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FOREVER

“OUR COMMITMENT TO CONTINUOUS
LEARNING AND INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP
ARE THE CORNERSTONES OF SUCCESS
AND OUR LEGACY TO THE FUTURE”

LEIGH GANNON
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HURT LOCKER

Past experiences shape our actions in the present and this is true for victims of domestic abuse. Trauma experts like Bessel van der Kolk and Gabor Maté have extensively studied how previous trauma can manifest in various aspects of life, including the workplace. Van der Kolk, evidences how trauma affects the brain and body, leading to symptoms such as increased anxiety, hyper-vigilance and difficulty in trusting others (Van der Kolk, 2014). Maté emphasises how trauma often leads to coping mechanisms that can disrupt daily functioning (Maté, 2010).

"AN EMPLOYEE WHO HAS EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC ABUSE MIGHT UNCONSCIOUSLY REPLICATE SIMILAR BEHAVIOURS, LEADING TO CONFLICTS AND A TOXIC WORK ENVIRONMENT"



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Unresolved trauma often leads individuals to unconsciously display abusive behaviours towards others, a phenomenon succinctly captured by the phrase "hurt people hurt people." (Wilson, 2001). By addressing these underlying issues through compassionate interventions that simultaneously challenge and disrupt inappropriate interpersonal dynamics, organisations can help individuals heal and prevent further harm. The development of awareness is the cornerstone of an effective support system for domestic abuse victims inhabiting organisations. It would serve employers well to develop safeguarding champions, staff members specially trained to identify and facilitate situations rooted in domestic abuse. These champions are a point of contact for victims and provide guidance and support to employees affected. Practical training for line managers should cover hygiene factors such as how to approach suspected victims, maintain confidentiality and provide initial support. Role-playing scenarios and case studies can be effective training tools, helping managers practice their responses in a safe environment. Additionally, creating a network of safeguarding champions can ensure that there is always someone available to offer support, regardless of the time or situation. The development of this capability however requires facilitation and training to ensure those in a support or safeguarding role are skilled, confident and receive support themselves for this additional role they play to ensure organisational wellbeing. A robust domestic abuse support policy is vital. This policy needs to be comprehensive and address both in-office and remote working scenarios. Key elements of an effective support policy include: *Clear response procedures for disclosure*: Establishing a straightforward process for handling disclosures of abuse to include guidelines on how to respond to victims, be sensitive to confidentiality and provide immediate nurturing support. *Safety measures*: Implementing safety measures to protect victims, providing a safe space to discuss their situation, arranging for emergency accommodation if necessary and access to legal and medical assistance. Additionally,

the development of partnerships with medical services, emergency responders and charitable organisations can provide victims with access to help. Safety measures could also include protocols for ensuring the physical safety of victims within the workplace. This can involve arranging for secure transportation to and from work, providing safe spaces within the office for victims to make confidential phone calls and working with security personnel to ensure that victims are protected from their abusers while at work. *Information on resources*: Providing victims with information about available resources and services, both within the organisation and externally. This can include contact details for local community support, helplines and therapeutic services. *Support for remote workers*: Ensuring support policies extend to employees who work from home. This can include regular check-ins, virtual support groups, and access to the same resources as in-office counterparts.

"ADDRESSING DOMESTIC
ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE
IS NOT JUST A LEGAL
OBLIGATION, IT'S A MORAL
IMPERATIVE"

Employers can leverage employee benefits to support victims of domestic abuse. Financial assistance programmes, counselling services and flexible working arrangements are examples of benefits that can make a significant difference. Creating a designated platform for these resources ensures that employees can easily access the help they need. Financial assistance programmes can provide victims with the means to leave their abusers and secure safe accommodation. Counselling services can offer emotional support and help victims cope with the trauma of abuse. Flexible working arrangements can allow victims to attend court appointments, counselling sessions, or medical appointments without fear of losing their job or income. Incorporating a variety of somatic practices into workplace wellness

programmes can significantly benefit both individuals who have experienced abuse and those affected by the undercurrents these individuals bring into the workplace. Practices that help individuals to work with their bodies such as yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong, dance and movement therapy, breathwork and massage can help to mitigate the effects of unresolved trauma and foster a more harmonious workplace. Somatic practices, like breathwork, will help individuals reconnect with their bodies, manage stress, anxiety and generate more human-centred conditions for interpersonal connection and compassion. These can also bring calm to the nervous system, reduce hyper-vigilance and improve interpersonal responses. Offering weekly yoga sessions, mindfulness meditation, and/or breathwork can provide employees with a safe space to process their emotions and release tension, thereby limiting the effects of unresolved pain which can result the unconscious infliction of abusive acts on others in the workplace. Employers play a crucial role in supporting victims of domestic abuse. By implementing robust policies, training staff, and seeking out available resources, organisations can provide the necessary support to help employees escape dangerous situations. Continued awareness and proactive measures are essential to ensure the safety and well-being of all employees. Employers must act now to create a safer, more supportive work environment. Addressing domestic abuse in the workplace is not just a legal obligation, it's a moral imperative. By taking proactive steps to support victims, employers can create a culture of safety and compassion, helping to break the cycle of abuse and providing a lifeline to those in need. It is essential to protect the organisation from the hidden effects of abuse that may impact colleagues and the workplace environment. By fostering a balanced approach that considers the needs of both victims and the broader organisation, employers can ensure a productive and harmonious work environment where all employees can thrive.

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