



TenStep Supplemental Paper

15 February 2004

Proactive Program

A Return-to-Work (RTW) Program is a proactive approach to assist injured/ailing employees return to safe, meaningful and productive employment when medically certified fit. The primary goal of a Return-to-Work program is the return of employees to their pre-injury/illness occupation through individual Return-to-Work plans.

Most individual RTW plans are designed as flexible, short-term accommodations leading toward the primary goal. Time frames and schedules are dependent on the injury/illness, medical recommendations, and the work performed by the worker before the injury/illness.

Injuries/illnesses are very costly affairs. Although prevention is the best way to reduce overall injury/illness costs, a RTW program is an effective way to manage costs after an injury/illness has occurred.

A formal Return-to-Work program facilitates the development and implementation of an individualized RTW plan immediately after the occurrence of an injury/illness. It promotes communication and establishes the roles of each participant. This enables all parties access to a documented process and helps to resolve any difficulties.

Guiding principles of RTW:

There are basic principles that guide development of a RTW program and individual Return-to-Work plans for injured/ill workers:

- **Respect and dignity.** All parties are to be treated with respect and dignity.
- **Joint responsibility and development.** Employees and employers are responsible for the development and implementation of a basic health and safety program for the prevention of injuries/illnesses. Employees and employers should jointly participate in the development of the RTW Program in order to achieve mutual understanding and commitment, increasing the potential for success. A joint approach should be used to develop individual Return-To-Work plans.
- **Responsibility and accountability.** A safe and effective RTW program clearly establishes responsibilities and accountabilities to guide and direct the return to work.
- **Involvement of the injured/ill employee.** The employee's participation in the development of his/her RTW plan provides a sense of ownership and responsibility for his/her rehabilitation, both on and off the job.
- **Communication/Promotion.** A successful Return-to-Work program and plan(s) should have ongoing communication and consultation among the participants to support and participate in return to work.
- **Rehabilitative focus.** The Return-to-Work program and plan(s) should have a rehabilitative focus to allow for a safe, effective and timely return-to-work.



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- **Continuation of Employee/Employer work relationship.** The continuation of communication and the work relationship/routine between the employee and employer will facilitate recovery and reduce the duration of disability.
- **Safe, meaningful and productive work.** To increase effectiveness, the tasks and duties contained in an individual's RTW plan must be safe, meaningful and productive.
- **Abilities.** The focus should be on the worker's abilities, not disabilities. The worker must be medically able to perform the duties safely without risk of injury to him/herself or others.
- **Training, knowledge and experience.** To be effective, employees must have the training, knowledge, skills and experience to safely perform tasks and duties included in the individual Return-to-Work plans.

A Return-to-Work Program is designed to address the specific needs of an employer and their employees. Conducting a needs assessment will ensure the program is the most fitting action to undertake and is designed to meet the needs of the particular employer. This will increase the likelihood that the time and energy invested produces the results sought.