

# Haven Herald



## How to Deal with Loss in the Workplace

by Janice Moody

There are three points of view to consider when dealing with loss in the workplace:

- The worker who has lost someone and must process their grief.
- The co-worker who wants to support their colleague.
- The employer who needs to deal with the employee's grief.

Karen Bussen in her article, "Grief at Work: Navigating the Office After a Loss" (online at [myfarewelling.com](http://myfarewelling.com)) offers some excellent practical advice.

### **For the employee grieving:**

"Remember that your team members and others may not know how you feel. If you find you need support, do not be ashamed to say so. Tell at least one person...and let them help you get the message out."

### **For the co-worker offering support:**

"First and foremost, share your sympathy. A simple, hand-written card left on their desk can be a meaningful and much-appreciated way to express your solidarity and support."

### **For the employer:**

"Create a thoughtful grief policy and make it part of your business. Send something to the family. Schedule a support meeting for your grieving staff member. Make a list of websites, podcasts, books or other helpful services. Be patient."

Whether you are the grieving worker, the co-worker, or the employer, it takes everyone showing compassion, understanding, and patience to help deal with loss in the workplace.

## Letter from the Executive Director

The spring brings beauty and light. In general, it is a season most people look forward to and enjoy, however, for those who are grieving, spring can be confusing and unsettling. The mood of grief does not line up with sunshine and flowers, so, in certain ways, the winter is safer and easier to maneuver. Finding those comfortable, calming spaces of spring can keep you from being overwhelmed. Narrowing the focus to familiar places that are quiet such as a garden or park you have enjoyed in the past might be a better decision during this time.

Haven will be a busy place this spring as we welcome new volunteers and plan for our spring and summer programs. We have fully opened up again after three years. It is a good feeling.

The topic for this newsletter is loss of a co-worker. This can be a very difficult loss to process, especially if the relationship was long or the death was sudden and traumatic such as an accident or suicide. It is very important to talk about the loss with people you feel safe with. Sharing stories, memorializing the person or possibly getting professional help are all things to consider. Do not isolate or deny your feelings with this loss. Find something that works for you.

Jill Bellacicco

## What Worked for Me

Haven volunteers - Thinking of you all as you mourn the loss of a dear friend and volunteer Orv Grimes. I have fond memories of Orv in our training class and also when I volunteered at Haven. The world has lost a very special person. Much Love to All – Mary Keegan

As I write this, it's been almost a year. I remember the day we all learned Anne Geer had died. We called each other – friendships solidified through years of volunteering together. Reaching out to console one another. We are trained to help others work through their grief; now, one of our own long-serving colleagues was gone.

Anne was so much more than a colleague. She had volunteered at Haven for over 30 years. She managed the bookkeeping, the yearly Volunteer Appreciation luncheon, the furniture upholstery; the plant watering and so much more. For over 25 years, we sat next to each other in the phone room every Thursday. We loved as only sisters could, and yes, we sometimes fought as only sisters would. But we always respected each other's opinion. Anyone who really knew Anne would soon discover that beneath the strong exterior was a very gentle, vulnerable, special Lady.

She and her beloved husband, Don, had experienced the most unspeakable of losses – their first born to cancer when he was just a lad, and a tragic accident that ended the life of their other son in the prime of his life. Then ten years ago, Anne was diagnosed with cancer. Undeterred, Anne continued to come to Haven throughout the grueling treatments. Sadly, the cancer returned with a vengeance last year.

For many months it was gut-wrenching walking the path to Haven's door, knowing Anne would no longer be there to greet me, to talk with, to share laughter and tears with, to confide in.

When I think of Anne now, I remember those beautiful eyes smiling at the possibility of a tomorrow filled with hope for a better future. In spite of all she had experienced, or maybe because of it, she never stopped looking for the joy and promise of a life well-lived. She was an inspiration, and so even as we continue to miss her every day, we find solace in her perseverance. – Stephanie James

I knew Anne Geer for almost ten years. We shared space in the phone room, along with our other co-volunteers and we called our group "The Thursday Girls".

Through the years, I came to really care for Anne. We did not always share the same views, but I admired the strength of her convictions, her many talents, and especially her courage and resilience in facing the personal tragedies life had handed her.

Sadly, COVID came along and interrupted our longstanding Thursday routine, her accident and rehab followed, and that chapter at Haven ended.

And then one day Anne was gone. Not just from Haven but from life, and although it shouldn't have felt like such a shock, it still did. I regretted not keeping in closer contact and of course not being able to say goodbye. I felt the ongoing need to do something with these feelings and after several months, one day I had an idea.

Over the years, Anne had given me two very thoughtful gifts. One was a lovely quilt she made with a book theme, as our group shared a lot about our reading, and another was a "grandma" cup when my first grandchild was born because she said I was the most excited grandma she had ever seen.

I chose a beautiful sunny day. I grabbed a beach chair and drove to the cemetery. I found her grave, wrapped myself in the quilt, and drank tea from the cup. I talked to her out loud. I told her all that I wanted her to know. All that I did not get the chance to say. At one point I cried, and at another I laughed right out loud. I also got some interesting looks from passers-by.

It was peaceful, it was healing, it was what I had hoped it would be, and it is what worked for me. – Mary Gunst

I've tried to write down my feelings about Don Reagan's death eighteen months ago, but words don't come. His was the first truly unexpected death among people close to me. I am sad, sorry for so much unsaid, and still stunned. His absence remains with me. - Moira Roberts

*Grieving together  
will help heal the wounds  
they left behind.*

## Boundaries in the Workplace by Kathleen Sebek

Boundaries in the workplace can be challenging during times of loss. The regular behaviors as set forth through Human Resources (HR) may not address how we interact with each other during a painful time. For most activities, there are reasonable and safe guidelines. Addressing grief in the workplace can be fraught with land mines. We want to address the griever, but we still must be aware of the need to protect self, griever and organization.

We will undoubtedly experience awkwardness. Many of us are afraid to address the griever's loss at all. We somehow expect that there is the perfect thing we can say that will alleviate the other's pain. There is not. There are simply no words. Avoidance often makes the griever feel more isolated and unwelcome. Some grievers, however, do not want to discuss their loss. So, what do we do? Here are a few suggestions that I have gathered from grievers.

- Greet your co-worker and acknowledge their loss. "I'm sorry" is often enough.
- If you are comfortable discussing the loss, let them know you are available to talk. Talking about our losses is basic and necessary. Be prepared for rejection.
- Think about what you are safely able to hear for your own self-interest.
- Do not talk about your individual losses unless asked. The conversation is not about us.
- Be a reflective and compassionate listener.
- Many loss stories seem illogical. Do not question them.
- Do not offer advice; be gentle in your approach; be gentle to you too.
- If you have serious concerns about the griever's mental health, talk to your HR people immediately. It is not unusual for mourners to talk about not wanting to live, but that does not mean they are considering suicide.
- You may be tearful. If you cry, is that ok? Ask yourself what your tears are about and for whom.
- Be aware of your limitations, needs and motivations.
- Hug or not hug? I am guessing this is well spelled out for you through your organizations.
- Be non-judgmental.
- Recognize that no matter how distraught or fragile we may appear, we are generally strong.
- Understand that grief is not a problem to be solved but a process that takes time and attention.



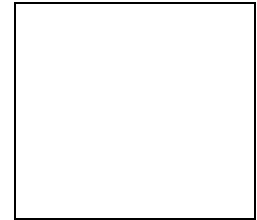
### HOW HAVEN IS FUNDED

Haven is classified by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. It is funded mainly by donations from individuals in the community who wish to support our work and by those who donate in memory of a loved one. Donations are tax deductible. If you are interested in making a donation, please contact Haven at (703) 941-7000 or at [havenofnova@verizon.net](mailto:havenofnova@verizon.net)

Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

4606 Ravensworth Road

Annandale, Virginia 22003



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## **Spring Schedule**

### **Widow/Widower/Partner Loss**

*Free Four-week Grief Support Group*

Spring 2023 group is forming

### **Parent Loss Workshop**

*Free Grief Support Group*

Spring group is forming

Group size will be limited

Call or email Haven to register for the groups.

Drop-in Suicide Loss Support Group

1st and 3rd Saturdays of each month

11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

*Haven also offers individual support by phone and in person; please call to schedule an appointment. For immediate support without an appointment, a volunteer is available on a walk-in basis Monday through Friday between 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.*

### **Contact Information**

Haven of Northern Virginia

4606 Ravensworth Road

Annandale, Virginia 22003

Phone: (703) 941-7000

Fax: (703) 941-7003

E-mail: [havenofnova@verizon.net](mailto:havenofnova@verizon.net)

### **Hours of Operation**

Monday through Friday

9:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

[www.havenofnova.org](http://www.havenofnova.org)

Messages may be left on our voicemail after hours