



Small Scenarios for Changing Times:

# Modern Bereavement

*The benefit that is rarely used is about to get used a lot*

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# The benefit that is rarely used is about to get used a lot.

*Bereavement leave is rarely mentioned when companies extend an offer to a prospective hire. They mention the 401k, or the on-site gym, but those three days of paid leave to say farewell to a family member are just an accepted part of the standard benefits package found almost anywhere. It's always been questionable whether three days is sufficient to say one's goodbyes, especially when a family death involves travel, settling affairs, or cleaning out a house.*

The current situation is going to test this model in several ways.

First, the number of people who are about to start using bereavement leave will be unprecedented. No matter where you are in the world, or which virus model you ascribe to, there will be death. Before long, everyone will know someone who has lost a family member.

Second, before COVID-19, requests for bereavement leave were probably spaced out over time. Other people could handle the work

while one person was on bereavement leave. The impending increase in deaths means your organization will have multiple people requesting leave at the same time.

Third, people will begin to lose colleagues they know and like. This has traditionally been a rare experience. Now, the colleague who was in the office with a cough in early March will be the one who is gone. This will have a profound impact on the workplace.

Pandemics take people from us who were not expecting to die. Financial affairs will be left in disarray. People who expected to be around for another ten years don't have their wills updated and recorded properly. Legal resources will be challenged as families argue over estates.

The shock of so much death will also be profound. Most organizations are not prepared for a workforce with PTSD. There is no way for your EAP to handle what's coming.

Grief is rarely talked about openly, and almost never in the workplace. This is all about to change.



*The Way We Worked: Ms. G.E. Mitchell, Secretary, National Archives, Records of the US Information Bureau*

# Here are things you should be thinking about in order to prepare for this seismic shift to global grief:

## 1. Calculate your capacity to accommodate grief requests

What percent of your active workforce is not at work on a typical day due to vacation, illness, or bereavement? Once you calculate the percentage, double it. Then double it again. Are your collaborative tech tools up to date? Are your associates trained to make their work readily available to colleagues?

## 2. Get ahead of the need

Train your HR team to process requests quickly. Plan to go above and beyond in your employees' time of need. Revise your policy to allow employees additional time to handle the impact of this pandemic and the loss of someone they love. Consider sending flowers or food. Make it easy for employees to understand their paid time off. Prepare a dashboard that shows available talent. Explore whether you can bring contractors in to handle some of the work.

## 3. Support your employees

Nobody has dealt with pandemic levels of grief before. Find out if your EAP provider has adequate resources with qualified people to handle what's coming. Look at your coverage for mental health care and increase the coverage if possible.

## 4. Consider asking "early grievers" to help you design a better approach

Grief is a complicated process. Perhaps some of the first associates impacted would be willing to serve on an advisory panel to ensure that the resources you are offering are commensurate to the need.

## 5. Understand what people will need when they return to work

Grief is not a three-day process. Even when employees return, they may need lighter loads or intermittent time off while they recover. Plan for this and make the priority healing rather than productivity.

## 6. Share your approach and learning

Death will occur in families both powerful and powerless. Working across industries to build an infrastructure that allows dignity and support for employees when they need it most will benefit everyone.

*For a while, grief will be the undercurrent to everything that happens at work. Build the flexibility and resources to support your employees. People will remember and **it will pay off in the long run.***

## About the Small Scenarios series:

Massive change is afoot. The pandemic gives us the opportunity to rethink and reappraise. The small scenarios project is designed to provoke thought about the medium-term future and how it will be different. The goal is to help HR prepare for the future we will encounter in a few short months.

## The Small Scenarios Team



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## About HRExaminer

HRExaminer is a research and publishing company focused on the evolving edges of HR and HRTechnology. The publications team includes a 25 member editorial advisory board who deliver insight and opinion. The company also produces two award winning podcasts (live on Thursday and Friday mornings at 8:00 AM Pacific). Each year, HRExaminer delivers the market benchmark report on the evolution of Intelligent tools in HRTechnology.

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