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a MESSAGE from SYLVIA

BALANCING EMPLOYEE GRIEF WITH WORK

There are many different factors that influence job productivity, but, in my experience, one of the biggest is personal loss and grief. Divorce, illness, abuse, and death affect work. So do financial instability, body image changes, and parental decline. If you're supervising staff, you can be sure that most are dealing with some type of loss. Whether or not you know about it, loss is the elephant in the "living room". How you acknowledge and manage it matters.

Sylvia with her niece, Sarah, at Hotel Hershey



In the early 90's my father suffered a hemorrhagic stroke one evening while watching the news on TV. At the time I was employed by a nonprofit health related organization in a small Pennsylvania city. Part of my job duties included public speaking, and seconds after I arrived home from one of my talks the telephone started to ring. For two hours my step mother had been trying to reach me to say that my dad was lying in the emergency room in serious condition. Tired from a long and demanding day, I got back in the car and raced to the local hospital. It was about 9:00 PM. When I got there, I was taken to one of the curtained exam rooms where I found my unconscious father in the middle of a massive seizure. It wasn't a pretty sight.

All these years later I have vivid memories of the events on that horrific night. But I have another memory. A comforting memory. A memory that I treasure still.

At some point I had called my boss to tell her what was happening. I told her that, under the circumstances, I would not be at work the next day. While my supervisor simply could have received this information, she chose to do more. She chose to interrupt her own evening to join me at the hospital. She chose to demonstrate her support in person. I've never forgotten that act of kindness. No question about it: she modeled an appropriate initial response to my loss. That response made all the difference.

My dad eventually recovered from his catastrophic crisis. However, during the weeks following his stroke I needed to be available to visit him, take him to doctor appointments, and attend to practical tasks. My boss gave me the freedom to come and go as the situation required. Together she and I discussed how essential work would get done. We also decided which of my activities could wait. These conversations offered me great relief. We'd plotted a plan. I didn't worry about losing my job. I was positioned to focus on Dad while meeting certain professional obligations. What a gift!

Of course this was a best case scenario. Bosses don't always cope with employee loss this way. I was fortunate beyond words. And grateful. As a supervisor, you may not understand how to approach this common reality. I want to change that for you. My feature article below provides a viable road map. Feel free to follow it.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

Balancing Loss and Grief With Work: What Bosses Can Do

Grieving any kind of significant loss is a bumpy ride. Believe me, there isn't a one-size-fits-all strategy or path. Each individual must do it "their way". Though grief is a normal response to loss, it's arduous, inconvenient, and terribly upsetting. People who grieve need time and support. Your staff who grieve need the same. Working while trying to put one's life back together is a major life challenge. You need to recognize that.

As a supervisor, you can either add to the turmoil or manage it. It's up to you. Take a look at the road map below. Implement it as you are able within your environment.

- Empathize.

When you are aware of someone's loss, acknowledge it directly. Talk to the person and/or send a card or personal message. Show that you care about what has happened through your words and actions. Don't pretend you don't know about the loss.

- Share observations.

Schedule a time to speak privately with the grieving employee to share your observations about her recent behaviors and work performance. You can open the door by saying something like: "I've noticed that you seem very distracted since your spouse left. I imagine it's difficult to concentrate during team meetings these days." Then let the staffer continue the conversation.

- Ask questions.

One of the best things you can do is to ask the person how you can help. Use questions such as: "What is it that you need right now from me? What do you need from your colleagues? What 3 tasks do you most want to accomplish over the course of the week? How can you succeed?"

- Offer time flexibility.

Rigidity doesn't serve grieving people. In fact, rigidity exacerbates grief and impedes healing. When someone suffers a loss, try to accommodate the need for time flexibility. Depending on the work environment and professional duties, you may want to consider offering some time off, a brief leave of absence, flex hours, telecommuting, reduced hours, job share, frequent breaks, longer lunches.

- Renegotiate expectations.

Originally, you may have given the grieving person a project deadline of next Friday. Under the current circumstances, that deadline may not be feasible.

If possible, engage the employee in a conversation that leads to adjusting the due date to one that works for both the organization and the individual.

- Make referrals.

If you see that the grieving staffer is experiencing great difficulty coping with his loss, don't be shy about referring him to your company's Employee Assistance Program, a bereavement support group, counselor, or clergy. Making such a referral is not an invasion of privacy. Remember: a whole employee is a healthy employee. Healthy employees are more productive both short and long term.

- Check in regularly.

Consistent weekly touch base phone calls or brief meetings provide structure and support for grieving persons. There are two specific benefits to these check-ins: a) You have the opportunity to follow up on work progress and b) once again you get to express concern for the human being doing the work. It's a win-win.

Supervisors who learn to balance the emotional needs of their grieving employees with the job that must be done are going to gain staff loyalty and achieve optimal results. It's an art.

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What Clients Say

FEEDBACK on Last Winter's Group Coaching Program: "From Loss to Light: A Blueprint for Rebuilding A Life That Works" **Coming again in February 2014...**

I received so many benefits as a result of participating in this special group program. First, let me say that it is a totally unique program—to my knowledge there is nothing else out there like it. Second, I learned that loss and grief are temporary experiences and not permanent. This was a huge discovery for me! Third, the program content gave me hope, which I seriously needed. Finally, listening to the other participants' insights, strength, and positive attitude was invaluable to me.

▪ Beth Swanson (April 2013)

This program allowed me to identify my different kinds of losses and prepared

me to develop strategies for dealing with them. It also helped me to really understand that loss and grief is a process consisting of multiple steps. Taking advantage of this opportunity was life changing for me.

- Liz Doherty (April 2013)

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Offers and Opportunities

“From Loss to Light: A Blueprint for Rebuilding A Life That Works”

On January 28, 2014 at 12:00 PM EST Sylvia will conduct a FREE one hour promo teleseminar that discusses content and logistics for her 12 week Winter Group Coaching Program entitled: “From Loss to Light: A Blueprint for Rebuilding a Life That Works”. The truth is that life is marked by both life changing and subtle losses. But many people stay stuck in the accompanying grief. If YOU, personally, are stuck, this audio event is ideal for you. Why carry such an energy draining burden throughout a brand new year? Do something about it. [Register here.](#)

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RESOURCES

Check out two of Sylvia’s handpicked resources if you—or someone you know—is dealing with any type of loss:

Recovering from Losses in Life, a beautiful, practical book by trauma expert H. Norman Wright, (2006 edition) discusses the meaning of grief, provides strategies for coping and moving beyond grief, and challenges readers to examine personal identify after experiencing loss. The final chapter focuses on how to help others through their own losses and grief. Available on Amazon.com for only \$12.00.

Aurora Winter’s 2013 life changing gem entitled *Grief Relief in 30 Minutes* teaches how to release grief quickly and easily. Having committed her life to serving people who are stuck in grief, the author focuses most of this book on her personal 5 step process for healing. Available on Amazon.com for

\$22.00.

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TIP

Because loss is a fact of life, you as a supervisor would be wise to confront it in the workplace. Provide employees with information about the grief process and bereavement. Offer formal trainings or lunch ‘n learns on the subject.

Distribute a list of both internal and external resources. Initiate general discussions about different types of losses during team meetings. Encourage people to tell you when they experience their own losses. Let them know that you don’t expect them to share all of the intimate details, but that you can support them best if you are aware of the situation.

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Where in the World is SYLVIA?

Join Us on a Telesummit

Over the course of two weeks, beginning January 21, 2014, Sylvia (and 18 other highly-sought-after guest speakers and career experts), are revealing their best strategies and tactics for career success in a 100% FREE Virtual Telesummit.

Join Sylvia for the “2014 Catapult Your Career Success Summit” which promises to give managers, executives, and other leaders exactly what you need to make a bigger impact, accomplish more in less time, and ultimately achieve greater success and recognition.

Kicking off the Telesummit event, Sylvia will be featured on January 21.

Register now: <http://resultscatalyst.ca/catapult.html>

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About This Ezine

The purpose of this Ezine is to: 1) Provide readers with valuable FREE content which contributes to personal and professional growth as well as overall career development; and 2) Invite readers to take next steps toward working directly with Sylvia.

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About SYLVIA

Sylvia Hepler, Owner and President of Launching Lives, LLC, specializes in career development for both corporate and nonprofit executives and managers. Based in South Central PA, she specifically supports clients as they upgrade their current job performance, seek a promotion, or plan/navigate a career transition. What makes her services unique is that Sylvia helps people to cope with change, loss, and grief as they work on developing their careers. Her professional background includes: nonprofit executive management/leadership, nonprofit community health program start-up, program evaluation, public speaking, business and freelance writing, teaching, and retail sales.

A certified executive coach through The Rescue Institute in Golden, Colorado and Quantum Endeavors in Chicago, Illinois (plus a participant in extensive continuing education opportunities with several coaches of national notoriety), Sylvia offers individual and group coaching, assessments, teleseminars, workshops, keynote speeches, and retreats. She also has created tangible and downloadable products that augment her coaching and speaking services.

For more information and to connect with Sylvia try:

[Launching Lives Website](#)

[Click to contact Sylvia by Email](#)

Reach Sylvia by phone at **717-761-5457**

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Launching Lives SERVICES

Launching Lives, LLC is a full service career development company for managers and executives located in South Central PA. Utilizing a holistic approach to service provision, Launching Lives focuses on supporting clients as they create the platinum level career they desire by upgrading their job performance, seeking a promotion, or planning/navigating a career transition

Often people don't really know HOW they might benefit from coaching. Quite simply, ask yourself these questions: "What can't I seem to resolve on my own? What is keeping me awake at night? What am I missing when I look at a certain situation? How can I get to the next professional level? How can I learn certain skills quickly? How can I narrow my professional gaps? How can I motivate my staff? How can I communicate more effectively so I serve myself and others better? How can I reduce my work-related frustration? How can I develop a viable plan of action for myself and/or my organization? How can I obtain greater job satisfaction? Coaching may be the SOLUTION to any of these issues.

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