

# Rose Consulting Group Client Newsletter

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**Depression is the most costly of all ailments that affect work productivity because depressed people still show up for work.**

**It's their performance while at work that suffers—and most employers don't recognize the problem.**

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Depression is not always a popular topic of conversation because, frankly, it is depressing. For many people it seems to have very little to do with business.

However, depression is most definitely a business-relevant topic. Here are some statistics. Depression affects about 19 million Americans annually, and is estimated to contribute to half of all suicides. About 5-10 percent of women and 2-5 percent of men will experience at least one major depressive episode during their adult life. Lets get specific.... employers lose an estimated \$44 billion every year due to workers with clinical depression.

What is depression? "Depression" is a broad category of feelings and behavior with many causes and many manifestations. In most cases it manifests itself with a loss of happiness and enthusiasm and a loss of energy. It is usually accompanied by irritability and withdrawal. Simple depression can be due to problems in personal life or a chemical imbalance or some combination of the above. It may have a sudden onset. It can, however, take over gradually so that the depressed person may not recognize what is happening. While it usually has a bad mood associated with it, some people only notice a loss of energy.

Depression can be caused or triggered by a number of things. For example, certain types of depression runs in families, and people with certain personality traits are more likely to become depressed. Difficult life events, loss,

stress, and change, can all trigger depression as well as some medical conditions and even vitamin deficiencies. There are no easy answers to the causes, but the symptoms are clear. People who are depressed will often perform poorly at work and be mis-diagnosed as having lost interest in work, become lazy, using drugs, etc. In some cases a potentially good performer is fired rather than treated. In this newsletter we will talk about recognizing depression in employees and how to deal with the problem without being intrusive.

Here are some ways you can diagnose depression in coworkers. None of these are necessarily depression but they are common signs of the depression:

- 1. Sudden change in performance** – If Bill was a good worker for two months and then began to slide you may be seeing the "honeymoon" effect, i.e., people often put on their best behavior for a few months and then revert to their normal bad habits. If Bill as a good worker for two years and then began to slide, there is a cause for that change.
- 2. Sudden change in appearance** – Some people tend to be careless about their appearance. But if an employee or coworker has always looked professional and suddenly becomes careless about their hair and overall neatness—that is a possible indicator that something is wrong. Another indicator is a significant gain or loss of weight.

3. **Disconnectedness** – You have no doubt been in meetings where some formerly enthusiastic team members seems “disconnected” in a way you can’t quite put your finger on. We have heard people say, “it looked like an inability to concentrate or focus on the task at hand”.
4. **Atypical irritability** – We are all irritated at times, some of us more than other. If the irritability noticeably increases or turns to anger it could signal a problem.
5. **Open plea for help** Sometimes people will directly say that they feel bad or make hints about life not being worth living, etc.

What should you do if you see these signs?

1. **Decide who should be involved.** You may not be comfortable with helping the person directly but feel his/her boss should not ignore what you are seeing.
2. **Don’t play psychologist.** Even if you think you see all of the signs above there may be other reasons than depression. And even if the problem is depression you are not qualified to counsel with the person.
3. **Find sources that can help.** You may have internal Employee Assistance Programs that are available through Human Resources. If not you can usually locate a local psychological association who can guide you to a list of approved professionals.

Most family practice physicians will be allied with psychologists they can refer you to.

4. **Be direct.** Most people who are having problems are well aware of it. If you hem and haw about problems you will, at best, not be understood. You may offend or even frighten people with vague comments about “problems.” It’s better to approach the individual directly. “Joe, in the past few months you seem to have lost your focus and enthusiasm. You just don’t seem like the same person. In cases like this I recommend that good performers visit with a psychologist. I’ve checked with some friends and I have names and numbers if you would like.” That’s a tough conversation because you may be rebuffed; more often than not the person will be interested in those numbers. If you notice something wrong the individual is almost certainly aware of it.
5. **Don’t overreact.** Remember that depression is not harmful to others and is not contagious. The only person who will be hurt by depression is the person suffering from it.
6. **Don’t isolate people because they seem to have withdrawn.** If you used to share coffee breaks or lunch with them, continue to include them. If you didn’t normally include them, do so. Don’t assume they want to be alone.... they don’t. Usually they are withdrawing so that others don’t have to share in their bad mood.

## What’s in it for you?

Certainly you are helping the individual. In addition, however, you are helping the company in a bottom line way. Research shows that 77% of those with depression reported some lost performance time at work. And that’s self-report which we all tend to underestimate. Look at it this way, even if an employee is out of commission one hour per day it adds up, e.g., \$50,000 year salary equals approximately \$24/hr. Take that number x 260 (number of work days in a year) = \$6240.

Early detection is key to arresting the rising costs and harmful impact of depression at work. Since depression isn’t always dealt with at home, the workplace is an important avenue for early detection and treatment referral. Depression may take years to treat and some people have to simply learn to cope with long periods of depression. Positive behavior changes, however, are often seen quickly with treatment.

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