

Grief in the Workplace - The First Anniversary  
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Just like nothing prepares you for the death of a loved one, there is no preparation for the first anniversary of a death. The anticipation of the date can make you just as emotional as the death itself. For all of the positive steps forward you have taken over the year, the anniversary can set you back again. While you do not start your grief all over, it is a temporary setback and the strength you have gained over the year will hold you together.

The events of 9-11 created a new meaning of the first anniversary of the loss of a loved one. In this case, it is an entire nation mourning the loss of freedom, life and prosperity. While there were some who were not affected by a death, they mourn other losses, and the events leading up to the anniversary will conjure up emotions that may have been stored.

During this time the workplace can either be a blessing or a curse. It will depend on what type of individual you are. Some like to be surrounded by others and busy with many tasks to let the day fly by. Others like to be alone, savoring the memories of the loved one they lost, mourning the loss and reflecting on how life has changed. There is nothing wrong with either approach, nor is there a right approach. What works for you is what is right. Here is some advice for both types of people.

If you are the type of person who likes to be surrounded by others, I would suggest using the workplace to your advantage. Schedule meetings, a luncheon and a social outing after work. When scheduling the meetings, be sure not to overwhelm yourself. The object is to keep yourself busy and challenged but not overwhelmed. That could lead to stress and additional emotion, and realistically it will be an emotional day regardless of how you have handled the year. Give yourself the slack to be emotional if needed. Try not to make any critical decisions as they may be swayed by hidden emotions.

If you are the type who prefers to spend time alone, take the time for yourself. You deserve it! If you don't have vacation time, ask your management if you can make up the time or ask a co-worker to cover for you. By sharing your situation you will have more support during this rough period. This would be a perfect time to go on a hike, watch a movie in a theater by yourself, workout, curl-up and read a book, call a long-lost friend, volunteer to help less fortunate people or just stare out a window. This is a personal time for you; do what works best. You deserve the time alone!

The hype of the media surrounding the anniversary of 9-11 can possibly create additional hardship on the griever. People in the workplace will reminisce about where they were a year before, what they were doing and how they reacted. Talking about the event and the loss will help with the grief process. As a manager, I would recommend providing your employees sometime to reflect. Not only will it help with their personal grief, it will also allow them to support both the nation and those directly affected by the tragedy.

My personal reflections over the year, and at the conferences where I have presented, have taught me a valuable lesson I would like to share. Deaths in your personal life other than those connected with 9-11 are just as tragic as those that we have watched on television and read about in the newspapers. Be sure not to diminish your grief or your loved ones' grief because of the events related to 9-11. You are just as important as the families in the news. The deaths may differ and the emotions of anger and disbelief may be more present, but your loss is just as important.

Let me close by saying the anticipation of the anniversary is far worse than the anniversary itself. After ten years of widowhood, I still fall apart in April, as it is associated with the death of my husband. Once the anniversary goes by, I pick myself up and continue as I did in the previous month. It is a lesson that takes years to master!

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