

How To Create A Workplace That Supports Employee Mental Health

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In this new era of the hybrid workplace, the mental health and wellness of the workforce are more important than ever. Burnout remains high, employees are resigning in record numbers and many business leaders are scrambling to figure out how to keep people engaged as they navigate the new world of work.

Within these challenges lays an opportunity to reimagine the workplace. Not just the physical office space, but how we encourage and support employees to maintain a strong, empowered workforce.

One key thing the pandemic and the resulting work-from-home model have done is blur—and in many cases eliminate—the separation between work and life.

As someone who has invested most of my professional life in this space, I've found it encouraging to see that employee mental health is now finally being recognized by a growing number of senior executives as a business imperative. It's unfortunate that it took a pandemic to elevate this from the HR office to the C-suite, but one thing is certain: Leadership support for mental health is here to stay. This presents an enormous opportunity to make the workforce feel more productive, resilient and supported.

Focus On Mental Health And Well-being

Business leaders understand the importance of workforce mental health and the need to improve support resources, but many don't know where to invest beyond their traditional EAP programs.

A study from my organization and Lighthouse Research & Advisory called the [2021 Employer Mental Health Report Card](#) found discrepancies in how employees and employers regarded how well an organization's workplace supported their employees' mental health. On the bright side, when asked about the benefits of positive mental health support, employees and employers were in complete alignment, noting that these resources can support higher productivity, greater job satisfaction and fewer sick days, to name a few.

Those employers who do provide mental health support are reaping the benefits. A Mindshare Partners study found that [61% of employees](#) who felt supported by their employer reported being less likely to underperform and miss work, more likely to be comfortable talking about mental health at work, more satisfied with their job and more likely to stay in their company. Thankfully, many employers are hearing the message. According to findings from the Business Group on Health, [76% of its members](#) said increasing access to mental health care was a key

priority for 2022, with 57% saying they would focus on addressing stigma.

As the Great Resignation shows no signs of slowing down, keeping employees happy and engaged has never made more business sense. With the understanding of the positive impact relevant mental health support can have, HR leaders have an opportunity to implement or improve access to resources at their organizations to help ensure that employees are engaged and supported.

Supporting Employees

It's imperative that employers take a proactive approach to mental health and well-being, fostering an environment that empowers workers and teams and enables them to nurture the many facets of their lives.

Removing the stigma is a critical piece of a healthy workplace. One good practice for leaders is to check in with others regularly. This includes listening to what people are saying and acknowledging their difficulties. This is especially important with remote and hybrid workers because leaders might not have the ability to evaluate their levels of stress easily. Building an environment where employees know that it's OK to let managers know when they are not feeling well—or putting confidential support in place to voice their concerns without fear of repercussions—can promote a more supportive culture.

At the heart of supporting employees' well-being is developing a strong company culture that is open and accepting of employees experiencing challenges. Leadership should align their mission, values, behavior and environment through this lens to create a positive and nurturing workplace.

It's important to remember that leaders need to create a workplace where employees can feel

comfortable knowing their leadership will support them no matter what. This means creating and maintaining a workplace that offers employees access to mental health support and qualified experts if needed and in the manner that suits them best. It means listening to people, not just gathering data. It means taking the necessary actions to enable employees to get the help they need in the way that they feel most comfortable accessing it. These efforts should begin at the top of the organization.

Leaders should carefully define and consistently reaffirm the company culture to employees. Doing so sets an example for the rest of the organization and reduces the stigma around those seeking support. It ensures the culture remains focused on supporting and celebrating the success of individuals and teams, caring for each other and making work more enjoyable for everyone.

Strategies like these are essential to ensure employees can continue to be their best both at work and at home. These two spheres of life have never been more entwined. As employers compete to attract and retain top talent, it's vital that they do not neglect one of the most important aspects of life in a post-pandemic world: Providing support and access to resources for the well-being of employees.