

YOUR GRIEF IS NOT WELCOME HERE

Workplaces must become grief inclusive.
The future of work depends on it.

ARE YOUR GRIEVING EMPLOYEES DISENGAGED?

As managers and leaders, you're not taught to address grief.

Why would you expect to know what to say or do - without good guidance? Recently, businesses have become acutely aware of grief in the workplace, yet still don't know what to do next. Grief has catapulted into our conversations, our news, our politics, and our enterprise.

Causes of our current collective and personal grief include:

- Unemployment and workplace changes
- Loss of normalcy and predictability
- Social isolation
- Racial injustice
- The end of a relationship
- Dreams we don't achieve
- A diagnosis we receive
- The death of a loved one

It's time to bring grief out of the organizational shadows.

Grief is disrupting business at every level - impacting engagement and productivity. It's real. It's now.

At Grief Warrior, we envision corporate cultures that support the worst of times as fully as the best of times. We simply must care for our employees throughout the whole human experience, which includes grief, loss, and hardship. This is what it truly means to be a compassionate organization. This is the radically inclusive future of work.

“YOU ARE THE
COURAGEOUS
LEADER THAT
ADDRESSES
GRIEF IN THE
WORKPLACE.”

Leslie Barber,
Founder, Grief Warrior

Grief is the biggest problem every manager may not know they have.

The Grief Warrior research team has pulled together this white paper to show what a real problem this is for organizations.

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PROFIT AND LOSS

Grief is the biggest problem every manager doesn't know they have. It's striking, but prior to 2020, corporations were losing over \$100B annually in grief-related losses. Much due to a lack of understanding about grief. This data was focused on grief from death. But there are many other reasons we grieve. It is a silent epidemic in the workplace, causing decreased productivity and billions in financial losses. Grief makes a significant impact on the grieving human. The physical impact of grief on the human brain and body must not be discounted. The majority of grieving managers report that their ability to make decisions significantly declined following the grief event. Others estimate that their value to the company significantly diminished for months. Grief is involuntary and very real. The urgency to address it is here.

**Management Decisions
rated "Very Poor to Fair"**

85%

in the weeks or months after a grief triggered incident¹

1 <https://www.docu vital.com/2017/01/05/the-hidden-costs-of-grief-in-the-workplace/>

“

‘The grief that people have difficulty naming is the sense of loss that we have for all that we thought we were secure in -- like the loss of the illusion that we’re in control of our lives,’ said Sonya Lott, a Philadelphia-based psychologist with advanced training in treating complicated grief.

Marnie Hunter, That uncomfortable coronavirus feeling: It could be grief. CNN, 2020¹

1 <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/15/health/grief-loss-coronavirus-pandemic-wellness/index.html>



Organization Action:

Assess the impact of grief on your organization today to address the potential losses currently happening. Immediately train HR on recognizing and respecting grief.

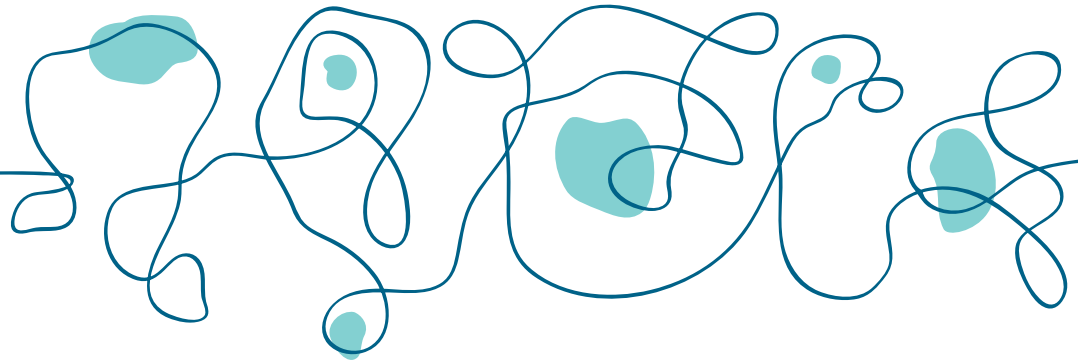
Manager Action:

Seek out the right words. There ARE words you can use with a grieving person to bring validation. Bring grief out of the shadows by addressing it with your employees.

THE FLUIDITY OF GRIEF

Grief is messy, unexpected, unrelenting, and anything but linear. There are no stages that could properly address all of the emotions and experiences of grief. It's chaos. Think tsunami.

The corporate challenge is that workplaces don't typically like chaos or unpredictability. Grief is one area where the organization will need to flex with the employee, not vice versa. And recognize that sometimes the most incredible innovation and creativity comes from the greatest moments of mess and vulnerability.



Number of grief stages

0

We want grief to be linear, but it is not.



Organization Action:

Resist the seduction of a framework to explain grief. Allow for, even model, messy within your culture.

Manager Action:

Be flexible with your grieving employees. Not just for a week, but for months and years. Model “emotional wellness” days so that your team follows.

CULTURE OF CONVENIENCE

We don't like discomfort. If something is too inconvenient or too uncomfortable, many of us look away.

Sometimes we think that we're honoring the griever when we don't look them in the eye, when we ignore the grief or don't mention it. We think we are being respectful by giving the grieving a lot of space. Or we don't bring up what has happened, because we don't want to "make them sad." That doesn't work. When their grief is ignored, they notice and the silence is deafening.

We must acknowledge grief, whether it is personal or collective, such as the grief we are feeling from the pandemic and from racial injustice. We must name it, even if it is awkward and uncomfortable. Most grieving people want to share about their grief, but no one asks. It's the acknowledgment that truly honors grief, not the ignoring.

Every other person is grieving

57%

% of Americans who reported (pre-pandemic) they are grieving the death of a loved one¹

¹ <https://eterneva.com/resources/coping-with-loss#:~:text=A%20recent%20study%2C%20done%20before,grief%20never%20really%20goes%20away.>

“

I couldn't understand when friends didn't ask me how I was. I felt invisible, as if I were standing in front of them but they couldn't see me... Even people who have endured the worst suffering often want to talk about it... Until we acknowledge it, the elephant is always there. By ignoring it, those who are grieving isolate themselves and those who could offer comfort create distance instead.

Sheryl Sandberg, Option B

Organization Action:

Invest in grief and compassion trainings to give employees and managers language and practical tools to compassionately address grief and uncomfortable emotions.

Manager Action:

Honor your grieving employees by witnessing their grief. Acknowledge, acknowledge, acknowledge.

Notice we didn't say
problem solve, fix, or ignore

BRING IT ALL IN

Engaged employees are crucial to business success. We want them to bring their whole selves to work, so that they will maximize engagement, vulnerability, and creativity. But without the skills to address grief, this is implicitly asking them to only bring their joyful parts, and thus, leaving a huge part of themselves at home.

Given the tens of millions of people who are impacted by grief each year and the lack of managerial training on navigating difficult conversations, this is not a realistic expectation of your employees. If they don't feel safe to do so, your employees will not bring their whole selves to work no matter how many times you tell them. Your culture must address the not-so-fun along with the fun.

Sharing is daring.

**High
Achieving
Teams¹**

55%

Share at work

45%

Leave it at the door

**Low
Achieving
Teams**

17%

Share at work

83%

Leave it at the door

¹ Among high achieving teams, 55 percent have a culture of sharing who they are and what's going on outside of work. On low achieving teams, only 17 percent do. <https://www.atlassian.com/blog/teamwork/why-we-dont-bring-our-whole-selves-to-work>

The background of the slide features two large, stylized fingerprint patterns in a light gray color, one on the left and one on the right, framing the central text.

“

The best managers make a concerted effort to get to know their employees and help them feel comfortable talking about any subject, whether it is work-related or not.

James Harter and **Amy Adkins**.

What Great Managers Do to Engage Employees.

Harvard Business Review, 2015¹

1 <https://hbr.org/2015/04/what-great-managers-do-to-engage-employees>



Organization Action:

Train managers on the recognition and listening skills required to implement a “bring your whole selves to work” culture. Model radical compassion throughout the organization.

Manager Action:

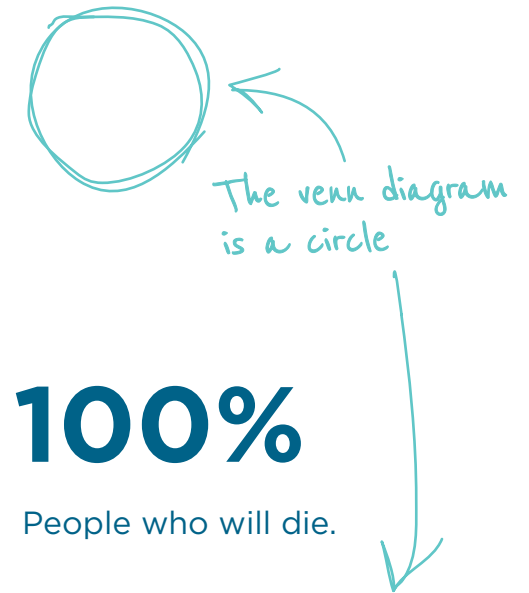
Take the time to get to know your employees’ whole selves and to support their emotional wellness. Build real connections with them that transcend their work.



YOU CAN'T DENY THIS

Western cultures deny death, while simultaneously obsessing over it in our language. I'm bored to *death*. He's *drop-dead* gorgeous! That pie is to *die* for. You *killed* that Zoom presentation! Notice, none of these phrases have anything to do with death. There is a general consensus that if we get too close to death, or grief, it may become contagious. In doing so, we deny grief. Or we hand

it to therapists for a diagnosis and a quiet plan behind closed doors. Ninety percent of the time, grief is not diagnosable. It is a natural response to a death or an ending. And the hard truth is that experiencing grief is a guarantee for every human. So, it is time to shift grief from being a denied taboo to becoming a universal source of connection.



100%

People who will die.

100%

People who will grieve someone they love or something that matters



“

Death is one of our few guarantees, and so therefore is grief. We will all love someone who dies or something that ends. If every one of us will experience this, isn't it time to bring grief out of the shadows and normalize it?

Leslie Barber, Founder & CEO, Grief Warrior



Organization Action:

Offer employees resources and benefits specific to grief, such as grief coaches or grief training, to begin to shift the language and culture of your organization to become grief-inclusive.

Manager Action:

Good news, managers: grief is not a problem you need to fix or solve. But you must acknowledge it. Seek out training on compassionate listening. Differentiate between when you will problem solve with an employee and when you will simply validate their experience.

TIME FOR A CHANGE

As corporate leaders, we pull together employee benefits and then pat ourselves on the back. We give 4 days bereavement leave! Pat. Pat. Grief Warrior Founder Leslie Barber's husband died on a Sunday. She would have been expected back at work on a Thursday. Laughable. And she even worked at a company listed on the Best Companies to Work For® list.

Bereavement leave is not that - it's funeral leave. It was originally given to employees to attend a funeral. The three days included one day to travel, one day for the funeral, and one day to return home. Companies do not give people any leave for grieving right now.

This is a silent epidemic.

Average days for ^{Funeral}~~bereavement~~ leave

4

for death of a spouse
or child

0

for death of a beloved pet
or best friend



The default approach is to try to spare the office from grief, leaving bereaved employees alone for a few days and then hoping they'll return expediently to work. This approach makes management complicit in what Julia Samuel...calls a "conspiracy of silence" surrounding death...It deprives people of the support that work could offer in times of mourning, erodes collegial bonds, and drains working lives and workplaces of meaning.

Gianpiero Petriglieri and **Sally Maitlis**.

When a Colleague Is Grieving.

Harvard Business Review, 2019¹

¹ <https://hbr.org/2019/07/when-a-colleague-is-grieving>

Organization Action:

Change bereavement leave to actually become what is needed: grief leave. Consider matching it to maternity or paternity leave. The physiological impact of grief is real and requires healing.*

**Bonus for companies who give choice on when the griever takes their grief leave*

Manager Action:

Advocate for HR to take the responsibility off your shoulders and to create a policy of grief leave. Until then, take responsibility for working with HR to attain additional time off for grieving employees. Don't make the griever do it alone hours after their loved one has died.



EQUITY MANAGEMENT

How companies treat their employees has become a significant boon (or hit) on their brand. It influences product and service purchases, it impacts employee retention, and it affects stock prices. Most companies put policies and training in place to ensure some uniform response to employee situations.

However, with grief, it's the wild wild west.

One hundred employees at the same company can have one hundred different experiences because HR often leaves it up to the individual managers - a person most likely unprepared to address grief in the workplace. When a grieving employee is met with the brush-off or with silence, they are at risk for immediate disconnection and disengagement from their work-family, feeling like they no longer belong.

More likely to contribute

3.5x

When motivated and engaged by managers.

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90% of employees admit to performing better when their company supports their emotional wellness.

The Next Generation Workplace Report, 15FIVE

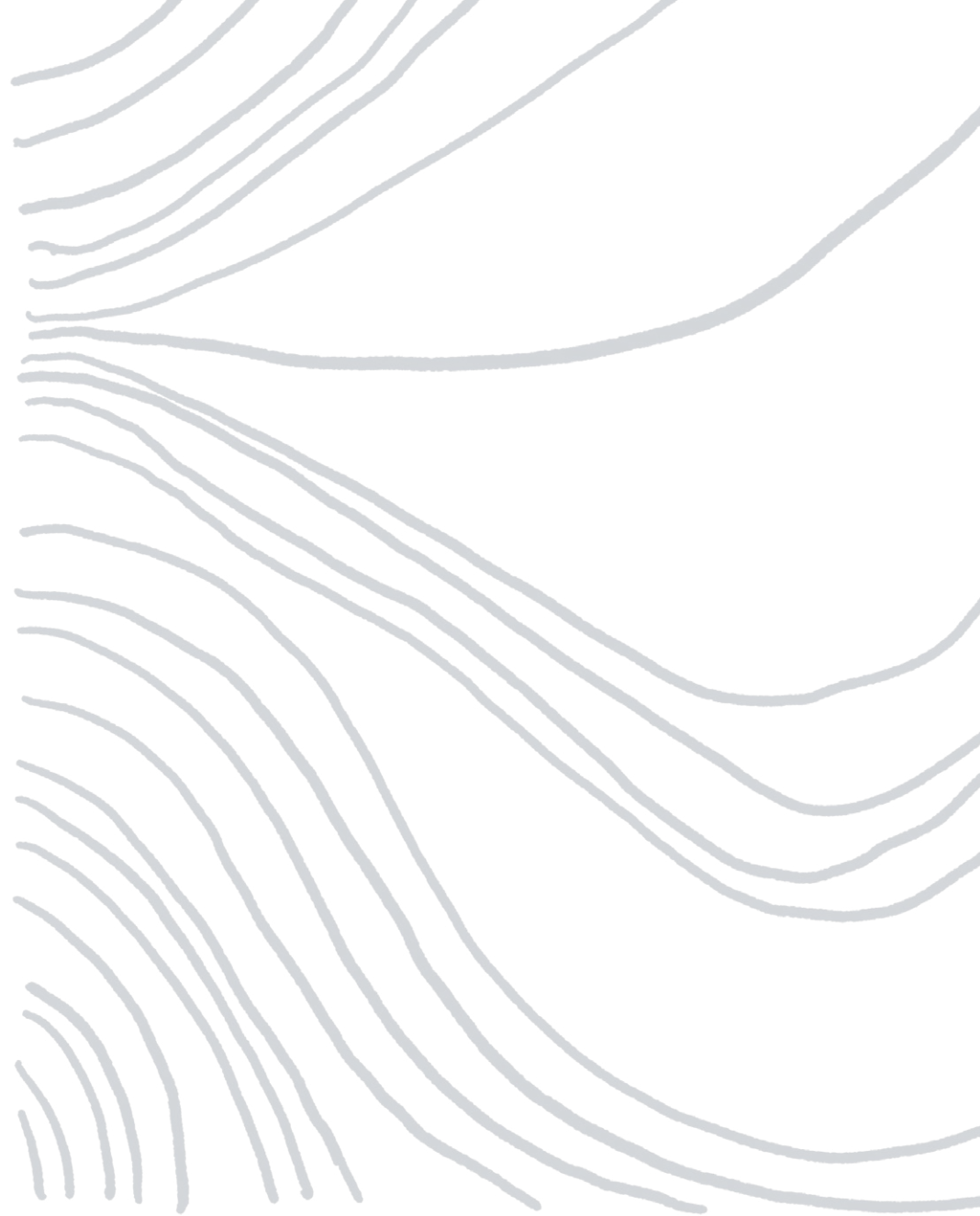
Organization Action:

Create a “One HR” response to grief so that every employee can expect similar responses when the worst happens.

Train managers in how to handle grieving employees to ensure consistency and equity.

Manager Action:

Seek out grief coaching or training so that you can show up compassionately for your employees. Make the effort.



GRIEF IS A FULL-TIME JOB

Physical symptoms can be severe, such as low energy levels, rage, anxiety, extreme fatigue, pain, fogginess and more.

Yet, grief (like love) is involuntary and not controllable by the bereaved. Grief is like taking on another job. It's extremely hard work and takes a significant toll on the body. We often want grievers to just pull themselves together, stop crying, and get back to life before the grief event. It's simply not possible. Physical symptoms can

be severe - such as low energy levels, anxiety, fatigue, pain and more. The emotional impact can be devastating, especially if someone's entire life has been altered by the grief event. Grievers may not be able to just "get it together", regardless of how much they want to. It's time to think differently about how we care for employees. We must recognize that the human experience has ups and downs. We must show up in the down.

65%

Grieving Americans with physical ailments¹

¹ <https://eterneva.com/resources/coping-with-loss#:~:text=A%20recent%20study%2C%20done%20before,grief%20never%20really%20goes%20away>

“

The stress of losing a loved one to death and the subsequent grief can reduce or suppress your immune system, making you more susceptible to coming down with a cold or catching the flu.

Chris Raymond.

How to Cope With the Physical Effects of Grief.
Verywell Mind, 2020¹

1 <http://www.verywellmind.com/physical-symptoms-of-grief-4065135>

Organization Action:

Model that grief is an acceptable reason to take paid time off. Rethink “sick” days to give griever the opportunity to take days off when the grief waves hit. Indefinitely.

Manager Action:

Make the effort to learn more about grief’s impact on the mind and body to build compassion for your employees throughout their grief journey.



WORK REMOTELY, NOT LONELY

“Our employees are young —no one here is grieving. When someone dies, we’ll call you.”

This thinking was prevalent before COVID-19. Many organizations went in unprepared. The grief hit instantly, now organizations are dealing with disenfranchised employees, connected only through projects, tasks, and WiFi. Management has run out of comforting words as they are not sure what to say or do. The question is now, how do you want to address it?

**U.S. labor force
now working from
home full-time¹**

42%



¹ <https://siepr.stanford.edu/research/publications/how-working-home-works-out>

“

The loss of normalcy; the fear of economic toll; the loss of connection. This is hitting us and we're grieving. Collectively. We are not used to this kind of collective grief in the air..

Scott Berinato.

That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief,
Harvard Business Review²



Organization Action:

Recognize that losing a physical workplace with our colleagues may cause significant grief in the organization, potentially impacting every single employee. Acknowledge the grief associated with change management - don't ignore it.

Manager Action:

Pay extra attention and give extra support to employees who may be suffering from collective grief, as well as personal grief. Name it.

A FINAL WORD

Grief is the biggest problem you may not know you have. And with the explosion of grief due to the global pandemic, unnecessary deaths, racial injustice, massive unemployment and so much more, organizations and managers can no longer afford to ignore the impact of grief on their workplaces and employees.

It's time to bring grief out of the shadows. A little acknowledgment will go a very long way for connection and engagement. Try it - ask someone who you know is grieving to tell you about it. They may respond with surprise, because no one else has asked. They will remember you asked.

It's not enough to rethink grief and the impact on your organization. It's time to act to stop the disengagement bleed of grieving employees and to put truth to the concept of bringing "your whole selves to work".

The future of work demands that we include grief in the workplaces. The time is now.



CONTACT

Grief Warrior offers HR consulting, manager trainings, corporate workshops, 1:1 and group grief coaching, and Heartfelt sympathy gifts.

For further information about Grief Warrior's solutions, contact Deb Stallings, VP, Sales at deb@agriefwarrior.com

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