

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1072 The Birthday Party That Never Should Have Happened

I keep telling managers that you have to get to know your workers, and it pays to listen to them. I'm Jerry Roberts, and I've got a story on that to prove my claim, today, on The Extra Point.

I saw a story recently that bears out my contention that managers too often ignore what they're told by their workers.

A Kentucky man with an anxiety disorder asked his employer not to celebrate his birthday, as he felt it would cause a panic attack. Did the employer listen? No.

They went merrily ahead and staged a surprise lunchtime party for the employee, Kenneth Berling. Well, Berling got upset over this, and when he protested, bad turned to worse. He was called into a meeting where he was criticized for his reaction. According to the lawsuit, this triggered another panic attack. He was then sent home for two days.

The company then sent him a letter, informing him that he was being terminated over the events of the previous week. The reason for the termination was that he, Berling, had violated the company's "workplace violence policy".

The company CEO stated that Berling was removed from the building quickly to, quoting, "de-escalate the situation." He wasn't allowed back in.

Berling got a lawyer and sued his former employer, alleging disability discrimination and retaliation. The case went to a jury, and they awarded Berling \$450,000, calling the incident an "adverse employment action."

What can we learn from this? First, there are significant mental health issues in America, Guam included. Government mental health facilities have historically been underfunded,

and were grossly unprepared for what Covid-19 brought.

Portland, Oregon-based insurance company The Standard, recently reported that about 46% of the more than 1,400 workers surveyed at the end of last year reported that they were struggling with mental health issues, compared to 39% a year earlier. And more than half of workers — 55% — said a mental health issue has affected them more since the pandemic began.

According to Dr. George James, a licensed marriage and family therapist, many people may not know where to turn for help. He said, "The stigma of mental illness, therapy and mental health at work can keep many employees from using resources."

We've seen survey after survey that clearly shows mental health issues are on the rise, and this isn't just an American problem. It's global.

It includes anxiety, isolation, dealing with toxic workers, injustices, whether real or perceived, financial uncertainty, and the list goes on.

Mental health concerns include lost productivity. In 2010, this was pegged at \$2.5 trillion. It's estimated that this will increase to \$6 trillion by 2030.

Berling's attorney said, "I think the significance for employers is that they need to understand they shouldn't make assumptions about individuals with mental health issues.

Kevin was an exceptional employee that went above and beyond for his employer, and if they would have taken a step back it would have been clear that he did not present any danger at all."

(Con't.)

To cap this off, I'm going to go back to the beginning here when I said managers have to get to know their workers, and listen to them. Berling said he didn't want a birthday celebration. If his employer had complied with his request, none of this may have ever happened. It doesn't get any more basic than that.

These problems are going to be with us. Mental health issues are not going away. Being deaf and blind to them only makes things worse.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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