**Detecting And Responding To Caregiver Burnout In Colleagues**

If you haven’t yet encountered a colleague who is caregiving for an older or disabled loved one, there is no doubt you will eventually. According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, approximately 40 million Americans are currently in this situation and the number continues to grow. Here are signs that someone in your circle is struggling—and what to do about it.

**Caregiver Burnout At Work**

1. Running late. Jane is a middle school principal taking care of her husband who recently had a stroke. She was always very punctual and now shows up late regularly, even when there is an important meeting.
2. Moodiness. Donald, a restaurant manager, has always had a great sense of humor. His employees have always respected his firm but light-hearted management style. Since he had to move his brother with Multiple sclerosis into his home, Steve has been short-tempered at work and staff have become uncomfortable working with him. Gone are the days of having fun while working. Steve’s employees never know if he’s going to fly off the handle or be impolite to a customer.

While Steve is short-tempered, other employees struggling with caregiver burnout may be experiencing sadness. For example, the usually upbeat Jody, a publicist, has been caught in the employee restroom tearing up when she’s been on her cell phone. Colleagues suspect it’s because she’s dealing with her father-in-law who has dementia.

3. Making more mistakes than usual. Jay, a very bright bank teller has been making more mistakes at work since his aunt came to live with him. He has forgotten the names of several regular customers and made simple math errors causing his manager to become concerned.

4. Talking about quitting or going part-time. Working caregivers experiencing caregiver burnout typically consider quitting or reducing hours for a while before they actually do it. Colleagues taking care of older or disabled loved ones who broach this topic with a peer or manager are typically very serious. Many working caregivers don’t see the point in continuing working, particularly if they are close to retirement age or are not primary breadwinners. Some working caregivers also are paying a lot of money toward paid caregivers or assisted living. They may think quitting or reducing hours in order to provide care to their loved one makes more sense than remaining in the workforce.

5. Coming to work sick. While those struggling with caregiver burnout are often susceptible to more illnesses, they will often come to work anyway because they are saving sick and vacation days for when they need to handle issues with their older or disabled loved one.

**How Do You Respond?**

Encourage working caregivers to communicate with their manager and/or Human Resources department to seek creative solutions. While the working caregiver should probably not share every painstaking detail, the employer must know there is a caregiving situation and some details about what that involves for the employee.

Often, working caregivers are reluctant to share their caregiving challenges, much the way some working parents are reluctant to discuss childcare issues because they don’t want the employer to doubt their commitment to the job. In reality, however, many employers are willing to make special arrangements to support and retain valued employees facing such circumstances.

Programs like FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act) and EAP (Employee Assistance Programs) and alternative work schedules might offer the working caregiver the helping hand he or she so desperately needs. Many employees are not aware that such programs exist.

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