers, too

One human resource manager cannot sleep through the night without waking up in cold sweats while dreaming about the layoffs expected tomorrow.

Another supervisor has been working for days without taking a lunch break.

A CFO says that exercise and eating right is helping him deal with the stress of the financial burdens that the company is facing.

The C-Suite and other supervisors and managers are not immune to the current stresses that the economy is causing. They are the bearers of bad news; the ones who control the hiring and firing process; the people who award those precious bonuses and salary increases.

American employers slashed about six million jobs since the slump began in December 2007, and the bottom doesn't seem to have hit yet. When the numbers come out each month, the focus is on the newly unemployed and certainly not on the stress of those delivering the bad news.

The sometimes forgotten group of supervisors, managers and human resource professionals must notify employees who are being let go. These professionals may take part in the planning of the downsizing for weeks and sometimes months prior or they may have a list of impacted employees given to them without their input and without time to prepare for the event.

Workers involved in the termination of employees through a layoff should be aware of the emotional toll of such duties and a plan to handle the stress



MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH

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involved. Although it is "part of the job," there are many emotions involved in telling individuals that their jobs no longer exist. Managers and supervisors must be as prepared as possible for any outcome or reaction that may occur during the layoff process. A few tips to help manage the stress of a potential layoff include:

Prepare for the announcement. Stay as mentally and physically healthy as possible to combat the increased stress that the days ahead will cause. Add physical activity throughout your day. You don't need a gym membership to be physically active. Park as far away from your destination as possible, take the stairs and walk the perimeter of the parking lot at some point during the day. Burn off the stress.

Educate and Train. Managers and supervisors need to be trained in the area of layoffs. Make sure you understand the process and any benefits you can offer in terms of severance and assistance.

If you have taken a class in the past, review the information and prepare yourself for any questions, concerns and benefit offerings that you may be asked about. Also, educate yourself

about the new COBRA guidelines and present information that might help the laid off worker in transition.

Professionalism, professionalism, professionalism. Take pride in your level of professionalism. This will be an extremely tough time for your organization. Take note, but do not let emotions control the discussions.

Practice deep breathing if you get nervous. Reactions from workers include shock, denial, sadness and often anger. Have security prepared in case you feel threatened at any time.

Talk it out. Sharing your feelings, both professionally and personally, can help reduce the stress. However, converse only with those managers in the organization who are privy to such information. Never discuss confidential business outside of the management team. Holding debriefing sessions for managers during a reduction in force can also foster healthy communication, where managers are able to discuss their experiences.

In many cases, employees understand that managers and supervisors are also facing new stressors every day from the effects of a weak bottom line to increasing numbers of layoffs needed for the business to perform. As many of our clients have told us, "It's not like we are being treated as the enemy, but times are tough and we hope to be hiring again soon."

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