

HOT SHEET

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HR Trends:

- Effective 1/1/2024 the Washington State minimum wage goes up from \$15.74 to \$16.28. The minimum weekly salary for an exempt employee for **ALL** employers will be \$1,302.40 (\$67,724.80 annually). Currently, for small employers (1-50) this is \$1,101.80/week and for larger employers it is \$1,259.20/week.
- 401k employee contribution limits for 2024 will go up \$500 to \$23K. Catch-up contributions for those over 50 remains \$7,500. The combined employee/employer contribution limit will go up from \$66K to \$69K. IRA limits are going up from \$6.5K to \$7K. The catch up contribution for over 50 remains at \$1,000.
- Employers would do well to tread lightly in offering support regarding the Israel/Hamas war. Instead offer employees psychological safety and resources to support them in this time of great suffering. Also consider supporting humanitarian aid for those who are harmed by these events.
- Following the trend toward transparency, a survey by SHRM found that more than half of employers are communicating with employees about pay policies—even if they are not required to.



Full-Circle HR

Nonapparent Disabilities at Work

Nonapparent disabilities can be just as debilitating as the ones you can see. Furthermore, they may be more likely to carry a stigma with them, particularly if they involve a mental health aspect. The person may have shame and discomfort sharing this information about themselves. There are approximately 33 million adults with a nonapparent disability.* Recent research by SHRM revealed that almost half of employees with a nonapparent disability choose not to disclose it. Some examples of these disabilities include autism, diabetes, traumatic brain injury, dyslexia, ADHD, sensory processing disorder, Crohn's disease, chronic pain, and mental health conditions. Unfortunately, employees with nonapparent disabilities do experience discrimination in the workplace due to

others perceiving them as lazy, antisocial, incompetent, or aloof. Many believe if they reveal a disability they will be scrutinized more closely, be talked about behind their backs, lose opportunities for advancement, or be seen as being unable to fulfill their work responsibilities. According to SHRM research those who reveal their disability are: Almost twice as likely to feel frequently excluded at work; and Two to three times more likely to experience rudeness, disrespect, or insensitive behavior. The question employers can ask is, "How can I help?" Creating a culture where employees feel safe coming forward to ask for accommodations is vital. 1. A step in this direction is education for your staff. Providing education that teaches employees what these disabilities are and how they affect

people who have them, it is more likely that your workers are more understanding, accommodating, and supportive. Otherwise, ignorance can create mistrust, anxiety, and avoidance behavior toward their colleagues. 2. If you have Employee Resource Groups (voluntary employee-led groups that focus on mutual areas of interest or concern), leverage them to create a supportive group for employees with disabilities. They can also work to foster awareness of disabilities and enhance a culture of acceptance, support, and inclusion. 3. Watch for and change non-inclusive language. Examples are using words like normal or regular for employees who do not have a disability. This can leave employees with a disability feeling left out. Other casual words we sometimes use include

psycho, crazy, nuts, and retarded. 4. Use assistive technologies and practices. Research and take advantage of technology that can support workers with disabilities. Some examples are computer voice technologies, adding captions and alt text to videos and presentations, and headsets for hearing impaired. A low-tech practice is to provide written instruction for those who have issues with retaining information. Most importantly, dialogue with employees to discover how you can offer support.

All employees benefit from a welcoming and inclusive workplace and you may find that you attract employees who are reluctant to apply elsewhere.

It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.
— Aristotle

Supporting Grieving Employees

The many aspects of living a human life are part of what make us who we are. Supporting this in our employees is part of how we create a culture of caring and inclusivity. Grief is a particularly difficult aspect that is not easy for anyone to experience or to support. As the holidays approach, this can become even more difficult to do. When a significant loss impacts a single employee or your entire staff, it can affect attendance, productivity and long-term emotional and mental health.

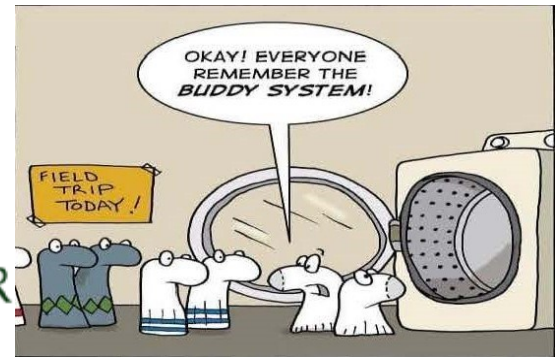
Here are some questions to consider:** How can you support your team through a difficult time and

work with them to transition back into a regular work routine? How do you balance the emotional needs of your employees with the needs of your business? How can you plan ahead for the possibility of this situation—whether it's grief or any life situation?

Here are some steps you can take. 1. As soon as you become aware of the situation, communicate in person if possible, by phone call if not. Let them know you care and also just listen. Be respectful of their privacy and quietly alert those who may need to take on additional tasks or be otherwise impacted. Don't share it broadly unless the employee has

given you permission to do so. Staff may want to support them with a meal train or send cards and notes of support. Otherwise, let the employee share when they are ready. 2. Offer bereavement leave in accordance with your policy if you have one. Be willing to listen to the employee if their loss does not quite fit the policy but may be a reasonable exception. 3. Be patient when the employee returns to work. If this is the first holiday season since the loss, it may be the toughest, but sometimes it can still have a deep impact for subsequent years. If you have an Employee Assistance Program, remind

them of it.*** If you don't, consider getting one. They are a valuable cost effective benefit. Maintain an open-door policy and make checking in on this topic part of the regular supervisory check-ins. Share your own experience of loss if appropriate. If their performance review is impacted, be sure to appropriately qualify any issues with the possible impact from the loss of time and focus due to grief. Dialogue with them about what is most helpful in making this transition. Flexibility in schedule or working from home may be a helpful option. An extended leave may also be a consideration.



*SHRM, All Things Work, *Invisible Disabilities*, Gonzales, Matt, October 28, 2023.

**Insperity.com, *How to Support Employees Through Grief*, Faniel, Leonard November 27, 2023.

***SHRM, *Holidays Can Be Hard for Grieving: Employers Can Offer Support*, Gurchiek, Kathy, November 22, 2023.