

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

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A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: WORKERS' COMPENSATION –TEMPORARY DISABILITY – SUPERVISING MODIFIED WORK

Like it or not, the supervisor's role is an important part of the modified work process; extra responsibility is triggered by having an injured employee working for you.

The primary responsibility is for the supervisor to know what restrictions that the doctor has placed on the injured worker, and to monitor those restrictions as they change during the course of recovery. Open lines of communication with the injured worker, the employer's HR department, and the claims examiner are all essential. As the recovery proceeds, the restrictions can change.

Beyond that, the supervisor's role is that of "the protector." First of all they have to protect the employer by making sure that the modified work really can be performed within the work restrictions. They have to make sure that the injured worker is not forgotten and allowed to linger in the modified position into perpetuity. (The worst YCPARMIA example was a person that was put in a light duty courier position for a year and a half.)

Secondly, they have to protect the co-workers that might have extra duties fall on them because the injured worker is not able to carry a full load. You don't want to trade one recovering injured worker for a new injured worker.

Thirdly, and the most difficult, the supervisor has to protect the injured worker from themselves. There is a tendency with some injured workers to do more than they should. It is a form of "self-modifying" their work with more attention given to what needs to be done rather than what they should do under their work restrictions. The doctor's restrictions are designed to gradually move the injured employee back to full duty – a work hardening process. If the injured worker is allowed to work beyond those restrictions they are risking re-injury or a delay in the recovery process. As a general rule, an injured worker cannot be trusted to monitor their own compliance with work restrictions.

An employee's psyche can be a delicate thing following a work injury. They might feel like "damaged goods" and that they are not carrying their usual share of the work load. It is important that the supervisor continually check-in with the worker, not only to find out how they are doing physically, but also emotionally. Many employers understand the importance of this continuing contact with injured workers and require that supervisors contact injured workers regularly while they are temporarily disabled and after they return to modified work. The worker needs to hear that they are valued and that it is understood and accepted that they are going through a recovery process.

A different problem that a supervisor might encounter is the unmotivated or malingering worker. That will be our next topic.

Next topic: Workers' Compensation – Temporary Disability – Malingering