

THE COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

Building positive culture for people facing challenging times

An Invitation

Programs for working Australians dealing with death

How we respond to loss and death has been debated for centuries. From often repeated platitudes, to a culture of awkward silence; from Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief, to the new science of resilience.

The Groundswell Project's 'death literacy' workshops bring the conversation about loss and death into the light. And with the Compassionate Workplace Program, we look at how the workplace can utilise existing networks to provide support for people suffering great loss.

How is your organisation responding?

“I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing”

The new science of loss recognises that most of us seek out the support of those closest to us, be it work or at home. Recognising this and empowering this is critical for a culture of compassion at work. So what do we say? How do we help? What can we do?

To answer these questions, we use the best evidence in social care to create an informal social support network for your greatest asset – your employees – at the most stressful time of their lives.

Because when bereavement leave ends, we go back to work.

An old saying we've all heard at some point in our working lives is that when it comes to the workplace we must leave our personal problems at the door. Until now workplace cultural models have been based on this idea of separating the personal from the professional, with little to no recognition of change and loss as relevant human experience that impacts every facet of our lives.



*As more people are diagnosed at earlier stages and surviving cancer, they are increasingly likely to be of working age, therefore **issues regarding productivity and continuing employment** must be addressed by patients and employers alike.*

- Cancer Council Australia



When it comes to the greatest instances of life-changing challenges and suffering, such as death, dying and bereavement, it's inevitable and understandable that the affects of such events on the personal life will cross the working-life threshold.

The role of work and the workplace has however shifted through a combination of generational change and because communities are more connected. In 2016 we see the boundaries between work, social networks and friends are blurred more than ever.

Australian workplaces can only benefit from recognising this shift and responding to it. The results will be of great benefit to everyone.

Welcome to the Compassionate Workplace

Where the internal relationships, wellbeing and resilience of your staff is key to driving meaningful engagement in 2016.

Bluefin Consultancy founder, Ravi Singh, has identified “employee engagement and culture” as the key priority for 2016. Something that hasn't been a strategic priority in the past.¹



*When we talk about grief in the office, we are blurring that boundary. In general, somebody passing away is really part of our personal lives, but **it is so important and affects us so deeply that it does come about in our professional lives.***

- Jodi R. R. Smith,
Mannersmith Etiquette Consulting



When it comes to recent trends in leadership development in Australia, compassion as a mode of operation for employee engagement is making a foray.

Loss is one of the most difficult challenges a person will have to face. And as we move toward a new age of employee engagement and compassionate working environments, it's time to consider how loss as a human experience is responded to within the workplace.

While people might find the idea of discussing death, dying and bereavement uncomfortable, remember that twenty years ago it was considered risky to talk about mental health at work. People were frightened of how they might be perceived by

THE COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

their colleagues and their employers. In order to combat negative or unhelpful responses, there was a call to ‘normalise’ the risky subject matter.

At the Groundswell Project, we talk about ‘socialising’ the subject matter, because the experience of loss and grief has always been part of life, even worklife.

Making the Case: When do we ever really switch off?

Working Australians are already sharing their life experiences. They’re having conversations over lunch, via personal emails ... or they’re at least wishing they could.

When we hear about someone’s loss, we often wonder how best to offer support in the event of great change and challenges such as dealing with death, a terminal diagnosis, or becoming a primary carer. Being able to provide that care is a natural inclination, however somehow we seem to have lost the art of talking, sharing and showing it.

Numerous studies have been done on the power of camaraderie and friendship at work for greater retention rates and productivity.² In fact, we often stay because of the strength of those relationships. Understanding the power of employee relationships and how to support and encourage them to respond well in the face of loss, is key.

“A compassionate workplace recognises that the *natural cycles of sickness and health, birth and death, love and loss, occur within the orbits of their institutions and regular activities every day*”³

Workplaces that create conditions in which employees can openly share their feelings about loss – past, present or future, regardless of rank or authority, result in better responses within the workplace when loss inevitably occurs.

End Notes:

1. 10 HR Trends you’ll see in 2016 : http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kosta-petrov/10-hr-trends-youll-see-in_b_8888690.html?ir=Australia
2. Gallup Report "I Have a Best Friend at Work"
<http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/511/Item-10-Best-Friend-Work.aspx>
3. Special thanks to the work of Julian Abel and colleagues: “Compassionate Community Networks UK”

Further reading:

1. Grattan Institute Report Dying Well 2014 <http://grattan.edu.au/report/dying-well/>
2. Parker, S Building Compassion in the Workplace UWA:
<http://www.news.uwa.edu.au/2013/11/21/6270/research/building-compassion-workplace>
3. Cancer Council Australia: Support working with cancer
http://www.cancer.org.au/content/pdf/AboutCancer/support/workingwithcancer_sect2.pdf

A compassionate workplace is a community. A community that recognises that care for one another at times of crisis and loss is not simply a task solely for health and social services but is everyone's responsibility.

Who is the Groundswell Project?

THE GROUNDSWELL PROJECT

Our purpose at Groundswell is to create profound experiences that enable social and cultural change around death and dying in Australia. Over the past 5 years we have run over 30 events and engaged 1000's of people in conversations and actions about end of life planning. We have created multiple partnerships and projects with community, government and health. We do a lot of social research. We are a social enterprise, registered charity with DGR status.

- Learn more about our projects and sign up for our newsletter by visiting:
<http://www.thegroundswellproject.com>
- For a conversation about how we can work with you, email
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