



### White Paper Series

## Elder Care in the Workplace: Solutions that Work

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As the number of working caregivers rises, employees are increasingly torn between the needs of their families and obligations to their employers; while employers are struggling to understand the needs of these employees in order to maintain the highest organizational productivity. Unresolved eldercare issues culminate in lost productivity.

Providing elder care can be an unexpected rollercoaster of physical, emotional, and financial drains. It is this complex and unpredictable rollercoaster that exemplifies the need for companies to be aware of and prepared for the needs of employees providing care. If employers want to sustain a healthy work environment and the highest level of productivity, they need to support family-friendly policies that include elder care (Yandrick, 2001). Working caregivers state their most common needs as **flexibility in work schedules, information about services** and aging in general, **support from coworkers and supervisors**, and **help in decision-making** about care options and related issues. The most common changes that employed caregivers make include: coming to work late/leaving work early; taking unpaid leaves of absence or using personal or sick days to provide care; refusing relocation or work-related travel; and refusing overtime work or new assignments. The majority of workplace programs that assist caregiving employees were created to enhance **worker recruitment and retention**, to **improve morale** among employees, to promote the company as a “family-friendly” workplace, and because of research about caregiving and demographics (Wagner, 2003).

Workplace culture can have a significant effect on the perception and utilization of eldercare programs. It is essential for the culture to support eldercare programs, benefits, and policies in order for them to be fully accessible to those in need. Effective programs include:

- Flex-time and place.
- In-depth information about community resources, health, and aging on an ongoing basis and in a format that minimizes time required to assess and use resources.
- Professional assistance to help employees make decisions about service options, eligibility, and choices.
- Referrals to elder law professional and services to assist in processing insurance paperwork.
- Care management services for helping design care strategies that are acceptable and appropriate for the care recipient and family caregivers.
- Procedures for the use of workplace programs that respect the privacy of employees and minimize the time required during work hours.
- Programs that reflect the changing cohort needs over time, and new and emerging issues related to a changing workforce. (Wagner, 2003)

These dimensions, however, are not inclusive of all the options, resources, services, and benefits that can easily be incorporated to further enhance eldercare programs. As employers' stake in the older adult population increases, Human Resource managers can help their companies by getting an overview of their employees' current and future elder care responsibilities and then choosing the right mix of benefits and services to help their workers meet those needs (Yandick, 2001).

Wagner, D. L. (2003). Workplace programs for family caregivers: Good business and good practice. Family Caregiver Alliance: San Francisco.  
Yandick, R.M. (2001). Elder care grows up. *HR Magazine*, pp.72-77.