



Dealing with the Loss of a Coworker

When a colleague dies, it can often affect us in ways that we may not expect. We spend a tremendous amount of time with our co-workers, and often become friends. We are part of the same daily world, yet, we may not be close friends. We may feel the loss daily as thoughts return to past or present projects that were shared.

It can be confusing and sometimes frightening for co-workers to experience the depth of these feelings. People often try to talk themselves and others out of them. It is realistic and appropriate that co-workers are affected. The death may also take on a symbolic meaning to us, reminding us how vulnerable we are and how unpredictable life and death can be.

Different Ways of Reacting and Coping

It is not unusual for individuals to react to grief in various ways. Some may mourn publicly, others privately. Some may react immediately, and for others, grief “sneaks up” on them through delayed and unexpected feelings that can be difficult to deal with. There is no right or wrong way to go through this process.

Several factors may affect the way we respond to crises in general, and death, in particular. Past experiences have a major influence. Our philosophical view of the world, including our religious beliefs and customs, also shape our reaction. Our health determines how much energy, both physical and emotional, we can invest in dealing with the loss. Lastly, our network of social supports affects our healing process.

A Few Suggestions for Healing

If you are personally grieving, it is important for you to try and acknowledge your feelings and seek some support. This can be a long and difficult process, which requires a lot of patience and self-care. Here are some suggestions for how to cope and how to heal:

- Make a connection between the event and your response.
- Find a safe environment for emotional sharing. Support from others is an enormous part of the healing process.
- Allow memories of related past events to surface, even if they are painful. Now may be your opportunity to work through them. Again, find a safe place to share these memories.
- Take care of yourself. Grief can be physically demanding. Make sure you get enough rest, eat nutritiously, and if you can, do some moderate exercise.

We are here to help.

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