Death of an Employee

Resource Guide for Supervisors

The death of an employee is a traumatic event that may greatly affect the office. Whether the death arose from a prolonged illness or a sudden event, some employees will experience feelings of grief and loss. As a supervisor, it's important to be aware of this and prepared for how to support your staff. On a practical level, there are also numerous issues that must be addressed, including informing the staff, covering the employee's work, and working with HR to finalize compensation and benefit payments to the estate and beneficiaries.

Immediate Response and Communication

If death (or serious accident/illness) occurs at work:

- Call 911, do not move the body.
- Collect the employee's emergency contact information to notify the next of kin – if you don't know who the emergency contact is, contact HR at 816-235-1621.
  - A manager who knew the employee may be the most appropriate person to make the call, or sometimes a colleague who knows the family well may volunteer.
  - You or another university representative may wish to meet the family at the hospital or mortuary.
- Contact the Worker's Compensation Coordinator to report injury or illness at 573-882-7019.
- Notify employees/executives with most critical need to know first, including HR
- Employees must not make any statements regarding a loss to the press or anyone other than the members of or as directed by:
  - Campus Business Services office
  - Campus Police Department
  - Office of Risk & Insurance Management
  - Office of the General Counsel

If death occurs outside of work:

- Notify employees/executives with most critical need to know first, including HR
- If the employee passed away in the hospital or other location away from work, someone from the family will likely contact you. Here are some things to cover in that conversation:
  - Extend condolences.
  - Ask for as much information as the family is comfortable giving.
  - Inquire about service arrangements or ask for the name of a contact person who can provide funeral details when known.
  - Ask if work colleagues may attend the service; the family might want only a small group of immediate relatives to participate.
  - Determine the family's wishes regarding remembrance (e.g. flowers, charitable contributions) and where sympathy cards should be sent.
  - Provide family with the phone number for Human Resources, 816-235-1621. Let them know that we would be happy to talk to or meet with them at their convenience to discuss benefit matters. While some families may want to delay this discussion until

after the funeral, others may find this information useful prior to making arrangements and covering final expenses.

Notifying Employees

- Upon death, notify remaining employees
  - Remember to contact staff who may be away or on leave.
  - You might want to add a few words about your favorite memory of the person or how that person had an impact on you. You might also want to prepare a formal statement in the event that the employee was well known professionally.
  - Communicate the family's wishes in regards to flowers or donations in lieu of flowers.
  - Designate an internal contact person for employees who have any questions or concerns, to prevent employees from trying to contact the family directly.
- Remind employees that UMKC's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) with Optum's Live and Work Well EAP program, has counselors available to talk them through the stress and grief they might experience. The number is 866-248-4094.
  - The EAP is also available to work groups that may have been directly affected by the employee's death.
  - Contact the EAP to discuss the needs of the work group to determine the type of debriefing or intervention available.
- Provide grieving employees time off as needed (immediately if they witnessed the death) preferably on a paid basis.

Keeping Business Moving

- Arrange to intercept and redirect phone, voicemail, email and mail communications.
- Find out the open items, major issues, and immediate tasks that were associated with the person.
  - Once you have this information, you will need to meet with your staff and figure out how to distribute the person's work.
  - You will also need to discover as much information about any future appointments or commitments.
- Work with HRF to begin termination processing following normal procedures (outline below).
- As the manager, expect the death of an employee to result in lower productivity and motivation for a brief time. The debriefing held soon after the announcement will ease the impact of loss, but it cannot be avoided entirely. Eventually the work unit will return to its normal level of functioning.

Planning for Funeral/Memorial Service

- Determine if flowers should be sent and where they are to be sent according to family's wishes.
  - Donations may be requested in lieu of flowers, communicate to employees as appropriate.
- Consider impact of time off on business but also recognize that many employees may feel a need to attend the service, be flexible and provide paid time off if at all possible.

Termination Processing with Human Resources

In the event of an employee death, you will work with the Human Resources Office to ensure payment for deceased employees and proper closure of the employee file.

<u>Employee's Department</u>
Human Resources Facilitator
Department HRF will be responsible for the following:

- Submits ePAF and complete all necessary documents to terminate employee's employment. This ePAF will include:
  - Name of deceased
  - Date of death
- Contact Chancellor and Provost (if applicable) Office and provide the following information:
  - Name of deceased
  - Date of death
  - Title and Unit of the deceased
  - Funeral Arrangement information

*If Human Resources Office is contacted directly by the employee's family, information above will be recorded and shared with the employee's department HRF for termination process to be completed.

<u>Human Resources Office</u>
Once the Human Resources Office has been notified of an employee death, the office will be responsible for coordinating the termination paperwork and the following activities:

Total Rewards Consultant
Will be responsible for the following:

- Contacting the beneficiary on the Life Insurance.
- Provide beneficiary with information on AD&D Insurance Policy and Health Flexible Spending Account where applicable.
- Instruct beneficiary on who to contact for information regarding Investment Programs and University of Missouri Pension Plans.
- Contacting the family for a marriage certificate and birth certificates for all of the surviving children.

Human Resources Operations
Once ePAF is executed, the following is completed automatically by HR Operations:

- Changing taxation to allow exemption from federal and state taxes (and city taxes as appropriate).
- Changing disposition of check to be held at the Payroll Office for proper. authorization (Certified Copy or original Court Order) to release check.
- Wages are reported on the W-2 in the employee's name.
- Instructing the family to contact Probate Court of the County in which the deceased employee resided in order to obtain deceased employee's outstanding payroll check(s).

- Provide Probate Court (upon court's request) with date(s) and net amount(s) of payroll check(s).
- Upon presentation of proper authorization, releasing check(s) to next of kin and instructing proper endorsement of check(s) based upon wording in court document.

NOTE: If the employee dies and then the wages due along with any vacation balance is paid the next calendar year, the payment is made by Accounting through Accounts Payable. Check is issued to spouse using spouse's social security number (or to person designated in Order from Probate Court) and reported on 1099 MISC, Box 3.