

# PEOPLE POINTS

October, 2001

## HANDLING DISASTER Getting back to business

***Disbelief, shock, sadness, difficulty sleeping, feeling powerless, these are all common responses to disasters.***

Sometimes they materialize immediately, sometimes later on. For businesses, when employees experience these feelings the result can be seen in lowered productivity, tension levels among workers raised, customer dissatisfaction and sometimes co-worker harassment. The ultimate result for a business can be loss of customers and possible disruption of ability to operate successfully. For managers and business owners getting the job done and taking care of employees can be a very challenging task. Here are few tips for businesses faced with these challenges.

- **Expect people to experience shock.** Allow for more frequent breaks and expect the increased use of sick leave.
- **Remember employees are looking to you (the manager or business owner) for reassurance.** Communicate frequently and openly and encourage employees to talk with you. Open lines of communication with regular meetings; publish a special newsletter with general information along with what the business and your customers are doing to respond to concerns. Use the company bulletin board, web site and regular email as a means to keep people up to date on business and current events.
- **Get back to the work routine quickly;** it keeps employees' minds on the work rather than



the disaster. Consider revising company goals to adjust to the changed business environment.

- **Encourage employees to seek professional help.** If your company has access to a counselor or an EAP (Employee Assistance Plan) promote the services.
- **Educate all supervisors and managers to be observant about stress.** Now is the time for them to be visible. Train individuals in good coaching techniques in order to be able to act as a confidant and trusted friend. MBWA – Manage By Walking Around; now is not the time to close doors and be unapproachable!

### Tips:

- Practice External Listening
- Respect the differences in people
- Understand that people react differently
- Take care of yourself, your family, & your employees
- Seek help, if needed



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• **Do not tolerate harassment.**

Employees of certain ethnic and religious groups may fear some form of animosity or retaliation. Remind employees and customers of your non-harassment policy and your intolerance of such activity.

• **Organize an employee community action activity.** Hold a blood drive, collect clothes or food, or solicit money for relief efforts. Show your employees the company is committed to helping out in these difficult times.

• **Be willing to reconsider travel schedules if employees are reluctant to travel.** Use teleconferencing, e-mail, or your web site if possible to alleviate temporary fears.

• **Promote teamwork and cooperation.** Encourage a strong and cohesive work environment by stressing company values and respect for one another. Avoid favoritism and negative or pessimistic comments.

• **Take time to listen & allow people to share their feelings.** Look for good news, heroic moments, sharing, helping deeds to lift spirits; identify local 'hometown' heroes and seek to celebrate the special moments no matter how small they may be. Work to restore spirit.

• **Plan for future emergencies.** Develop a communication plan for all employees. Be certain security policies are up to date; double check record retention and storage facilities so duplicate records exist. Make sure vital assets, secrets, software are protected. Have a medical response plan ready if needed. Identify secondary suppliers should they be needed. Consider decentralizing operations.

• **Take time to relieve your own pressure.** Too often business owners and managers care so much for others they neglect themselves. Exercise, eat properly, sleep and get away once in a while. Don't be afraid to get counseling.

There are many more items to be considered, these are just a few but **by working to understand and help employees during challenging times businesses can get back to business.**

**Would you like to share an idea or obtain additional information about our services?**

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