

Helping hands in times of need

If your employees actually had thought bubbles like those displayed by cartoon characters, there's a very good chance that the thoughts in those bubbles — particularly during these trying economic times — would have very little to do with work. While out-of-work issues have very little to do with what happens in your business, they can have a tremendous impact on productivity.

Most managers are ill-equipped to get involved in the personal lives of their employees. It also calls to mind a question of workplace appropriateness as well — does the boss really need to know (and provide advice or assistance for) about family, financial or other personal issues? Moreover, it's a door that few wish to open because it can be very hard to close.

Steve Cook, owner and founder of Capital Chaplains LLC in Middleton, is providing a growing number of capital region companies with a different option: Corporate chaplains.

"Smart business leaders look at people holistically," he says. "They want to know what they can do personally to build relational capital with them."

Cook's business offers a way for businesses to do that without getting involved in all the sticky, personal details. Corporate Chaplains is a for-profit business that's not affiliated with any particular religious denomination. While his staff chaplains are required to be "people of faith," their backgrounds range from ministry to social work and other related fields.

"Ninety to ninety five percent of the work we do is human care, and about five percent is chaplaincy," says Cook, noting that there are about 4,000 corporate chaplains in the collective national workplace. "While we are more than willing to pray with an employee, we will only do so if they ask us to do it."

Generally speaking, companies that enlist Capital Chaplains' help start with a mandatory employee outreach meeting to explain the program and its benefits.

"From that point on, participation is completely optional," says Cook. "We are on site every week providing personal human contact and we get to know the employees; if they want to talk to us, we sit down with them."

Cook says that his chaplains deal with a wide range of problems, from relationship issues to parenting issues and financial struggles. He's also visited employees in the hospi-

tal, helped bridge the cultural gap in assisting employees who were working in this country illegally, performed wedding ceremonies and officiated at an employee funeral.

There are certain things a corporate chaplain will not or cannot do: Hinder employee's ability to accomplish assigned responsibilities; compel a discussion or relationship with any employee; moralize or criticize an employee's conduct; report content of discussions with employees to management or any other party, except where state or federal law requires full disclosure for cases of child abuse or where personal safety is at risk; endorse a specific place of worship, religion or proselytize; make financial loans for any reason; and perform psychological and psychiatric counseling.



Capital Chaplains

7228 Elmwood Ave., Middleton, WI 53562

www.capchaps.org • 608-217-7261

Sponsors of the Chaplain Assistance Program

While the services provided by a corporate chaplain are similar to those provided by an EAP, Cook says there is a big difference.

"One is proactive and the other is reactive," he says. "Corporate chaplains get to know the employees very early on; employees generally don't call on an EAP until they're really in trouble."

He notes that at one Madison company served by Capital Chaplains, EAP participation is generally around 13 to 14 percent, which is actually quite high compared to the national average.

"In contrast, at the same company, participation in the chaplaincy program is between 60 to 70 percent," he says.

In addition to providing real help with employees who are struggling with personal issues, Cook says a corporate chaplaincy program also provides an important benefit to employers.

"It helps set up a good, healthy boundary between employees and their employers, but at the same time, provides important care through people who are called and trained to do so," he says. **CRW**

Laurie Arendt is editor of *CRW*.