

## **Workplace COVID 19 Fatigue**

With the onset of COVID 19, there has been a transformation to the accustomed way of life in the workplace. For the most part, employees have had to make some adjustments to workplace practices. It is now a case of it not being business as usual. This has caused some personal inconvenience to workers. Moreover, it has created a level of fear and suspicion on the part of individual employee of their colleagues, customers, suppliers and service providers, who may be suspected of having been exposed or in contact with a person who has contracted the COVID 19 virus. This has brought about a safety and health consciousness, which has informed the new normal in the workplace setting.

The changes in the workplace have invariably made a difference with how employees relate to each other within the work space. There has been some change made to the customary closeness which workers enjoyed, as they are as far as possible and practical, required to maintain social distancing. This requirement can pose some difficulties for the operations within some workplace and place a level of pressure, stress and frustration on workers. The fact remains that within the operations of some enterprises, it is almost inevitable to prevent workers from coming into contact or entering the personal space of others on a daily and routine basis.

It is for this purpose that workers tend to feel and suffer some form of inconvenience as they undertake to comply with the protocol of maintaining social distancing. The stark reality is that social distancing is neither practical nor possible in all workplaces. If the authorities were to be stringent in the enforcement of the COVID 19 protocols, it is quite possible that many small and micro businesses would have their operations shut down and employees thrown out of work.

The inconvenience suffered may extend to workers having to work in an unfavourable environment. With there being a need to have a greater level of ventilation, the possibility exists that some employers may resort to shutting down the air-conditioning. While this may be desirable and the action well intended, the result can be that employees may be left to work in unbearable hot conditions. This is likely to contribute to low productivity and the creation of tensions that causes the employer a source of stress.

While the use of the standing and ceiling fans is the recommended alternative to the use of air-conditioning, it should be also be noted that the operation of standing and ceiling fans in a dusty environment and a high traffic area can prove to be counterproductive, as the circulation of dust can be intensified. This presents a further challenge to workers and customers. This evidence of this can present itself in the many one door stores, shops and other business places, some of which can have between five and ten employees.

The stress created in the observance of the COVID 19 protocols is heightened for employees who worked in the backend of business operations. In short, those who are working in warehousing and storerooms could be more than challenged than other employees. It can be demanding of

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them as they work to comply with the measures and restrictions in an already stressful environment. Therefore, workers who are in this position are likely to feel the pressures exerted on them to remain complainant. This brings to the fore the need for employers to work with their employees in taking a careful look at what are the best precautionary measures and practices to be implemented within the respective workplaces.

The enforcement of the wearing of masks and that of regular handsanitizing are practices which most workers hope would become a thing of the past. When all is taken into consideration, workers are more prone to endure psychological stress and mental fatigue from having to work in the abnormal environment. There is no getting away from the fact that these are abnormal times, but it cannot be ignored that the forced changes imposed on workplaces include personal restrictions. The induced level of fear amongst individuals regarding their safety and health, have the potential to make today's workplace unproductive, uneasy and uncomfortable for both employees and customers.

Workers and customers alike are facing up to the fact that the constant disruption in business activity due to someone at the workplace having come into contact with a suspected COVID 19 infected person, is not good for the psyche of the members of staff, customers and clients. The issue of stigmatization raises its ugly head and this alone is enough contribute to the increase incidence of absenteeism, sick leave and the turnover of staff. We need also to make mention of the decline in customer service and the draw back from the interface between customers and workers. The absent of this is never good for business.

The bigger issue which is likely to have a devastating impact on workers, is the intention of employers to violate their right of choice, by insisting that they are vaccinated against COVID 19. There can also be the insistence that workers subject themselves to mandatory testing on a routine basis. The implications of these approaches reside in the threat impose on the right of the individual to work and to freely choose work. These are issues which need to be immediately and decisively address. Employers ought to move beyond their shortsightedness and recognize that they can be no business activity without workers. Employers need not to be reminded that even in the days of forced labour, the survival of capital depended on the demand for labour for its existence. It would be unwise for employers to think that their business could survive without labour.

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