

Supporting Employees Affected by a Job Action Disruption: Recommendations for Managers

In light of the recent job action disruption (or strike) affecting your workplace, you may observe varying reactions of your employees. This will depend on the scale of the incident, degree to which an employee was personally impacted, and whether they were a striking or non-striking employee.

The restoration of a positive workplace environment is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Affected workplaces will need to review important factors such as addressing the backlog of work, any changes in the business process and productivity, client and stakeholder reactions, the impact of possible fractured working relationships that may have emerged or deteriorated during the strike. Employees most impacted may exhibit a range of possible reactions; everything from feeling unsettled, appearing distressed, shaken, anxious and angry. In the extreme, some employees may exhibit unusual physical responses as they may be physically and or emotionally exhausted. Employee reactions may also depend on their current life stressors, triggers or how they associate this current event with previous stressful or even traumatic occurrences. In addition, returning to work following a strike action is a process in which pre-event levels of individual wellbeing may take several days or even weeks to resume.

Typical Stress Reactions

Even during a strike and after, employees are generally resilient and some individuals may not exhibit any significant negative effects. However, some of your employees may exhibit clear reactions and may need support to facilitate their recovery. It is

not uncommon for some people experiencing stress to minimize or avoid expressing their concerns and reactions.

Some observable signs of stress reactions may include: expressions of sadness; anxiety; guilt; resentment; anger; irritation and agitation; and unusually high expectations directed at managers to answer questions. You may find that some employees are experiencing diminished energy; are engaged in frequent conversations about “them and us”; have difficulty concentrating, making decisions and attending to tasks; or may becoming easily distracted. There may also be increased absenteeism and an uncharacteristic decline in work performance.

What can you do?

Reactions to a workplace disruption and any ruptured relationships that may have resulted from the job actions, may create a sense of loss of control and influence over such events. Therefore, a primary consideration for managers is to provide a supportive environment in which control, confidence, competence and a sense of mastery can be regained.

It is helpful to do the following:

- **Identify any employees who are at greater risk** — those who may be more vulnerable as a result of their direct exposure to conflict or their physical and emotional exhaustion.
- **Ensure there is a proactive and ongoing plan** to reach out to impacted employees by yourself or designated leaders.
- **Acknowledge employee concerns** in a respectful and non-intrusive manner.



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- **Acknowledge some of your own concerns** and reactions to the events.
- **Recognize and acknowledge, in a non-judgmental way,** that employees may have different emotions, attitudes and opinions related to this situation.
- **Remind employees** that they each have their own unique and resourceful ways of coping.
- **Urge employees to reach out to colleagues,** family, friends and people they feel close to.
- **Inform staff experiencing anxiety that these feelings may vary from day to day** and may be different than what others are feeling.
- **Assist and support employees as they resume their work activities** and be mindful that some employees may require a modified work schedule for a certain period of time.
- **Demonstrate a balanced approach** between employee needs and work place productivity.
- **Supportively and directly address any concerns** about an employee's ability to resume their work tasks.
- **Address proactively and directly if an employee's behaviour** in any way impacts workplace or public safety.
- **Provide information regarding dedicated resources** to support the coping and recovery needs of employees.

Important considerations for managers

As a manager, you play a significant role in facilitating a quicker recovery for impacted employees. The active support of leadership in an organization has been shown to make a big difference in employees' recovery rates.

- Communicate frequently and convey information through daily communications. This should ideally occur at the same time each day and contain practical and accurate information for employees.
- Provide employees with clear information regarding how to access internal and external helpful resources, including their Employee and Family Assistance Program.
- Take good care of yourself and seek consultation and/or support, if needed. Reaching out and supporting employees at a time when you may also be affected by these events can be stressful.
- Be visible and manage employee anxiety and fear by routinely checking in with employees, offering support as much as possible.
- Do not hesitate to consult the Homewood Health Crisis Management Team, if you require any consultation or support in assisting your employees, work teams or yourselves.

For more information, to book a counselling session, or to access any of your EFAP services our Client Services Representatives are ready to speak with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

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