Frontline Employee

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A newsletter from the Washington State Employee Assistance Program

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

The statistics are sobering: 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men in the United States have been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. And it's not just a problem at home—96% of domestic violence victims who are employed experience problems at work due to abuse (Resource: thehotline.org).

If you suspect a coworker is in an abusive relationship, should you intervene? The key is to listen to victims and survivors without judgment, and respect their choices. Survivors of intimate partner violence know their situation best, and should never be pressured to leave the perpetrator or take out a protective order. Engage with empathy and let your coworker know that when they are ready to seek help, you will be there to support them. The website workplacesrespond.org has additional guidance and resources for survivors, coworkers, and supervisors.

Here are some steps you can take to be a part of ending domestic violence:

- Act to build a culture of respect, equity, and safety in your home, workplace, and community.
- Use your voice to stand against victim-blaming, discrimination, and violence to end the stigma towards victims and survivors.
- Become an active bystander. Learn how by participating in "Bystander Intervention" training.

Fight the Stigma of Mental Illness in the Workplace

The stigma of mental illness in the workplace contributes to denial and avoidance of treatment. Some studies have shown stigma contributing to the delay of treatment for up to eight years! That's a lot of needless suffering. Since 25% of employees will eventually have a mental health diagnosis, fighting stigma is crucial. To fight for change, take two powerful steps:

1) Talk about mental wellness just as you would physical wellness.
2) Just as you know to avoid derogatory terms for physical disabilities, also discourage language (crazy, nut-case, whacked-out, etc.) historically associated with mental illness.

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Protect Yourself from Identity Theft

ID theft is a growing problem. Here's what's hot right now: Many background check Web sites have information about you—e.g., Truthfinder.com, etc. Thieves acquire this information for free. But that free info is not enough to steal your identity. That comes next—by sending you an apparently foolproof, convincing email that appears to come from a friend—who was hacked. The email asks you to click a link that obtains the missing piece of information. The fix: Don't click a link in an email that comes from a friend until you have verified it is not fraudulent.

Foods That Prevent the Afternoon Crash

If that droopy feeling zaps your afternoon performance, examine your diet. The culprit might be lunchtime foods like white bread or white rice—or foods that contain white flour, like pasta. Are you eating enough protein? A protein deficit will affect your energy. Your body wants protein in order to do its jobs, like metabolizing and repairing. A little bit of unsaturated fat is a good thing to keep your metabolism up. Foods like avocados, nuts, and oily fish like salmon are good choices. These also supply energy without the crash. Finally, experiment with smaller, more frequent meals during the day, say every three hours, to see if your energy remains up. Keep a diary, and discover what works for you.

How to Be More Proactive

Are you a proactive employee? Being proactive means acting in anticipation of future problems, needs, or changes. Proactive employees naturally get more stuff done with fewer crises and less work strain. Not being proactive does not mean you don't act or respond to critical issues, but that you may just act later on these things. This means being prompted by a crisis that includes more stress. To be proactive: 1) Pay attention to your gut telling you to act now on what you're facing. 2) Resist the temptation to use procrastination as a way to manage work, causing you to respond daily to only what's urgent. 3) On the job, keep the big picture in mind. Doing so will cause you to feel more energized by work tasks, rather than perceive them as burdens to avoid or postpone.

When Your Coworker Seems Depressed

You can't play doctor, but something's not right with your coworker. They are coming in late, not "caring" as much about the work, putting things off, and not dressing as nicely as they once did. They appear a little absent-minded, unsure of themselves, scattered or unorganized, and a little bit isolated or withdrawn from the rest of the group. Sometimes they are snappy, too—not as pleasant to be around. Although you can't diagnose, you can share your concerns. Listen and encourage them to get help. A whopping 23% of employees will suffer from depression and miss work because of it, according to one key study. Getting over depression is not an exercise in willpower. It's a neurological disease process often requiring medical intervention to overcome. As a peer, you could have tremendous influence—likely more than a family member with whom the employee possibly engages in conflict. This means it doesn't take much effort to influence a coworker's decision to take action and get help. Simply sharing your observations (in private) and encouraging a coworker to get help could be enough to motivate them to do so. Depression left untreated can lead down a chronic path of worsening symptoms. You may help your coworker avoid years of pain as the illness grows worse, and coming to work may be a lot more pleasant for you, too.