



Proper Lifting & Ergonomics

Sarah, the church office manager, had nearly tripped several times over a box of copy paper someone had left on the floor in the supply room. Being that she didn't want anyone else to actually fall and get hurt, she decided to pick the box up, intending to remove it from the area. She bent over, lifted the box, and started to lift it three feet onto the counter area. As she turned to place the box on the counter, she felt a pop followed by extreme pain in her lower back. She let out a scream and fell to her knees.

Fortunately, the pastor was nearby and came to her aid. Sarah could not move. The paramedics were called and Sarah was taken to the emergency room. In the end, Sarah was off work for six weeks while she recovered.

Strains and injuries are not limited to those who do heavy labor. Hundreds, if not thousands, of injuries happen in churches across the country every day. Many of those injuries are similar to Sarah's; they happen quickly and are immediately noticeable. Others, however, happen over a period of time.

What we do know is that these injuries can cost the church and individual time and money. Occasionally these injuries are unavoidable, but most can be prevented. The need for proactive training cannot be overstated.

LIFTING

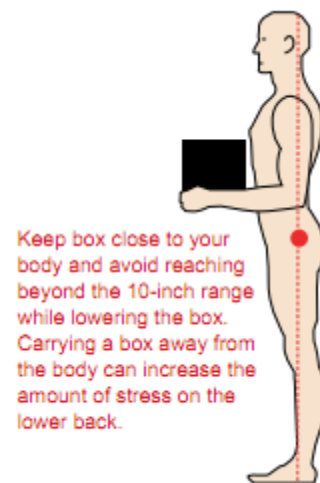
A quick search on the internet will provide a reader with hundreds of web sites and information about lifting. Though there may be some slight variations, most experts agree on the proper lifting technique. The following guidelines, taken from the www.orthopedics.about.com/cs/backpain/ht/lift_p.htm site, suggest:

1. Plan ahead before lifting.
2. Lift close to your body.

3. Feet should be shoulder width apart.
4. Bend your knees and keep you back straight.
5. Tighten your stomach muscles.
6. Lift with your legs.
7. If you're straining, get help.
8. Wear a belt or back support.
9. Don't twist when you are lifting.

The issue in many church settings has to do with training employees and volunteers, and helping them know their limitations. Not only should there be guidelines posted, but employees and volunteers should be required to follow them. Often, a person who is either out of shape or older, will try to do something that they used to be able to do, only to find out, after injuring themselves, that they are no longer able.

Designating a healthy, trained employee or volunteer to do the heavy lifting can not only prevent injuries but is also a great way to practice mercy.



ERGONOMICS

Besides quick injuries that come from lifting, slower injuries can occur over a period of time due to work conditions. Again, there are countless web sites and information about ergonomics. If you have not done so, have an ergonomic evaluation done on all office areas. You will want to evaluate them in relationship to the person using the space. What should you look for? Here are some pointers:

- The height of desk and chair
- Type of chair
- Lighting
- Height of and style keyboard
- Level of computer screen
- Document holders
- Mouse location

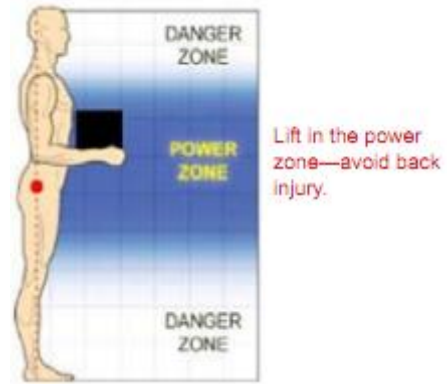
- Phone location
- Wrist supports
- Air quality

After an evaluation, employees and volunteers should be encouraged to plan their work. Consideration should be given toward pacing their workload. Employees and volunteers should rotate tasks so the same work is not done for long periods of time. When possible, employees and volunteers should rotate roles so they are not doing the same work constantly. Breaks should be encouraged. Further, relaxation techniques and exercise should be taught and encouraged.

If pain or strain is noticed, employees and volunteers should report it. If it persists, they should see a doctor. Addressing the issue early on can prevent long-term damage.

CONCLUSION

Church employees and volunteers should be protected and provided the best environment possible for their ministry. Training, planning, communication and supervision should all be a part of the service environment. It is important for church leaders to take the time and energy necessary to keep everyone safe, happy, and healthy. Everyone will benefit from such a proactive approach to ministry protection.



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