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JULER GROUP IDENTIFIES OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH DECLINE DURING CORPORATE RESTRUCTURING AS PRIORITY FOR HSE PROFESSIONALS



Austin, Texas. February 5, 2015 – Juler Group Incorporated identified employee health decline before and during layoffs and corporate restructuring as a hazard that must be recognized and mitigated by company HSE professionals.

Anxiety, heart attack, insomnia, depression, alcoholism violence and discrimination have impacted the American workforce as a result of corporate financial drive. Economic downturns, competition, international trade, and mergers result in corporate restructuring through downsizing and “churning” of people. As a result of restructuring toxic health effects afflict those who lose their job, but also those people left behind to shoulder a new burden.

Restructuring now demands that the crew left aboard the crippled ship shoulder new burdens of increased workloads while wrestling with continued perceptions of uncertainty. Taking on the extra weight of responsibility, the stress of timely execution and the relentless drive for improved quality at reduced cost the crew suffers. The crew is lashed to maintain profitability amidst sinking revenue, and to maintain customer loyalty in stormy seas.

The occupational health professional must be alerted to the fact that in the wake of restructuring those who were once sharp, conscientious and hard working now may take on a demoralizing cynicism and anger toward the captains of the organization, as they are forced to take on the stress and hopelessness of saving a sinking ship.

In this environment, it seems that every motion and every effort is weighed in the balances of stress. Bodies once strong and agile find themselves laboring under the immensity of an invisible load. Minds once positive and enthusiastic find themselves wincing at hollow accolades and the promise of smooth sailing.

The occupational health professional, understanding of the toll of restructuring, has a new hazard to recognize, characterize and mitigate - layoff survivor syndrome. Adverse health effects arise out of the emotional struggle over guilt and a sense of responsibility, anxiety, tension, irritability, depression and anger. Additionally, greater distrust, decreased motivation and reduced engagement are found among survivors. These struggles cascade into health effects that include increases in self-reported neck and back pain, certified sickness absence, increased appetite leading to greater body mass index (BMI), and an increase in prescription and illegal drug use for coping with the stress. There may be increases in workplace harassment and violence among co-workers, and increased discrimination from supervision and management. All of these potentially lethal safety and health issues are a direct result of remaining behind and taking on huge workloads while immersed in role ambiguity and further uncertainty in long-term survival.

The HSE professional in the organization now has a new hazard to characterize and mitigate, and in the same way risk assessments are carried out for other hazards such as on a CNC machine, a drilling rig, a wind tower, a mobile crane, a high pressure high

temperature process, a bio-fermentation process, an assembly or any other process, the hazards associated with these life changing and traumatic events must be considered and planned for.

This reality means the occupational health professional now has an amplified responsibility in the turnaround of the crippled ship by ensuring the resilience of the crewmates left aboard. It will be healthy and vibrant employees that ultimately bail the water, repair the breach and right the ship until the captain declares smooth sailing.

The HSE manager must consider the following elements in their occupational health and safety recovery plan.

- Emotional response resources to address anger and insecurity
- Increased teamwork to address isolation, discrimination and workplace violence
- Increased number of tool box or safety talks, lunch and learns focusing on needs when at full production
- Increased number of lunch and learns focused on ergonomics and health-life balance
- Establishment or re-engagement of safety and health teams to improve HSE elements on the line and in preparation for the upturn
- Increased communication of successes in HSE
- Enhanced cooperation between HSE and line management to quickly identify problem areas
- Enhanced cooperation between HSE and human relations departments to promote annual physicals, and healthy diet and exercise programs for employees

For the occupational health professional, taking a moment to contemplate the importance of this role and to craft a deliberate plan that encompasses this new and expanded responsibility will not only ensure the health and well being of every employee left behind, but may be a pivotal moment in the history of the company.

Juler Group Incorporated is a professional and technical services firm offering total solutions for the occupational health, safety and environmental professional. Juler Group provides risk and hazard assessment services, industrial hygiene monitoring support, safety program design and implementation, health and safety audits, process safety management, leadership and ethics services, and unequaled training development and delivery. We help you manage risk in the workplace.

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