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Human Resource's Role in Crisis Events – FEI Behavioral Health

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by SHRM-Atlanta
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The ultimate impact of a crisis, in costs to a company and its people, is determined by how that crisis was addressed before, during and after an actual event. Unfortunately, the stressful and chaotic environment of a disaster can cause organizations to overlook the deep impact a crisis can have on the psychological health of its victims. Fortunately, organizations already have a resource on hand that is equipped to manage their human capital; the human resources department. Because they are responsible for ensuring the well-being of the employee population, it is particularly important that human resource professionals are properly trained to assist employees before, during, and after a crisis in the workplace.

Before a Crisis

Organizational leaders should take the following steps to ensure their human resource department is equipped to assist employees before an event takes place:

- **Develop an Accounting for People plan.** Accounting for People involves identifying what individuals have been impacted by an incident and documenting their current status. The scope of people that can be affected in an event includes all staff, guests, vendors, contractors, visitors, and any other person that may be on site in the event of the incident. The status update should specify whether they are injured, hospitalized, unaffected, etc.
- **Conduct a talent assessment of employees.** The talent assessment should consist of a set of questions surveyed to employees asking what special skills they possess that can be utilized in the event of a crisis. These skills could include whether employees have first aid training, a background in law enforcement, psychological training, trauma experience, etc.
- **Prepare a list of support resources.** These support resources should include detailed instructions for contacting the organization's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider. In addition, human resources should contact their EAP for a list of mental health counselors in the area in the event that they may be needed on-site.

During a Crisis

Once a crisis strikes, a top priority of the human resources department should be

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accounting for employees and maintaining contact with them.

- **Ensure continuous lines of communication.** Human resources should be involved in setting up crisis hotline numbers for employees that communicate important information and allow employees to report their status. These hotline numbers should be established within the company's Accounting for People plan.
- **Field requests and inquiries from family, friends and media.** The human resources department should be involved in establishing a credible, controlled source outside of the organization by which to notify families and keep them up-to-date. Human resources should include family information hotline numbers in employee handbooks so that employees can share them with their families ahead of time.
- **Decipher appropriate staffing.** The human resources team should be responsible for staffing employees for immediate needs that may arise, and scheduling for future staffing needs. In the event that the building infrastructure is damaged, the human resource department should determine what employees can handle operations remotely and work with the IT department to ensure that operations can continue.

After a Crisis

Providing psychological support as a crisis unfolds is essential to help employees continue to function in the midst of crisis. Human resources' main concern in the aftermath of a crisis should be to provide psychological first aid to employees.

- **Offer resources.** Human resources should start by distributing written materials to employees that contain information about trauma and 24/7 contact information for EAP counseling services.
- **Arrange for Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD).** CISD helps employees recover from traumatic events by participating in a structured group that is facilitated by an experienced, EAP professional.
- **Decipher Fitness for Duty of employees.** A Fitness for Duty evaluation provides a medical/psychiatric determination as to whether an individual can perform the essential functions of his or her position, without a direct threat to the safety of the employee or others in the workplace.
- **Conduct group debriefings.** Human resources should be involved in providing debriefings for all personnel on-site or other involved locations. Personnel should be provided with the opportunity to express any feelings they may have about the process and how well the organization did to cater to their needs.

For more information on HR's role in crisis events occurring in the workplace, visit FEI Behavioral Health at booth #205 at 24th Annual SHRM-Atlanta HR Conference!

As **FEI Behavioral Health's Senior Director TerriHoward** is responsible for working with corporate clients to ensure companies are prepared for, can respond to and recover from a crisis incident. Terri is also responsible for coordinating the people support and psychological first aid services for those impacted by a crisis incident. She is experienced in developing drills and exercises aimed at testing current crisis management plans and procedures. Over the years she has contributed to several



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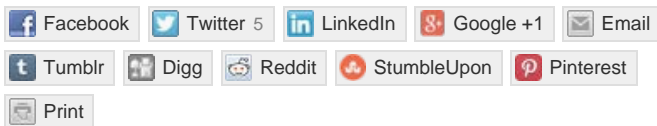
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international standards and guidelines on crisis management and workplace violence prevention, including ASIS and the FBI. She has also spoken at numerous conferences and conducted webinars on various topics.

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