

**Retaining Employees in a Behavioral Health Treatment Business
Making a Difference with Your Staff Members
Part Four of Four**



Element Four: Support and reward your employees

To maintain a healthy workforce, it is essential to support and reward employees, helping to sustain their commitment to your organization and to the greater good they provide as helpers.

At any given time, one in every six employees has personal problems that directly affect productivity. Employees who experience work/life conflicts are three times as likely to quit their jobs. Showing that you are sensitive to family problems and struggles, illness and unavoidable absenteeism builds confidence in your company's concern for the employee.

What is the biggest work/life conflict in our field? "Compassion Fatigue" or "Burnout" has been cited as one of the primary reasons for lack of longevity in social services. Some of the symptoms of compassion fatigue are:

- Chronic illnesses, e.g. headache, backache
- Lack of energy, both emotional and physical
- Emotional blunting - low level, chronic clouding of caring and concern for others

Compassion

"Without an awareness of our feelings we cannot experience compassion. How can we share the sufferings and the joys of others if we cannot experience our own?" Gary Zukav

The first step to solving the problem of compassion fatigue is to acknowledge that the problem exists. Helpers tend to focus on others and their problems, often to the detriment of themselves.

The individual suffering from compassion fatigue should be encouraged to refocus on themselves and their self care, such as getting plenty of rest and becoming more aware of dietary and recreational habits. If they haven't already, they should be urged to cut out negative addictions such

as nicotine and caffeine.

As with any condition that takes time to develop, healing takes time. People suffering from compassion fatigue should be counseled to keep and enhance a portion of their life in which they need to take rather than give: getting massages or learning a new skill unrelated to work. Putting themselves in situations in which they see the positives in life – like attending a field trip with a child where they're truly enjoying the experience.

Preventing burnout should be a priority for management staff members. Supervision ought to include support and tips to help employees practice good emotional health habits and maintain balance in their lives. Supervisors should be aware of the signs and symptoms and know some interventions to use if burnout becomes a possibility.

Sometimes, you can't prevent compassion fatigue from occurring. However, practicing some of the foregoing techniques can restore the ability to feel compassion for and sensitivity to the troubles and difficulties of others.

Work/Life programs and policies are designed to create more flexible, responsive work environments supportive of commitments to community, home, and loved ones. Examples of these policies are the ability to use flex-time or allow schedule adjustments for parenting responsibilities. The benefits of programs that solve work/life conflicts are immense!

Developing a program for your agency or using an established program, such as an EAP or wellness program that assists in solving work/life conflicts has shown to be well worth the time and resources needed to encourage participation.

Work/Life programs have been shown to:

- Improve performance due to increased focus and motivation
- Improve employee retention
- Decrease stress related illnesses
- Reduce absenteeism

Programs that help solve work/life conflicts improve employee morale and loyalty. To heighten employee recruitment, make sure that everyone is aware of your program including prospective employees. A cost offset of such programs is reduced time spent dealing with personal issues on the job. Long term value is realized through protection of your most important asset in a human service business: your employees.

As a manager, check your employee benefits to see that they include assistance for mental health support and family conflicts. Ask if your workplace is a nurturing environment for those who work there as well as those who are patients.

Rewarding employees can be as simple as paying attention. Most people who go into the helping professions are “feeling” people. Noticing and appreciating good work, giving small gifts or gratitude awards is easy and inexpensive. Put reminders on your calendar of events such as birthdays, celebrate special events and make sure that every month someone gets special recognition. It’s easy to forget to thank people in our busy environments – make sure YOU remember. It will pay off in uncounted ways.

So we hope that this short refresher has been helpful to you and that you will:

Plan To Make A Difference

- ✓ Be a company people want to work for
- ✓ Select the right people in the first place
- ✓ Make new employees feel welcomed, valued, prepared, and challenged
- ✓ Support and reward employees to maintain their commitment

Resources and Websites

- Keeping The People Who Keep You In Business Leigh Branham
- Built To Last James C. Collins and Jerry Porras
- <http://www.work911.com/>
- <http://www.managementhelp.org/>
- Perfect Phrases for Setting Performance Goals Douglas Max