

# *Ways to Help Employees Cope After a Bank Robbery*

## **Overview**

Ways managers can help employees cope after a bank robbery.

- First steps
- Helping employees before the arrival of the crisis counselor
- Emotional reactions
- How to respond
- The importance of taking care of yourself
- Your EAP can help

When a bank robbery occurs, you and your employees may feel a variety of sudden and unexpected emotions, including anxiety, fear, and anger. Depending on the type of bank robbery -- some robberies are relatively quiet and involve only one teller while others are more hostile and can involve many bank personnel -- employees may be affected for days, weeks, or even months afterward. If you and your employees have witnessed or been involved in a bank robbery, you can take the following steps to support your employees and help them cope.

## **First steps**

When a robbery has occurred in your workplace, you are in the position to coordinate an appropriate and compassionate response to the situation.

- *Make sure everyone is safe and notify appropriate departments as necessary*, such as police, human resources (HR), and company security.
- *Call your employee assistance program (EAP)*. Every robbery is different. An EAP counselor will discuss ways to respond to the crisis, given the specifics of the incident and your organization. When you call, be sure to do the following:
  - Describe the incident -- who, what, where, when, why, and how.
  - Describe the reactions of employees and how your company has responded.
  - State your own needs, and the needs of your company.
  - Let the EAP counselor know if there are any concurrent stressors.
- *Be aware that employees will have a range of reactions and emotions to robberies*. As a manager, you will have to pay attention to each individual's reaction to the trauma to make sure that your employees get the support they need.
- *Before making any announcements, be sure to check to see if your company has guidelines or policies about robberies*. For instance, your company may have policies or procedures in place to deal with the media. Make sure your employees are informed about your company's policies, too.
- *Be forthright and provide factual information to your employees*. This can help stop rumors from spreading. Provide a consistent message to all groups. Address any rumors or concerns employees may have.
- *Remember that affected employees need structure, peer support, facts, and instructions on what to expect next*. This is particularly crucial if the individual has inadequate support at home. Before employees leave, find out what they are planning to do

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with their time once they leave work. And encourage them to spend time with friends or family members.

- *Identify the employees most affected and encourage them to go to a quiet place with selected close friends or family that may have arrived.* But don't force them to be isolated if they'd prefer to stay with their co-workers.

### **Helping employees before the arrival of the crisis counselor**

There are several ways you can support your employees before crisis professionals arrive:

- *Show employees your concern and tell them about any steps you or the organization has taken or will take to deal with the crisis situation, and how they will be kept safe if applicable.*
- *Tell your employees that a crisis professional(s) will come to the work site to provide help.* Offer an invitation to involved employees to attend a group-debriefing meeting. There is a dynamic that happens within a group that doesn't happen one on one with a counselor. Co-workers are able to support each other in ways that a counselor can't. Individual sessions may also be available to impacted staff.
- *If any employees of an impacted work group were not present when the crisis occurred they should still be provided support.* However, they should not be put in the same group with those directly impacted. There is a risk that they will unnecessarily be impacted further through the discussion that the directly impacted group may have.
- *Understand that employees may experience strong emotional reactions either immediately or delayed.* These reactions are normal and are to be expected when individuals are closely involved with a traumatic event.
- *Discuss immediate work expectations and time-off policies.* Consultation with your HR department or EAP crisis counselor may be helpful. For some affected persons, time off is very helpful. For others, it can be very detrimental.
- *In the unfortunate event of casualties, contact family members of casualty victims.* It is best to send two management people to the home of each casualty or deceased employee to make arrangements for assistance without leaving the distressed persons alone. Remind family members that the EAP is available to them.

### **Emotional reactions**

After a robbery, employees may feel a wide range of emotions. The good news is that most people exposed to a traumatic event will recover without any formal intervention beyond perhaps information and reassurance.

- *Expect a variety of reactions from employees.* Employees may experience various negative feelings following a robbery. They may feel that they are just fine or they may be overwhelmed by the event. They may also experience some of the

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signs and symptoms of stress, which can be physical, mental, or emotional. These feelings are normal and will usually ease with time.

- *The length and intensity of each employee's feelings will vary.* Everyone is different and everyone reacts differently to a traumatic event. Some people may experience uncontrollable crying or emotional outbursts. Others may withdraw or appear numb. Some may not experience any unusual reactions at all.
- *Reactions may be immediate, delayed, or ongoing.*

#### **How to respond**

Immediately after a robbery, the primary concern is to provide safety, support, and stability.

- *Offer resources to employees.* Remind employees to call the EAP. Consider organizing a group meeting to help process emotions and reactions to the critical event.
- *Encourage employees to talk about the experience and to express their feelings* with each other and with their family, friends, and other people who will have a compassionate response.
- *Allow employees to feel a wide range of emotions.*
- *Let employees know that there are no "right" or "wrong" feelings or reactions.*
- *Listen to your employees.*
- *Don't ignore your own feelings or expect to "do it all" or "fix it all" yourself.*
- *Look for signs of obvious distress, and refer distressed employees to the EAP for help.*  
Signs of distress include the following:
  - wandering aimlessly
  - unjustified angry outbursts
  - overall loss of emotional control
  - shock-like state
  - uncontrollable crying
  - staring
  - disorientation
  - isolation from the group

#### **Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD)**

Setting up a CISD can provide a safe and receptive environment for employees to express their thoughts and feelings about the robbery in order to acknowledge the shared experience and to consolidate group support. When a robbery occurs, individuals may need help accessing their support systems. The group session can

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provide an environment where employees support each other and encourage recovery and return to normalcy. A major component of the CISD process is to educate employees on the common symptoms they and their co-workers may be experiencing, to normalize their reactions, and to encourage effective coping techniques.

- *When coordinating a group debriefing, notify any affected managers and employees about the possibility of attending the session.*
- *Encourage attendance and arrange for a quiet, private, and comfortable room, with adequate seating for the debriefing to occur. Make sure you offer meetings that cover all shifts.*
- *Provide a consistent message to all groups. Address any rumors or concerns employees may have.*
- *The trauma specialist will meet with employees as a group and give them an opportunity to discuss what happened and their reactions since the event.*

#### **Communicating facts**

You may wish to distribute a “fact sheet” to relieve confusion and curb the spread of rumors. You may consider doing this through a management chain or e-mail. Your message should do the following:

- *Stick to the facts and clearly communicate what has occurred.*
- *Let employees know you will keep them informed as accurate information comes available.*
- *Express your organization’s concerns.*
- *Demonstrate awareness of feelings and concerns.*
- *Offer EAP services.*
- *Encourage the use of your EAP service for post-trauma assistance.*
- *Announce the time and location of onsite debriefing.*

#### **The importance of taking care of yourself**

Managers often overlook their own feelings during difficult times at work. It is important to take care of yourself during this time.

- *Pay attention to your physical and emotional health.*
- *Talk with other managers.* Managers who talk with and seek support from other managers during difficult times can benefit from this contact.
- *Seek support for yourself.* Use the resources available to you at the company -- through HR, the EAP, or the employee resource program.

### **Your EAP can help**

Your EAP can offer support to employees and managers throughout the stages of recovery and help people cope with the feelings that are common after a robbery. An important part of the recovery process for employees is knowing they can contact a consultant 24 hours a day to discuss the event and their reactions to it. The connection with the EAP consultant can be maintained throughout the phases of recovery. And in some cases, referrals can be made for long-term counseling. Remind employees that the EAP service is confidential and is offered free to them as a benefit paid for by your company.

- *Remind employees that the call and the service are confidential and are offered free to them as a benefit paid for by your company.*
- *Remind employees that they and their family members may contact the program 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for help.*

By providing support and resources to employees coping with a bank robbery, you can help reduce the long-term effects of the traumatic event on your workplace and on the people you work with and care about.

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