

Developing Modified Duty Positions for your Injured Employee's

You, the employer, need to take the necessary steps in the event an employee becomes injured on the job. You do not want to place yourself, nor your employees in the position of having to struggle developing a transitional/modified duty position for an employee who is ready to come back to work with restrictions. By planning ahead, you will be able to create an atmosphere of efficiency, not to mention the cost savings, if the need arises. So let's look at how we create these modified duty positions.

First off we need to understand that no injury is the same and the restrictions placed on an employee are going to be different. With that in mind, we need to create a classification system based off of the severity of the injury. There are three, possibly four different classifications we can place every injured employee into based off of the restrictions provided by the treating physician.

- 1. Employee can return to work with no restrictions. Easy, right?*
- 2. Employee can return to work with restrictions. Getting tougher.*
- 3. Employee can return to work in a different department with restrictions. Uh oh.*

The fourth one is a toughy. Because this injured employee has stepped into what's called "outlier" status. Sounds like a title to a Stephen King book. 90% of injured employees are able to return to work with or without restrictions. The other 10%, the "outliers", are the ones in which the severity of the injury is so great that the employee may not ever be able to return to work in full capacity. You would also place malingerers or fraudulent claims in this category as well because the likelihood of these employees returning to work is a mess all on it's own. So, with this in mind, let's start identifying potential modified duty assignments.

Identifying the physical requirements through the creation of the job descriptions, may provide the best insight into developing a modified duty assignment for an injured employee. On the other hand, the injury coordinator needs to look at the supervisors, managers, foreman, and anyone else that works in a position of supervising others can be a huge asset in helping identify potential modified duty assignments. In getting the supervisors involved in the development of the modified duty assignments, has a number of positive effects. The supervisor having been asked for input on developing a company policy, will have a feeling of value to the company. This will also create "buy-in" from the employees that report to this supervisor because their department is being represented in the policy.

When identifying potential modified duty assignments, supervisors do not have the benefit of being Nostradamus and being able to accurately predict what the restrictions are going to be placed on an employee. To prepare for the inevitable, plan around the most commonly given restrictions placed on employees. Lifting restrictions, limb limitations, and standing/walking restrictions.

When identifying these potential assignments, you are only limited by your imagination. Have the supervisors think about items that need to be completed, but are not, due to it being lower on the priority list. Preventative maintenance, as unfortunate as it may sound, is a perfect example of this. Remember the modified duty work does not have to be the most stimulating or rewarding assignment, but you need to be innovative in helping create a position that is worth while. Yes, counting screws does count as modified duty, but is it worth while? Maybe?

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