

# How can we keep performance up during employee's divorce?

**Question:** "One of our employees is going through a divorce. Although she says she is doing OK, lately she is making more and more mistakes on tasks that she used to do well. She also seems overly sensitive to constructive criticism and blames others for work problems. Frankly, I think she needs a vacation, but she says she can't afford one. Any suggestions on how to help her through her divorce without sacrificing job performance? Is there such a thing as a 'mandatory' vacation?"—**Jocelyn, Mass.**

## Comments

As logical as a vacation may sound it may in fact put her in a situation in which she has lots of free time to ruminate about the difficulties she is having. This might actually increase her level of stress as opposed to decreasing it.

Since you have a situation in which her performance is slipping (and assuming that this has been brought to her attention), I would make a referral to the EAP. To ensure that she attends her sessions, I would likely make it what we call a Job Jeopardy Evaluation. That way she gets the help she needs to sort through the issues surrounding her divorce and hopefully the counseling sessions will mitigate the impact that the divorce is having on her performance.

Posted by: Tony | April 15, 2008 at 01:10 PM

I would recommend she be allowed to work from home, or use some flex time, if available, so that she has the opportunity to rest when needed, meet with her attorney... An occasional "attaboy" might build her self-confidence back up if a lot of "dirt" is being thrown at her during the divorce process.

She might just need some "me" time.

No matter who is at fault for what has caused the breakup, it can be difficult on men and women alike. It can be a very lonesome time if you've not been real social during your marriage. A confidante during this difficult time would be helpful.

Posted by: Nancy Neale, SPHR | April 15, 2008 at 01:15 PM

Well, Jocelyn, you sound like a heartless "you know what". Having gone through a horrible divorce myself, it was a good day if I got out of bed and made it to work. Give her a break. I doubt the company will fold because the poor woman's life is falling apart.

Posted by: Diane | April 15, 2008 at 05:28 PM

I've been through this many times with employees. Offer whatever help you can give her and just let her work through it. Pick up the slack for her if you can. This is just a stage during the divorce process (7 years working with divorce lawyers) and she will get over it. You'll have a grateful employee on the other end. Remember, divorce has grieving stages just like a death has. Unfortunately, the person did not die, they chose to end the relationship so it is most times harder.

Posted by: Mary Ellen Winters | April 16, 2008 at 06:24 AM

Divorces are horrible things to go through especially if there was abuse on either side. Stay flexible. Give them space but be open to talk. Try not to criticize them unless you have to then only constructively.

Posted by: Divorcing Lady | April 17, 2008 at 10:13 AM

I agree that you should gently remind her of your EAP program and other mental health programs in your benefits. She is sending signals that she needs help. Tell her that you will work with her to attend appointments. Ask if there is anything that you can do to help (professionally)? You must inform her about the change in her performance/behaviour. She may not realize that her "coping" skills are unsuccessful. This is a painful, lonely, and empty period. As a co-worker/supervisor, tell her before she hears whispers. Show her the dignity and respect that you would prefer be reciprocated in your times of change.

Posted by: Teresa Ricard | April 21, 2008 at 07:31 AM