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Melt Away Those Holiday Blues

For most people, the holiday season is a joyous time of year filled with parties, shopping, gift exchanges and social gatherings. The holidays are generally festive, cheerful and create an opportunity for friends and family to celebrate. With all this fun going on, who wants to work? Probably not many of us, but we still need to get the job done despite the holidays and all their inherent distractions.

Even the most positive events may create stress and unfortunately, holidays are one of those times. You're faced with buying gifts on an already-stretched budget; trying to shop while meeting job deadlines and other responsibilities; and worrying about family dynamics that get played out each year.

Some employees may have a hard time coping with this time of year. Stress and depression, if not dealt with and treated properly, can affect an employee's overall work performance. For these employees, it may be a time filled with sadness, self-reflection, loneliness and anxiety. Balancing the demands of shopping, parties, family obligations and houseguests may contribute to feelings of being overwhelmed and increasingly tense. Others may experience post-holiday sadness after New Year's Day which can result from built-up expectations and disappointments from the previous year coupled with fatigue.

Problems related to the holiday blues take a serious toll on employee productivity, an issue that costs employers millions of dollars every year. The good news is that there are effective ways for employers to help control the negative impact the holidays may cause.

- In order to gain a better understanding of how your employees may be affected, review the state of your business prior to and after the holiday season. Review the numbers and employee absence data to determine if and how your business has suffered.
- Create a plan before identified issues recur. If you see a seasonal increase in attendance issues, think about putting attendance incentives in place. Consider offering a bonus or gift for perfect attendance.
- Focus on employee resources. People are more productive when they have fewer projects. Examine business priorities and projects. Are there certain activities that have higher priority and others that can be put off?

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- Find a healthy balance between holiday work and play. Manage the frequency of holiday celebrations in the workplace. Allowing employees to acknowledge the holidays is a wonderful way to boost co-worker camaraderie and employee morale. However, too many parties can distract employees from their work and exacerbate holiday burnout.

Dr. Seligman, a researcher and proponent of the psychology of happiness, says that happiness has three essential components:

- 1) The ability to savor life's pleasures.
- 2) A true engagement with one's work, avocations and loved ones.
- 3) The sense that one is serving a larger purpose beyond one's self.

Whenever we focus on something greater than ourselves, especially the well-being of others, our sense of satisfaction and peace grows exponentially. So give to yourself this year and watch your stress and anxiety melt away. You may find that your employer and the people around you will get exactly what they want – a productive and engaged employee, a cheerful friend and an enjoyable family member.

Sources: Medicine Net: "Holiday Depression and Stress", PR News Now: "All I Want for the Holidays...", and All Things Workplace: "A Final Thought on Holiday Happiness".