

When Someone on Your Team Loses Someone

A one-page guide for managers

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Most companies give three days of bereavement leave. Grief takes about three years. That gap is where good employees quietly fall apart and good managers accidentally make it worse — not from malice, from not knowing what to say. Here is what actually helps.

In the first week

Say the name. “I’m so sorry about David.” Not “your loss.” People are terrified of reminding someone their person died. They have not forgotten. Hearing the name is a relief, not a reminder.

Don’t say “let me know if you need anything.” They never will. Asking for help takes energy they don’t have. Replace it with something specific and already decided: *“I’m covering your Thursday call. It’s done, you don’t need to reply.”*

Decide the work questions for them. Which meetings they’re off, what gets reassigned, when you’ll next check in. Every choice you hand a grieving person costs them something.

In the first three months

This is when it gets harder, not easier. The casseroles stop and the real grief starts. Most workplaces have moved on by week two. Your person hasn’t.

Watch for what looks like underperformance but isn’t. Missed details. Slower replies. Going quiet in meetings. Grief eats working memory and it looks exactly like someone checking out. Manage the work, but name the cause before you name a performance problem.

Keep check-ins short and regular. Two minutes every week beats thirty minutes once. Regular means they never have to raise a hand.

Don’t make them the grief person. They still want to be good at their job. Being handed only light work can read as being written off. Ask what they want to keep.

The dates nobody puts in the calendar

Birthdays. The anniversary of the death. The first Christmas. The day the estate finally closes. These land harder than the funeral, and they land alone — because by then everyone else has forgotten.

Put one date in your calendar: the anniversary. Send four words that day — *“Thinking of you today.”* Nothing else required. It will matter more than anything you did in week one.

What not to do

- “At least he isn’t suffering.” Never start a sentence with *at least*.
- “Everything happens for a reason.” Not yours to say.
- “How are you doing?” in an open-plan office, where the only safe answer is *fine*.
- Going silent because you’re scared of saying the wrong thing. Silence *is* the wrong thing.

The one thing to remember

You cannot fix it. That is not the job. The job is to be the person who still says the name, still checks in at week ten, and still remembers the date a year later. That’s the whole thing — and almost nobody does it.

Kamille Bauer speaks to teams, HR groups and leadership retreats about grief in the workplace. She was widowed at 33 with three children and two businesses, and got no days off at all. She now runs a day spa in Sandy, Utah with a team of her own, and hosts *Put On Your Big Girl Pants* — 110 episodes on grief, loss and finding a way forward.

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