

Layoff Survivors Syndrome

Contributor: Jeffrey L. Hansen of Expense Reduction Analysts here in Jackson
Printed: July 2009 Chamber Business News



You know the place; you drive by it every day; the one with the nearly empty parking lot. Maybe you park in it yourself. You feel sad and concerned for the people who used to park there, but what about the ones that are left? How is their emotional and psychological well being affected by the sudden absence of their colleagues? What impact does it have on your company's productivity?

According to Donna McCarrell, a Licensed Local Professional Counselor, the loss of co-workers from a lay-off triggers the same emotional responses as a terrorist attack, war, or death of a loved one - a condition known as Layoff Survivors Syndrome. According to McCarrell, "The remaining workers can experience anxiety, frustration and anger. Once the relief of dodging the pink slip wears off, other feelings set in. The apparent randomness of the event creates uncertainty about one's own future and breeds anxiety." The employees left standing are asked to assume the duties of the departed with some taking on the workload formerly carried by two or three workers. Frustration over the prospect of a now impossibly heavy workload can give way to anger at the company for this unreasonable expectation and a sense that their contributions and sacrifices are not appreciated. Left unaddressed these feelings can drain effectiveness.

Some may argue that these are hazy emotional issues not concrete problems. But the effects are real enough. Studies have shown that Layoff Survivors Syndrome produces at least two negative effects:

- Reduced productivity lasting a year or more and
- Increased turnover

Just when your business needs renewed energy, fresh creativity and prudent risk taking, many are distracted with worry, and reluctant to suggest something new for fear of becoming the next lay-off target. Others may look for opportunities elsewhere. Those most likely to find other employment are your most experience and qualified performers, creating a brain drain.

While these effects are serious, they are not inevitable. There are practical steps you can take to help employees overcome these emotions and return to full productivity. To find out how, keep reading. Go to Empowering Survivors....