

Solving Employee Eldercare Challenges

If you have found it difficult to address the productivity and management problems of employees with elder caregiving challenges, a new business may serve as your “front door” for solving these issues.

You have no doubt heard of the coming “age wave” - Americans are living longer and the number of older adults is steadily increasing. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Workplace Forecast of 2004-2005 indicated that the two most important demographic trends impacting the workplace are the growth in the number of workers with eldercare responsibilities and the growth in the number of workers with both childcare and eldercare responsibilities. According to SHRM, over 90% of companies surveyed expect an increase in the number of employees caring for elderly relatives. In 2007, almost 22 million workers in the United States cared for parents or other elders (AARP web site, 2007).

Elder care is not like child care. Think of how often you have seen family photos of employees including their children. Now think of how often these employees display photos of their parents and other aging relatives. For parents, children are hope; we help them grow, learn and experience life. We do not expect to watch them face the physical, emotional, financial and health challenges an adult child as elder caregiver will face.

Your employed elder caregivers will rarely entertain open discussion about the needs of their elderly relative until a crisis occurs. When this happens, they are then catapulted from being fairly oblivious to elder care issues to being in the

midst of an eldercare crisis that disrupts work, family, finances, health, marriage and other relationships.

You may have witnessed some of the work and productivity-related burdens employed caregivers of the elderly face: missing full and partial days of work, taking more time off work, experiencing additional interruptions and distractions at work, being unable to take on additional projects, travel, or even well-deserved promotions. These elder caregiving responsibilities affect a worker's health, finances, family and social life; all of which **result in lost productivity at work.**

How much are the costs in lost productivity solely due to elder caregiving by businesses in the United States? According to a study by the MetLife Mature Institute, **the costs are up to 34 billion annually.**

Employee assistance program experts, along with company benefit and human resource professionals, are noticing that eldercare is "becoming the new childcare" with regards to helping employees balance work/life challenges.

Employees as Caregivers

A National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP study in 1997 showed that for 40% of caregivers surveyed, caregiving affected their ability to advance in their jobs. The subsequent lost wages then affect the ability to save for retirement (National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, 1997).

In regards to health care concerns, it was learned as early as 1988 that employees caregiving for older adults were 20% more likely to see their physicians than employees who are not providing care to the elderly (Dellman-

Jenkins: Creedon, 1988). Additional research links caregiver stress with increased risk of depression and anxiety, diminished immune responses, slower wound healing and a greater incidence of hospitalization, sleeplessness, and weight gain or loss. A study focusing on dementia found caregivers of those with this cognitive impairment **experienced almost three times the stress symptoms** when compared with other caregivers; they were also more likely to report using prescription drugs (Azaroff & Scharlach, 1988).

Moore, founder of FamilyCare America Inc. and the National Caregivers Library, states the following impact on health care costs of working caregivers:

- 50% report 8 additional visits per year to a health care provider (for themselves) as a result of their caregiving responsibilities
- 22% report a significant impact on their own health
- 75% of working caregivers report an adverse affect on their own health

As maintained by the Society for Human Resource Management's 2003 Eldercare Survey, **absenteeism is the number one problem among employees having caregiving responsibilities**. Of those participating in the survey, 62% have seen partial day absenteeism due to older adult caregiving and 59% have seen full day absenteeism. Stress & absenteeism in the workplace for those caring for elderly relatives (that live a long distance away) results in workers missing at least 15 million workdays each year.

The average working caregiver spends approximately two hours on the phone communicating with medical professionals and any home care agency

used to coordinate care, along with the four to five calls received per day from her elder or the hired home caregiver (“Caregiving vs. Career,” 2003).

In these most difficult economic times, a ten percent (10%) reduction in employee population might be welcomed by some. However, how welcome would that be if the choice of employees leaving your company were not in the control of management? How difficult would it be to replace your age 40-45+ workers, those with the most intellectual capital and experience, when they themselves decide they must resign their jobs to care for an elderly family member? According to Greene, 2006, nine percent (9%) of family caregivers quit their jobs of their own choosing due to these eldercare issues, **costing employers about \$6.6 billion a year.**

Corporate Productivity Loss

The responsibilities of elder caregiving have a direct impact on employee productivity and on those who work with them. **According to companies that have surveyed their employees, 20% to 30% of them found employees balancing work and elder care issues** (Dellman-Jenkins, 1994).

The main areas of corporate productivity loss according to John Paul Marosy, President of Bringing Elder Care Home, are:

- 1) **Employee productivity** – replacement of employees who burn out or terminate; absenteeism, partial absenteeism, workday interruptions.
- 2) **Management-administrative costs** – supervisory costs related to time and impact of additional stress on managers and supervisors who are

often ill equipped to manage the personnel productivity issues related to workers' caregiver responsibilities.

3) **Health care, including mental health** – costs for caregivers under a physician's care, associated with treatment for anxiety and depression, and employee assistance programs.

Additional costs incurred include loss of human capital when caregivers turn down promotions, transfers and extra projects; missed meetings and business trips and the reduction in employee continuing education.

Eldercare and Corporate Culture

Employees with eldercare problems need to see the support of management as well as feeling acceptance in the organization's corporate culture. Without it, the employed elder caregivers are not helped, nor will the employer see the value in the eldercare related program investments. Research shows that when management demonstrates an understanding of the value of a healthy family life, it can increase employee commitment. When employed caregivers are able to share their problems with co-workers and supervisors, learn from their caregiving experiences or become aware of programs that can provide them with solutions, they reported work/life satisfaction, improved productivity and less stress.

Corporate Eldercare Solutions

Eldercare in the workplace continues to be a hidden problem. Even when the problems related to caregiving of an elder is acknowledged by human resources, the depth of the impact on the employee and on productivity is often

underestimated. A corporation offering targeted employee eldercare assistance based on their specific employee concerns may lead to gains in employee loyalty, morale, retention and commitment; a boost in employee candidate levels, and a reduction turnover, **all of which help lead to increased productivity.**

Corporate Eldercare Solutions, llc is in the business of helping companies realize the costs related to their unaddressed employee eldercare challenges and then provide them with solutions to help enhance productivity and relieve employee stress and its related health issues.

Via a baseline diagnostic **Employee Eldercare Needs Analysis**, Corporate Eldercare Solutions llc will provide practical and revenue-preserving answers for businesses that want to enhance productivity, retention, recruitment and morale, and at the same time reduce turnover and the employee stress that so often leads to increased health care costs. Solutions to employee eldercare challenges help to increase the quality of employee work/life issues.

The outcome of a customized employee eldercare needs analysis will educate and provide solutions for human resource professionals, employee assistance experts, corporate (executive suite) leaders and employed elder caregivers to the deeper realizations of financial, personal, health, and career loss risks associated with “employee as elder caregiver.”

To begin your customized employee eldercare needs analysis, contact Veronica Woldt, owner of Corporate Eldercare Solutions llc, today. Veronica can be reached via email at veronica@corporateeldercaresolutions.com, or phone at 414-763-6333.

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