April Mental Health,
Inclusion & Belonging Update

April 2nd, 2024
Assembled By
Matt Glowacki, Diversity Equity & Inclusion Chair
Jefferson County HRMA
Matt@MattGlowacki.com

Optimizing for Employee Well-Being: A Holistic Approach for HR Leaders

Employee well-being is a multifaceted concept that goes beyond physical health; it encapsulates mental, emotional and social aspects, each playing a crucial role in how employees engage with their work and the workplace. It's a holistic concept that includes:

Physical well-being: Ensuring employees are healthy and safe at work. It involves providing ergonomic workstations, promoting regular physical activity, and adhering to health and safety regulations.

Mental well-being: Mental well-being addresses the psychological aspects of employee health, including stress management, resilience building, and access to mental health support services. It emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive work culture that values employees' mental health.

Emotional well-being: Emotional well-being involves acknowledging and supporting employees' emotions, providing them with the tools and resources to manage their feelings effectively. It involves fostering an environment where employees feel comfortable expressing their emotions and seeking help when needed.

Social well-being: Building a sense of community and belonging within the workplace. It involves promoting positive relationships among colleagues, encouraging teamwork, and creating opportunities for social interaction and collaboration.

The Wellness Wheel: A Multidimensional Approach to Organizational Well-Being
The first step into understanding employee well-being as a whole for your organization is viewing it like a pie with eight important core pieces that all work in conjunction with one another. This pie is what we call the Wellness Wheel. The Wellness Wheel is a model that we use at Rizewell that serves as a beacon for comprehensive employee well-being. Each piece of the pie is going to be a bit different for every organization. Some companies may have a higher

focus on social wellness, some may lock in on emotional wellness due to employee burnout and others may target the entire wheel. Some pieces might even be taken out of the pan.

Regardless, these eight important pieces are what you need to look at when developing your employee well-being strategy because this all ties into the foundational culture of your organization.

SOCIAL WELLNESS
Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS
Coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships

OCCUPATIONAL WELLNESS
Personal satisfaction and enrichment derived from one's work

SPIRITUAL WELLNESS
Expanding our sense of purpose and meaning in life

FINANCIAL WELLNESS
Satisfaction with current and future financial situations

INTELLECTUAL WELLNESS
Recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills

ENVIRONMENTAL WELLNESS
Good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being

PHYSICAL WELLNESS
Recognizing the need for physical activity, diet, sleep, and nutrition

Now, let's dive into each one:

Social wellness is the linchpin that bolsters collaborative dynamics and community engagement.

In contemporary organizational design, an emphasis on cultivating robust social networks within the corporate structure is paramount.

Emotional wellness transcends personal health, impacting organizational resilience and adaptability. Effective emotional stewardship within the workplace is critical for sustaining a productive and emotionally intelligent workforce.

Occupational wellness is not solely about job satisfaction; it is also about aligning individual purpose with professional endeavors. It is the responsibility of HR leaders to navigate this alignment through strategic role design and career development pathways.

Financial wellness is a potent undercurrent that influences employee stress levels and work satisfaction. HR's role extends to providing employees with the resources needed to achieve financial security and literacy.

Environmental wellness exerts a profound influence on employee well-being and productivity. HR's role is to create a physical and aesthetic workspace that not only adheres to safety standards but also promotes environmental consciousness and well-being.

Physical wellness remains a cornerstone of employee health initiatives. Comprehensive health programs are essential to maintaining a workforce capable of meeting the demands of a competitive business environment.

Intellectual wellness urges continuous learning and mental growth. It's a catalyst for innovation and engagement. A workplace that values and promotes intellectual growth fosters a dynamic and competitive edge.

Spiritual wellness, though less tangible, is intrinsic to individual and corporate harmony. It is incumbent upon HR to respect and accommodate the diverse spiritual needs of the workforce. Each of these eight dimensions, while distinct, does not exist in isolation. Like the spokes of a wheel, they support and reinforce each other, promoting a robust structure that can withstand the bumps and turns on the road of life.

The Role of HR in Employee Well-Being
In this intricate dance of well-being, HR professionals play the pivotal role of choreographers, carefully orchestrating programs and initiatives that resonate with each unique individual in their organization and their culture. They act as the guardians of this wheel, ensuring that it turns smoothly and that each employee's journey toward wellness is met with understanding, support and the resources needed to succeed.

Standing at the forefront of shaping and sustaining the workplace environment, HR professionals effectively act as the architects of employee well-being. Their role transcends traditional administrative functions to encompass the creation of a supportive and healthy work culture. This pivotal position allows HR to influence not just the physical but also the psychological and emotional health of the workforce.

Understanding HR's Responsibility
The responsibility of HR in this realm is twofold: to advocate for employee well-being at the strategic level and to implement practical solutions that make a real difference in the day-to-day lives of employees.

This involves Strategic advocacy: Elevating employee well-being as a key factor in organizational strategy and decision-making processes. HR must make the case for well-being initiatives not just as the right thing to do, but as a strategic imperative that drives retention, engagement and performance.

Practical implementation: Developing and deploying programs and policies that directly impact employee well-being. This includes health and wellness programs, flexible work arrangements, mental health days, and initiatives that foster a supportive work culture.

Building the Foundations of Well-Being
The foundations of a well-being-focused workplace are built on a deep understanding of employee needs and a commitment to addressing them. HR professionals must engage in active listening by leveraging surveys, feedback mechanisms and direct communication to gather insights into what employees truly value and need. This data-driven approach ensures that initiatives are not just well intentioned but are also aligned with the actual requirements of the workforce.

Addressing the Real Concerns of Employees
With SHRM Research highlighting "insufficient regard for employee well-being" as a key factor driving high-value employees away, the message is clear: Employees are increasingly prioritizing workplaces that care about their holistic well-being. This sentiment underscores the responsibility of HR to not only understand but also genuinely address the well-being concerns of their employees. It involves recognizing the multifaceted nature of well-being that includes mental health support, physical health resources, career development opportunities, and a culture of inclusivity and respect.

Tools for Building a Culture of Well-Being
To effectively foster a culture of well-being, HR professionals need a toolkit that combines strategic insights with practical applications.

This toolkit should include:
Analytical tools: To gather and analyze data on employee needs, satisfaction and feedback. This could involve survey platforms, sentiment analysis tools and HR analytics software.

Communication platforms: For transparent and ongoing communication with employees about well-being initiatives, resources and feedback channels.

Well-being programs: A range of programs that cater to different aspects of well-being, including physical health programs, mental health support, financial wellness advice and career development pathways.

Training and development: Resources to train leaders and managers on the importance of well-being, how to recognize signs of stress or burnout in their teams, and how to foster a supportive team environment.

Feedback mechanisms: Systems for collecting and responding to employee feedback on well-being initiatives, ensuring that programs evolve in line with employee needs.

Assessing the Current State of Well-Being
Creating impactful well-being strategies necessitates a deep dive into the current state of employee wellness within your organization. This process is fundamental not just for identifying current issues but also for aligning your strategies with broader organizational goals. By engaging main leaders and stakeholders early in the process, you establish a unified approach that significantly enhances how employee needs are addressed alongside organizational objectives. This collaborative effort fosters a culture of understanding and support that is essential for the successful implementation of well-being programs.

Conducting Surveys and Gathering Feedback
One of the most effective ways to gauge the well-being of your workforce is by conducting comprehensive surveys and actively seeking employee feedback. These surveys should cover a range of topics, including employee satisfaction, stress levels, mental health, physical health and overall well-being. The design of these surveys is crucial: They should be anonymous to encourage honesty, as well as comprehensive to ensure all areas of well-being are covered. This direct line of communication enables employees to express their needs and concerns, providing valuable insights into the collective health of your organization.

Analyzing the Data
The data gathered from these surveys is a gold mine of information that, when properly analyzed, can highlight critical areas requiring attention. It's essential to go beyond mere numerical analysis to interpret these results in a way that uncovers common themes, recurring issues and potential areas for improvement. Despite the importance of this analysis, a startlingly low percentage of organizations—only 17%, as reported by HR professionals in 2022—actively measure the effectiveness of their mental health and well-being programs1. This gap in assessment underscores the need for a more structured approach to evaluating well-being initiatives.

By carefully analyzing survey data, organizations can:
Identify key stressors: Understand the primary sources of stress and dissatisfaction within the workforce. This could range from workload and work/life balance to relationships with management and career development opportunities.

Gauge program effectiveness: Evaluate how existing well-being and mental health programs are perceived by employees. Are these initiatives accessible, effective and valued by the workforce? Tailor interventions: Customize well-being initiatives to address specific needs identified through the surveys. This could mean introducing new mental health resources, adjusting workloads or offering more flexible working arrangements.

Set benchmarks for improvement: Establish clear benchmarks based on survey results to measure the impact of implemented changes over time. This allows for continuous improvement and ensures that well-being strategies remain aligned with employee needs.

https://www.shrm.org/labs/pulse/optimizing-for-employee-well-being-a-holistic-approach-for-hr-leaders#

Workplace Loneliness: A Silent Pandemic CEOs Need To Pay Attention To

Around half of U.S. adults have experienced loneliness. Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. Vivek Murthy, in his 2023 81-page report, declared loneliness a lethal pandemic, equating it to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

People are becoming lonelier and unhappier despite living in a hyper-connected world. For the first time since the rankings began in 2012, the U.S. has dropped out of the top 20 countries in the recent World Happiness Report appearing on a Gallup poll. The U.S. was 15th the previous year, and self-reported happiness declined in every U.S. age group, particularly those under 30. While this study is viewed through the lens of an individual's life overall, CEOs and organizational decision-makers should pay attention. In the workplace, where individuals spend a significant portion of their time, these issues of loneliness and unhappiness have profound implications.

Why Companies Should Care About A Unhappy and Lonely Workplace
Our personal and professional lives are dynamically intertwined and are increasingly becoming so. Three in five adults reported feelings of loneliness, which typically spills over into stress, anxiety, and depression. In Cigna's Loneliness Index data, published in the Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance, show that loneliness strongly affects the organization and its bottom line.

Regarding loneliness, 62% of employed adults considered themselves lonely. However, loneliness isn't just a personal issue; it's a company issue that affects productivity, sales, talent recruiting, and retaining, plus a bevy of other factors, all equating to unnecessary bleeding of the bottom line.

Loneliness costs employers more than $154 billion annually in lost productivity due to absenteeism. Lastly, lonelier and unhappy employees also expressed a greater intention to quit within the next 12 months, nearly twice as likely as other workers. Research from the University of Warwick published in the Journal of Labor Economics found that happy people are around 12% more productive than those who are unhappy. This boost in productivity shows up through increased creativity, engagement, motivation, and pace of work.

CEOs and leaders have a great opportunity to significantly impact their organization by focusing more on employees' happiness and to personally impact the quality of life of their team members' personal and professional lives. That said, numerous ways exist to address your organization's happiness. But here's one foundational and fundamental principle that serves as a great launching point:

Workplace Physical and Mental Health
Mental health and obesity are two growing issues in society that significantly affect the workplace. The economic aftereffects from obesity and excess weight on U.S. businesses and employers amounted to a staggering $425.5 billion in 2023. Mental distress is prevalent in the workplace, with up to 85% of workers reporting the workplace affects their mental well-being. Mental health and excess weight often go together. Research appearing in the journal Psychiatry Investigation found that individuals with excess weight had a 55% higher risk of developing depression over their lifetime, and people with depression had a 58% increased risk of obesity. Installing a health and fitness culture that tackles all fronts is no longer just an excellent addition; it's becoming increasingly necessary.

According to research from the National Safety Council and NORC at the University of Chicago, employers see a return of $4 for every dollar invested in mental health treatment. "When employees receive effective treatment for mental distress, organizations realize reduced total medical costs, increased productivity, lower absenteeism, and decreased disability costs," the study states. Creating a culture prioritizing physical and mental health is a win-win for everyone involved.

Organizations can start building their healthy culture by:
- Having a physically and mentally fit CEO lead by example
- Involving and reminding everyone of the company mission and values to keep them mentally engaged
- Offering flexible work arrangements with healthy remote work boundaries
- Having various mental health resources and options available
- Providing gym memberships and fitness subsidies
- Bringing in multiple experts and resources to address issues pertinent to your team

Loneliness and unhappiness aren't merely personal struggles; they're systemic issues that impact productivity, engagement, talent retention, and, ultimately, the bottom line. However, these challenges also present opportunities for forward-thinking CEOs and organizations. Rather than contributing to dissatisfaction, leaders can transform the workplace into a net positive by prioritizing employee well-being. By doing so, they position their companies as industry leaders, operating with a competitive advantage thanks to a happier, more innovative, and committed workforce.

https://www.forbes.com/sites/julianhayesii/2024/03/30/workplace-loneliness-a-silent-pandemic-ceos-need-to-pay-attention-to/?sh=24e43ee16a6f

A Guide To Promoting Mental Health In The Manufacturing Industry

In the fast-paced manufacturing world, where repetitive tasks, irregular shifts and safety concerns are part of the daily grind, nurturing mental well-being often takes a back seat. But with the right approach, it doesn't have to. In the following guide, I'll unpack the distinct challenges faced by the manufacturing industry and provide practical tips for creating a workplace that prioritizes employee mental health.

Manufacturing Workforce Challenges
All of these factors have traditionally made the manufacturing industry a very difficult place to prioritize mental health. Despite advances in technology, many manufacturing employees withstand working conditions and norms that take a cumulative toll on their minds and bodies. Research shows that people who work in manufacturing are more likely to struggle with substance abuse, suicidality and other serious mental health concerns.

Manufacturing jobs often involve repetitive, monotonous and physically demanding tasks that must be performed rapidly. On top of that, this work frequently involves safety hazards, irregular scheduling and worries about layoffs. These factors are known to cause mental and physical exhaustion, boredom, high stress, anxiety and a subsequent lack of engagement at work. At the same time, manufacturing workplaces don't always have robust mental health

policies or resources. So, workers may not feel comfortable expressing their feelings and asking for help.

Engagement Challenges
When it comes to tackling the problem of workplace mental health in manufacturing, one of the primary challenges is a lack of awareness. Due to the nature of shift work and limited HR communication channels, many manufacturing employees do not fully understand the scope of their benefits, and they may have little time to ask questions. There may also be a language barrier, and some employees may not have access to the technology they need to utilize a digital benefits platform.

In addition to the awareness problem, there's another significant barrier to improving mental health in the manufacturing industry—stigma. Manufacturing remains a male-dominated industry that typically prioritizes safety-related concerns over mental health and well-being. It's often a high-pressure environment that focuses on keeping the production line in motion at any cost. These aspects of the culture may discourage employees from slowing down and asking for help or seeking out support for their mental health when they need it.

Cultivating A Supportive Culture Around Mental Health
While it may take some time to see a major shift in the way the manufacturing industry views mental health, there are some small but meaningful steps HR leaders can take to create a more supportive workplace culture.

1. Encourage regular breaks. In addition to mandatory breaks, encourage your employees to take time for a mental and physical reset every few hours. Offer healthy snacks in the break room and encourage employees to step outside for some fresh air when possible.

2. Promote stress management techniques. Teach stress management techniques like meditation or deep breathing, and give your employees a dedicated space to engage in them.

3. Allow schedule flexibility and offer mental health days. Provide some flexibility to accommodate appointments, personal concerns and family needs. Also, be specific and let your employees know they can take time away from work when they need to tend to their mental health.

4. Train managers on mental health awareness and provide access to mental health support. Educate managers on the signs of poor mental health and ensure that mental health resources (like access to therapy or digital apps to support well-being) are available to everyone, regardless of their location within the facility.

5.	Foster community and connection. Create opportunities for employees to connect and build relationships through team lunches or social events during the workday. You can also leverage employee resource groups where employees can meet other people who share similar experiences and challenges.

6.	Conduct anonymous employee surveys and establish clear communication channels. Let your employees know that you're listening and that their feedback is important. Provide clear and confidential communication channels for them to express their concerns, seek help and share their thoughts on workplace mental health and other issues.

7.	Keep mental health top of mind. Run regular awareness campaigns to educate employees about mental health and encourage the use of resources like mindfulness apps or tools that employees can access during breaks to reduce stress.

8.	Reevaluate your employee assistance program (EAP). Low engagement and utilization with your current provider might be a sign that it's time to swap. I recommend looking for an EAP that is user-friendly and provides proactive mental health support and confidential counseling for employees facing personal or work-related issues.

https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2024/03/14/a-guide-to-promoting-mental-health-in-the-manufacturing-industry/?sh=720295431e70

State of 'Permacrisis' Taking a Hit on Employees' Mental Health

Employees are experiencing more mental health struggles and overall negative feelings about their work, underscoring an "urgent need" for employers to take more aggressive measures to help with their benefits offerings.

Employees are now more likely to experience negative feelings at work, including stress (12 percent more likely) and burnout (17 percent more likely) than they were pre-pandemic (2019), according to new data from MetLife. Employees are also 51 percent more likely to feel depressed at work than they were pre-pandemic as they face what the insurer calls a "complex macro environment and permacrisis state"—a state which has included the pandemic, persistent high inflation, international turmoil and war, and more.

Those are among the findings in MetLife's 22nd annual U.S. Employee Benefit Trends Study, released March 18—data indicating that employers may have to revisit benefits offerings to not only support employees, but retain them.

"Against the backdrop of a permacrisis, this year's study underscores the urgent need for employers to acknowledge the modern challenges that impact their workforce and take steps," said Todd Katz, executive vice president and head of group benefits at MetLife.

Benefits should be at the center of those steps, he said, as they play "a critical role in demonstrating care and driving employees' well-being.

"Focusing on benefit utilization supports holistic health, maximizes the value of benefits for both employees and employers, and drives key business outcomes," he said.

Financial concerns and persistent high costs of living—which other reports suggest are causing a significant number of employees to live paycheck to paycheck—are the top reasons for poor mental health among employees in 2024, cited by 45 percent. Rates are higher among women (51 percent) and Generation X workers (52 percent). Meanwhile, 67 percent of employees are concerned about losing the value of their savings due to inflation or other market forces.

Stress from reasons outside of work (cited by 36 percent of employees and 47 percent of workers with a disability), balancing home and work life (33 percent), and from the state of the economy (32 percent) are other reasons for poor mental health.

MetLife's new data comes on the heels of several other reports finding that employee mental health—as well as employees feeling their employer cares about them—is on the decline.

A ComPsych report released earlier this month found that mental health-related leaves of absence are surging in the workplace, up 33 percent in 2023 over 2022, and overall up a whopping 300 percent from 2017 to 2023. A recent report from mental health provider Lyra Health found that 87 percent of employees faced at least one mental health challenge in the last year. And an Aflac report last year found that well over half of employees (57 percent) are experiencing at least moderate levels of burnout, while about half of employees said they don't believe their company really cares about them.

MetLife's findings come one year after its previous annual report found that employees' satisfaction with their benefits dropped to a decade low. That report also found that 42 percent of employees say they don't feel cared for by their employer.

Some Good News
Not all the news from MetLife's annual report is bad: The study finds that some gains have been made over the past year. Employees' satisfaction with their benefits is up slightly, to 65 percent, from 61 percent last year.

Alongside rising satisfaction with benefits, MetLife indicated employees' "growing interest in more tailored offerings, communication and decision-making support in choosing from available offerings."

Holistic well-being—a measure of employee perceptions of their own physical, mental, financial and social health—rose by 3 percentage points in 2024, from 41 percent to 44 percent, returning to 2022 levels.

And job loyalty saw a slight jump to 75 percent from 73 percent in 2023. While that number remains below the pre-pandemic peak of 80 percent in 2018, this year's gain is a pointed improvement from 2022, when 70 percent of employees said they intended to be working at their current organization in 12 months.

Increasing Employee Expectations
The research comes amid the backdrop of rising employee expectations, Katz said. The report found that employees are looking for more help, particularly with their financial and mental well-being.

The MetLife data underscores a disconnect, though, in terms of employees feeling cared about and supported by their employer. For instance, among employees who went through a significant unplanned financial stress/expense, 86 percent said it had a high impact on them, but only 48 percent felt that their employer demonstrated care during the experience. And 81 percent of employees who experienced an ongoing mental health condition said it had a major impact on them, yet just half agreed that their employer demonstrated care toward them.

"Employers need to assess what care means to their workforce and recognize employees' expectations of care both at and outside of work," Katz said. "While care should have an always-on approach, there are key moments when employees are looking to their employers to provide support. Life moments, including unplanned financial stress, are less visible to employers but have significant impact on employees, including how they show up at work. Identifying strategies to demonstrate care when employees need it most leads to more successful workforces."

Boosted benefits communication and enhanced offerings—like financial wellness solutions, life insurance, retirement benefits and mental health benefits—can help. They will also have a positive impact on employers, Katz said.

The MetLife data, for instance, found that employees who understand and use their benefits are significantly more likely to feel cared for (88 percent) by their employer, compared with those who don't (34 percent). In return, employees who feel cared for are 60 percent more likely to intend to be at their organization in 12 months and 55 percent more likely to feel productive at work.

"When employees feel cared for, there is a ripple effect across the organization," Katz said. "When employers aren't prioritizing delivering care to their employees, they risk a workforce that's not only less holistically healthy and happy, but also less engaged, loyal and productive." A clear and tangible way for employers to demonstrate care is by offering tailored benefits for employees' current needs—both in and out of the office, Katz said.

"Ultimately, employers should think about how delivering care and the role of benefits fit together," he said. "Employers should consider whether their benefits strategy meets employees in the moments that matter most."

https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/benefits-compensation/metlife-annual-benefits-report-2024-mental-health-permacrisis

Discrimination Lawsuits Are Growing. How Can Employers Avoid Being Sued?

The federal government received more charges of discrimination, filed more lawsuits and secured more monetary relief for employees in fiscal year 2023 than in the previous fiscal year. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC's) latest annual report shows the agency secured more than $665 million to resolve discrimination cases in FY 2023—a 29.5 percent increase over FY 2022. The amount includes more than $202 million for 5,943 federal employees and job applicants—an increase of 53 percent over the previous year.

"For nearly six decades, the EEOC has been entrusted with the clear mission of preventing and remedying discrimination in our nation's workplaces," EEOC Chair Charlotte A. Barrows said in a statement. "That legacy and our ongoing work are vitally important as we rebuild the economy to work for everyone and fulfill our nation's promise of equal justice for all."

The agency also:
- Received 81,055 new discrimination charges, a 10.3 percent rise over FY 2022.
- Filed 143 new lawsuits, an increase of more than 50 percent compared with FY 2022.
- Obtained more than $22.6 million for 968 individuals in litigation while resolving 98 lawsuits and achieving "favorable results" in 91 percent of all federal district court resolutions.

Stephen Paskoff, CEO of training company Employment Learning Innovations in Atlanta and a former EEOC litigator, said he wasn't surprised by the rise in enforcement and subsequent penalties due to claims of discrimination and harassment.

"We now have expanded ways of communicating, where instances of misconduct, harassment or discrimination are no longer limited to in-person or over-the-phone interactions," he said. "Emails, virtual calls, texts, social media, etc. create more concrete evidence of misconduct that results in more filings and claims to pass."

How the Pandemic 'Changed the Dynamic' of Misconduct
Mark Kluger, an attorney with Kluger Healey in Fairfield, N.J., said that social movements such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter have resulted in increased awareness and sensitivity to

workplace harassment and discrimination issues—but nothing has changed the dynamic more than the pandemic.

"So many more employees have not only become 'Google lawyers' during the last four years but also just seem to simply resent having to work," he said. "This has resulted in many employees pursuing every avenue to claim that they are being mistreated from a legal perspective even when they are not."

However, many claims of harassment and discrimination are legitimate, according to Paskoff, who noted that the popularity of remote and hybrid work "only increases the methods by which uncivil conduct can arise."

"In our experience, issues with noncompliant behaviors that rise to the level of EEOC enforcement usually aren't a matter of being aware of the rules," he said.

Paskoff explained that many "bad actors" are aware that they're engaging in misconduct yet persist in these behaviors because:

- They feel they can get away with it.
- Recipients and bystanders don't take the necessary steps to report them.
- "Or worst of all: These issues are reported, but the organization fails to adequately address them," Paskoff said. "All of this emboldens the bad actors and leads to greater risk exposure, as well as an unhealthy organizational culture."

How to Avoid Charges of Discrimination
Discrimination-related lawsuits can cause reputational harm. Kluger recommended that employers be vigilant in ensuring that decisions that are made from hiring to firing have legitimate, documented and nondiscriminatory reasons to support them.

"Employers need to err on the side of caution before taking actions that could result in employment litigation," he said.

Peter Spanos, an attorney with Taylor English Duma in Atlanta, told SHRM Online in 2022 that adopting clear and meaningful anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies and hosting employee forums periodically could help reduce discrimination-related lawsuits.

Paskoff laid out additional ways that organizations can avoid charges of discrimination and improve workplace civility.

Educate the workforce. Training is a critical element of prevention, but it requires additional reinforcement to truly impact people's behavior. This starts with leadership being fully aware of the behavioral standards, modeling them personally and communicating expectations around them—including consequences for violations.

Create a psychologically safe workplace. Leaders also need to foster psychological safety in their work environments, which increases the likelihood that employees will report misconduct when they see or experience it.

Respond to misconduct. It takes courage for people to speak up, Paskoff said. But it also takes organizational commitment so that when employees report misconduct, leadership is receptive and responds promptly, appropriately and consistently.

Think about the long-term ramifications. While the increased EEOC enforcement is serious, the damage from a weakened organizational culture can be far worse, resulting in lower recruitment and retention rates, as well as a damaged reputation.

"The ultimate goal is to support a culture that is compliant, civil and protects people and the organization's reputation while producing the best results," Paskoff said. "Organizations must commit to and regularly communicate their behavioral standards—up to and including consequences for violations including termination, if warranted."

https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/inclusion-equity-diversity/eeoc-discrimination-cases-growing

Name bias at work is real and employees of color are most impacted by it

According to a new Harris Poll shared with Fast Company, 23% of U.S. adults have avoided someone because they couldn't say their name.

A rose by any other name might smell as sweet, but it might not command the same price. According to a Harris Poll survey shared with Fast Company, for workers of color, names can have a significant impact on their careers. Harris surveyed over 2,000 American employees and asked them about their attitudes toward names.

Here are the key findings:
Pronunciation impacts perception: 54% of white respondents said their name was easy to pronounce, compared to 47% of Hispanic respondents, 45% of Black respondents, and 42% of Asian respondents. People of color also were more likely to say their names get mispronounced most or all of the time (36%) compared to white respondents (18%).

Names can have a social cost: 35% of U.S. adults say they get anxious when they see a name they can't pronounce, and 23% have avoided someone because they couldn't say their name. Meanwhile, 19% of respondents say they've judged people by their name. Interestingly, people of color were most likely to say that they would avoid someone if they couldn't pronounce their name, compared to white respondents (26% compared to 21%).

Names can lead to workplace discrimination: People of color were more likely to say that others made them feel negatively about their name (12%) compared to white respondents (6%). One-third say they have experienced discrimination at work because of their name while only 16% of white respondents said the same.

POC are altering their names to fit in: Unsurprisingly, 56% of people of color said they changed their name at work in some way, compared to 34% of white respondents. Meanwhile, only 4% of white respondents have been told they should change their name to make it easier to find a job, while 13% of POC have been told the same.

"While some common names have come with more baggage recently (e.g., Karen, Chad, Becky), these names may still have a better chance of getting hired than more unique names," said Latoya Welch, VP at Harris Poll, who led the research efforts. "And, as many companies continue to 'quietly' adjust DEI efforts in the workplace, it leaves the door wide open for name bias in everything from hiring to advancement."

https://www.fastcompany.com/91065774/name-bias-at-work-employees-of-color

White men who experience workplace harassment become allies of diversity efforts

University of Michigan study finds this group is more likely to recognize systemic race and gender bias when they get mistreated at work.

- White men who have experienced workplace harassment themselves are more likely to support efforts to combat race and gender bias in their organizations, according to a new University of Michigan study.

- White men are less likely than women and people of color to experience discrimination and harassment in the workforce. However, when white men are treated poorly by their colleagues, they are more likely to recognize race and gender bias happening in their organizations and are more likely to take action, the study indicated.

- "White men will be allies in workplace diversity and inclusion efforts only to the extent they recognize that race and gender bias exists in their workplaces and are willing to act," said study author Erin Cech, U-M associate professor of sociology.

Cech used survey data from more than 11,000 workers in 24 federal agencies (including 5,000 white men). A third of white men had experienced some kind of harassment at work like bullying or physical intimidation. These men were more likely than other white men to

recognize the systemic race and gender bias that their colleagues faced, and were also more likely to take action—to report the incidents of bias they witnessed to their colleagues and supervisors, the findings showed.

When white men experience harassment, it dispels a taken-for-granted belief that their workplace operates meritocratically, Cech said. This belief can serve as a blinder to bias recognition and reporting.

"Harassment experiences can lower these meritocratic blinders and introduce opportunities for white men to consider how the workplace might not be fair for their colleagues," she said. Cech noted that the findings have important implications for organizational antiracism and antisexism efforts.

"Of course, the takeaway is not that we should increase harassment toward white men," Cech said. "Rather, white men who have had the unfortunate experience of being bullied or threatened at work might be unexpected allies in diversity and inclusion efforts.

"Asking white men to reflect on their own negative treatment at work can foster fruitful skepticism about the meritocratic operation of their workplace. This skepticism may facilitate a greater willingness to acknowledge unfair treatment experienced by colleagues and take action."

Workplace diversity and inclusion efforts, she said, must take into account that white men often take the treatment they experience at work as proxies for the experiences of their female and racial minority colleagues. White men's critique of the status quo through reflection on their workplace treatment may stave off defensiveness and "backlash" that often undermines organizational change.

https://news.umich.edu/white-men-who-experience-workplace-harassment-become-allies-of-diversity-efforts/

Gen Z is 8% happier at work than they were a year ago—But they're still the most unhappy generation

Things might finally be looking up for Gen Z.

The generation has struggled with burnout and mental health more than others.

Many members entered the workforce during the pandemic, and have been forced to deal with sky-high inflation. But this year, the cohort actually experienced a huge bump in happiness, according to a new report.

About 62% of working Gen Zers say they are happy at their jobs, according to a survey from MetLife, an employee benefits and insurance company. That's 8% higher compared to a year ago, and a bigger jump than other generations—millennials saw a 2% increase, Gen X saw a 3% increase, and the number of boomers who are happy at their jobs dipped 2%.

Todd Katz, executive vice president at MetLife, told Fortune that Gen Z's happiness bump is linked to upticks in things like job loyalty, satisfaction at work, level of engagement, and all elements of "holistic health"—how employees view the quality of their physical, mental, financial, and social health.

Despite that big leap, however, Gen Z is still the unhappiest generation in the workplace. Around 62% of Gen Z say they're happy at work, compared to 65% of Gen X, 66% of millennials, and 67% of boomer employees, according to the report. And workers of all ages continue to live and work below pre-pandemic levels of happiness.

Katz says Gen Z's general workplace unhappiness is fueled by elevated levels of stress and burnout, alongside feeling more overwhelmed than other generations. If employers want to bolster Gen Z's happiness, they should focus on facilitating a quality work-life balance, according to the survey, and bosses should focus on making sure that employees feel a sense of belonging and let them know they're valued.

Katz also suggests that employers focus on the workplace qualities that young employees value most, including career development, wellness benefits, and a supportive office culture.

"It's important for employers to know how feeling happy and cared for looks different to each generation," he says.

https://finance.yahoo.com/news/gen-z-8-happier-were-115411719.html

The Benefits of Employee Assistance Programs

Taking care of our mental and emotional well-being is crucial for a healthy life. Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are an invaluable resource that many companies offer to support their employees. Let's explore how EAPs can positively impact individuals and organizations alike:

- Better Attendance: EAPs decrease absences by 26 percent and increase attendance by 28 percent, promoting a healthy, engaged workforce.
- Cost-Effective Health Solutions: Taking care of mental health doesn't just benefit our minds; it also has a positive impact on our physical health. By addressing mental health issues proactively, companies can reduce healthcare costs for their employees.

- Cost Savings: Implementing EAPs can lead to significant returns on investment (ROI), with productivity improvements valued at over $10,000.
- Change Management Resilience: Organizations often have to deal with changes. EAPs help employees navigate these changes with greater adaptability and resilience.
- Enhanced Employee Retention: Employees who receive support through EAPs tend to stay longer in their jobs and perform at higher levels, leading to increased job satisfaction and retention rates.
- Legal Safeguard: EAPs can provide legal assistance and guidance, helping to protect both employees and employers against wrongful termination and potential lawsuits.
- Leadership Development Support: EAPs offer opportunities for leadership development, allowing companies to nurture and cultivate leadership skills within their teams.
- Time Savings: Structured strategies provided by EAPs, such as Bronson HelpNet, enable managers to address employee concerns efficiently, saving valuable time and resources.
- Well-being: Studies have shown that individuals who utilize EAP services experience a 21 percent increase in overall life satisfaction, highlighting the profound impact these programs can have on personal well-being.
-

By investing in the mental and emotional health of employees, you can create a more supportive and thriving work environment for everyone.

https://www.bronsonhealth.com/news/benefits-of-employee-assistance-programs/

Connecting the dots between psychological safety and the mental health crisis
What is psychological safety?

With psychological safety, companies can be the employer of choice, care for employee's total health and wellness, and recruit and retain a healthy workforce.

Psychological safety is the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up, generating ideas, asking questions, voicing concerns, admitting mistakes, and showing vulnerability. The culture and leadership in your organization either supports or oppresses psychological safety through established norms, values, policies, and practices. Psychological safety is engineered to support a more inclusive and engaged workforce without fear of retaliation or exclusion.

When employees fear, or perceive it is not safe to speak up or ask questions, they often become withdrawn or disengaged, they may feel isolated or not valued for their contributions at work. This lack of belonging or acceptance can leave one vulnerable to depression and stress that impacts both the personal and professional experiences we have at home and at work.

One popular model to support psychological safety follows a four-phase maturity process that begins with creating inclusion safety, learner safety, contributor safety and then challenger safety within your organization and or team.

Phase 1: begins with inclusion safety that embraces diversity within the group. During this phase the workers feel welcome, included, wanted, and appreciated in the group setting.

Phase 2: known as learner safety, supports learning by asking questions, learning from our mistakes, and learning through mentorships.

Phase 3: is contributor safety that encourages collaboration within the team and having the knowledge and skills to make meaningful contributions without fear of embarrassment or ridicule.

Phase 4: is called challenger safety, that is the ability of the individual or group to respectfully challenge the status quo and ask, "why do we continue to do it that way", or "what if we do things differently around here"?

One way to measure psychological safety within an organization uses a blended approach to examine trends between workplace violence events and employee retention rates. This two-pronged approach helps correlate the employee's experience in the work setting with their degree of satisfaction measured against exposure to workplace violence events like bullying, intimidation, and even physical violence. When not addressed, these trends expose the organization to direct and indirect expenses related to workforce shortages, recruitment, and retention as well as higher claims costs due to physical and psychological workplace injuries and claims.

Guidance and legislation that supports psychological safety as part of workplace violence prevention

OSHA's General Duty clause, from the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 directs employers to ensure a safe working environment for employees that is free from recognized hazards that could cause physical harm and those that may lead to serious psychological harm.

The ISO 45003 global standard provides guidance for managing psychosocial risk within an occupational health and safety management system based on ISO 45001. ISO 45003 emphasizes the importance of addressing psychological health as part of overall workplace safety.

In 2023 California signed into law the SB553 that now expands the definition of workplace violence to address risk of both physical injuries and psychological trauma or stress. Identifying and evaluating workplace violence hazards along with education and expanded record keeping are some of the basic elements of the new legislation.

What is happening today with employee mental health and wellness?
The World Health Organization defines mental health as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to their community.

Mental health and wellness can be positively associated with psychosocial factors and lifestyles that include having a caring social network, contributing to society, and having a sense of belonging. Psychosocial factors and lifestyles can also have a negative influence on the individual such as when financial and medical concerns leave them vulnerable to stress and anxiety that sometimes leads to substance abuse and suicide.

During a global benefits survey WTW saw that 59% of individuals feel lonely, 58% report having addictive behaviors, 59% report overspending, and 53%, just over half, are satisfied with their social life.[6] When effective, health and benefits teams within organizations do a tremendous job of helping employers find the right vendors to provide mental health care and treatment options for employees. It is equally important to understand what we can do to prevent the additional burden of stress in the workplace by addressing psychological safety before harm occurs.

Today's mental health and wellbeing agenda is being pushed into the forefront of organizational requirements through a series of frameworks and in response to employee engagement surveys that highlight the need to expand mental health services. This is coming in the form of frameworks, standards, innovative applications, and data analytics.

Framework
The U.S. Surgeon General published a Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being in 2022.[7] The framework outlines essential elements including the need to protect workers from harm including both physical and psychological harm. Recommendations from the U.S. Surgeon General include a focus on continued efforts to minimize occupational hazards, workplace violence and psychological harm that can result from discrimination, emotional hostility, bullying, and harassment.

Data and analytics
Data innovations are further impacting mental health claims to help facilitate early detection, personalized monitoring, and data-driven interventions for improved outcomes. Organizations are continually auditing and improving Employee Assistance Program (EAP) programs and adding mental health apps, and reward programs to improve utilization. Many employers are elevating their data analytics today to track and trend mental health aspects in claims data. Mental health claims are typically managed through the employee's health plan but can also be reported as part of a workers' compensation claim in instances where there has been an injury to an individual involving threats or aggressive assaults at work or stress directly related to the workplace role.

What is the connection between psychological safety and mental health?
It is important to remember that nearly everyone will experience stress at some point in their career or personal life. While we cannot remove stress from life, we can be thoughtful about how the organization contributes to workplace stress and responds to the rising need to address access to mental health care and services for this next generation of our workforce.

With psychological safety we can be the employer of choice, caring for our employee's total health and wellness, and recruiting and retaining a healthy workforce. Without psychological safety we see employees disengaged at work and sometimes suffer needlessly with mental health concerns brought on by stress and anxiety from both the work environment and personal crisis at home.

Successful strategies to promote psychological safety and address mental health needs
Building psychological safety and supporting the mental health and wellness of your employees requires insight from employees, managers, leaders, and industry experts. Here are some practical steps you can take:

- Consider an anonymous survey to understand some of the concerns employees are dealing with that produce stress or mental health concerns that can impact their work performance and safety.

- Schedule open forums to explore the survey results and listen to employee concerns and needs about mental health and psychological safety at work.

- Develop an interprofessional team approach including human resources, safety, risk, management, and employees to bring forth perspective from all levels within the organization.
- Expand the mental health support community by offering mental health champion education to managers and interested employees. The mental health champion role helps you create a culture of empathy and caring for your employees. The mental health champion role is not designed or authorized to diagnosis mental illness but rather to be a non-judgmental listener for the employee during their time of need and help them navigate the resources available to them.

- Create a mental health anti-stigma campaign designed to let employee and managers know it is okay not to be okay, and show how your organization cares about employees, listens to their needs, and provides resources to help them navigate to the right clinical care they need for their mental health and wellness needs.

- Use metrics to determine what is working and what to adjust as part of your ongoing improvement strategy. One example is measuring the trends associated with mental health claims from your health plan participants each year and address barriers that may

exist with your current health care plans for the upcoming year. Another important metrics to review is related to stress or anxiety that may have been associated with workplace injuries, bullying and incivility reports.

9 Mental Health Questions for Your Employee Engagement Surveys

Employee feedback is essential for creating and maintaining a work environment that supports mental health.

By including mental health questions on your employee engagement surveys, employers not only demonstrate a clear organizational commitment to employee well-being, but also gain insights that will help them improve the mental health support they provide.

Clarify Goals
Begin your revamp of your employee engagement survey by clarifying what you're trying to accomplish by measuring mental health, said London-based independent consultant Amy McKeown, who trains HR professionals in supporting workplace mental health.

Ask a few foundational questions before starting, she advises: "What are we trying to do? Are we looking to get a snapshot of employee mental health, or measuring what people know about available mental health benefits, resources, policies and processes? Why are we doing what we're doing, and how do we measure it?"

McKeown works with large U.K. organizations, many of which "went out and bought any number of random mental health resources during the pandemic."

And yet not much has changed for them, she says: "Mental health absences, for instance, remain high." Purchasing benefits or apps without having a clear strategic framework in place for how they will be used and measured "doesn't really help anyone except the vendors."

9 Questions You Should Ask About Mental Health

Once you've defined your goals, think carefully about what you'll ask in your employee engagement surveys. Determine what your organization will do with the feedback. Experts weighed in with important questions to ask and answer.

You can, and should, customize each of these recommended questions so they align with your organization's needs:

1.   How comfortable do you feel talking about your mental health with your manager, HR and your colleagues?

Creating a work environment where people feel comfortable coming forward and discussing their mental health concerns is foundational for any improvement. Much work remains to be done to destigmatize workplace mental health, because 8 in 10 workers report that shame and stigma keep them from seeking treatment, according to health care provider Kaiser Permanente.

"Conversations are the most common way people seek support for their mental health and are typically how organizations learn about them," said Bernie Wong, knowledge lead and principal at workplace mental health consultancy Mind Share Partners. "Responses to this question help you understand the prevalence of stigma, how comfortable people feel about coming forward and who people go to when they seek support."

2.   Do you understand what resources are available to support your mental health?

Providing benefits doesn't mean that people are aware of, or utilizing, them. For example, a Mind Share Partners Mental Health at Work Report found that only 50 percent of employees knew the proper procedure for getting support for their mental health.

"The mental health resources you offer could cover a wide breadth of benefits, therapy, self-care tools and more," Wong said. "But your people may not even be aware of them. Educating people about available resources is a key step that helps empower them to take care of themselves."

3.   How easy is it to access your mental health benefits?

"The more friction and complications around accessing benefits," said Mark DeFee, a workplace wellness consultant, "the less likely they'll be used."
Organizations can work both internally and with their vendors to streamline the process of accessing benefits. Wong recommended "developing a tool, perhaps a portal on your website, that explains all your mental health resources in one easy-to-navigate place."

4.   Have you used mental health benefits or taken time off due to mental health concerns?

A Gallup report found that workers with fair or poor mental health have nearly 12 days of unplanned absences annually, compared with 2.5 days for all other workers. If someone did take a mental health day, for example, were they transparent with their manager/HR about their reasons?

5.   Have you ever endorsed mental health benefits to a co-worker?

"This question gets at how satisfied employees are with their mental health benefits, without asking them directly," DeFee said. "If an employee has ever recommended a mental health benefit to a co-worker, they clearly believe there's value in it and are also comfortable recommending it to someone else."

6.   How would you describe the work culture here when it comes to supporting mental health?
Use the answers to this question to map out the places where workplace stress and burnout do the most damage to people's mental health.

"There are so many factors involved with burnout," McKeown said, "and when you ask this question, you might get simplistic responses about heavy workloads and lack of work/life balance."

Wong offered a potential solution: "When you ask this question, consider breaking down work culture into the core determinants of burnout, which are workload, fairness at work, role clarity, autonomy, flexibility, whether people feel rewarded for their work, as well as community and belonging."

Employers have historically offered mental health support that focuses on the individual (via benefits and wellness apps). "But the biggest driver of mental health concerns is workplace culture," Wong said, "where we've unfortunately seen the least change."

6.   To what extent do you believe our leadership prioritizes workplace mental health?

Support for mental health should come from managers and co-workers, including senior leadership. When leaders "talk the talk" on mental health, but their behaviors aren't aligned with their words, people notice and don't feel supported.

"Leaders play a determining role in setting work culture," Wong said, "in concrete ways around policies, but also through establishing norms around work." A new hire, for example, "might make a rough assumption about what's a reasonable amount of work each day by watching her manager, colleagues and the leadership team."

7.   Have you experienced any stigma related to mental health in the workplace?

"We know that the biggest obstacle to accessing mental health care is social stigma," DeFee said, "so asking about how colleagues have responded to someone's mental health concerns is important. Has someone failed to take your concerns seriously? Or have they been supportive and encouraged you to seek help? Those moments matter."

8.   How can we improve communication around mental health in the organization?

How you communicate about mental health can matter as much as what you communicate. "Some employees may want shorter, written communications, while others might want a video," DeFee said. "If you put up a poster about mental health in the break room, for example, some employees might not want to be seen looking at it."

Turning Insight into Action
When you start to ask mental health questions, employees will expect you to do something with their feedback. Making positive changes will not only improve mental health outcomes, but also build momentum for increased participation in your surveys.

https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/employee-relations/mental-health-questions-employee-engagement-surveys

White Employee: Woke Training Created a Hostile Work Environment

In one of the latest woke training lawsuits, a Colorado employee claimed his employer's mandatory DEI training created a hostile work environment. When the case reached the Tenth Circuit, the appeals court affirmed a ruling in the employer's favor. Even so, the court's decision contained a stark warning for employers: In some cases, DEI training can create hostile work environments.

Here's what you need to know:
- Employee: Woke training made 'gross generalizations' based on race
- An employee worked for the Colorado Department of Corrections, which implemented mandatory DEI training.
- In the employee's view, the training program "paint[ed] a grim picture" of the U.S. "as a racist country permeated with discrimination."
- Moreover, the training made "sweeping negative generalizations regarding individuals who are white, and other gross generalizations about members of other racial demographics," the employee asserted.
- Training included woke terms

The employee took issue with some of the terminology listed in the training program's glossary of terms.

Specifically, the glossary defined the following terms as listed below:
- White Fragility: Discomfort and defensiveness, often triggered by feelings of fear or guilt, on the part of a white person when confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice.

- Race: A social construct that artificially groups people by skin tone and other physical traits. The concept, which has no genetic or scientific basis, was created and used to justify the social and economic oppression of people of color by white people.
- White Exceptionalism: The belief held by some white allies that they are exceptions to white racism even though they fail to address the implicit ways in which they perpetuate white supremacy. These individuals are often more interested in not seeming racist than actually improving the lives of people of color.

Did recommendations push a woke agenda?
- The training also included an Other Tools & Resources section that the employee said he felt "pressure[d] to review." One recommended video, titled "Redlined, A Legacy of Housing Discrimination," "describes white individuals as having a misplaced sense of success," the employee's lawsuit alleged.
- The training also recommended two books: White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism by Robin DiAngelo, and How to be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi. In the employee's view, both books "entrench invidious racial stereotypes."
- The employee asserted that the training materials "created a culture of suspicion and distrust" in the workplace. He claimed that his "own experiences [were] severe and pervasive." He insisted that "his knowledge that his colleagues were being instructed in the same manner with the same trainings exacerbated the hostile [work] environment."
- Moreover, the employee said that he felt "harassed and intimidated to the point that he no longer felt comfortable" at work. He said that he filed a complaint through the formal complaint process and was told that no investigation would be done because he "did not establish reasonable cause to indicate the presence of discrimination [or] discriminatory harassment."
- The employee said he resigned due to the employer's "refusal to investigate or remedy the situation." He sued, alleging a hostile work environment claim under Title VII.
- The district court dismissed the employee's claim, finding he failed to plausibly allege the harassment was "severe or pervasive."

The employee appealed to the Tenth Circuit.
What is a Title VII hostile work environment?

To state a racially hostile work environment under Title VII, the employee had to allege:
- He was a member of a protected class
- He was subjected to unwelcome harassment
- The harassment was due to race, and
- The harassment was so severe or pervasive that it altered a term, condition, or privilege of his employment and created an abusive work environment.

In this case, the Tenth Circuit explained, the issue was whether the alleged harassment was severe or pervasive enough to negatively affect the work environment and create an abusive environment.

Court issues warning before turning to facts of case
First, the court offered a word of warning. It said the employee's allegations, accepted as true, "paint an unflattering portrait" of the employer's training program.

Such "messaging could promote racial discrimination and stereotypes within the workplace" and "could encourage racial preferences in hiring, firing and promotion decisions," the Tenth Circuit opined.

Moreover, the court stressed, any employee who objected to the messaging "risk being individually targeted for discriminatory treatment – especially if employers explicitly or implicitly reward discriminatory outcomes."

Lack of concrete evidence dooms claim
Turning to the matter at hand, the court said that the employee had to plausibly allege the harassment was objectively severe or pervasive. He did not do so, the court determined.
The employee claimed he was "forced to resign" due to the training but he did not provide any context about "why or how he was forced to resign." Specifically, he did not include details about "what he experienced in the workplace due to the DEI training – particularly his interactions with supervisors or co-workers," the court said.

In addition, he did not allege that "the training occurred more than once" or that "supervisors threatened to punish or otherwise discipline employees who failed to complete" the training. While the employee's complaint asserted "the training could lead to safety or security issues because of the nature of the workplace – a state prison," the court said that concern was merely "speculative."

The employee did not show that the training was severe or pervasive enough to create a hostile work environment, the Tenth Circuit held. It affirmed the district court's ruling in the employer's favor.

Young v. Colorado Dep't of Corrections, No. 23-1063, 2024 U.S. App. LEXIS 5814 (10th Cir. 3/11/24).

https://www.hrmorning.com/news/woke-training-hostile-work-environment/

An 18-point playbook to combat age discrimination at work

These strategies can help leaders move beyond stereotypes and embrace the power of diversity in a multigenerational workforce.

The growing intergenerational divide could be a source of conflict in the workplace, but what if we could shift it to an opportunity for growth?

Younger workers may feel an economic pinch while older generations grapple with a suddenly fickle future thanks to evolving work trends and rapid tech advancements.

We can bridge this gap by fostering empathy, understanding, and open communication that unlocks unique strengths across the entire workforce. To get there, 18 thought leaders shared their perspectives on transforming conflict into growth. From HR's role in bridging this gap to modeling each generation's values, they've provided a road map for turning the tide on ageism in the workplace. These strategies can help leaders move beyond stereotypes and embrace the power of diversity in a multigenerational workforce.

REEVALUATE POLICIES AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES THROUGH HR
It requires a nuanced approach, especially considering the presence of four diverse generations in the workforce. Younger employees may feel their challenges are overlooked, leading to perceptions of neglect or misunderstanding by older generations.

Conversely, older employees might face stereotypes of being resistant to change or out of touch. This dynamic could foster misunderstandings and unintentional biases, affecting hiring, promotion, and development opportunities. But it also presents an opportunity for organizations to reevaluate policies and embrace more inclusive practices.

So, my prediction is that the role of Human Resources (HR) becomes not just important but indispensable. They're not the "bad guy" they're often made out to be. In bridging this significant and complicated gap, HR will absolutely play a pivotal role (more than they already have) in transforming these challenges into opportunities for growth and understanding.

HR professionals are uniquely positioned to lead the way in addressing age-related issues in the workplace. They can be the architects of a more inclusive and empathetic work environment, actively working to dismantle stereotypes and bridge gaps between generations. There's a reason their titles include things like "human" and "people."

EXTEND CROSS-GENERATIONAL GRACE WITH ALL TEAMS
I think it's clear to everyone who's a Gen Xer or boomer, who has kids, grandkids, or has ever worked with the younger generation, that Gen Z doesn't care much about our sensibilities, and that's a good thing. They're done when the workday is done, they won't get guilted into doing overtime for free, and they take days off as is their legal right.

I just don't see why everyone is pretending that intergenerational conflicts have just been invented with Gen Z; this is a story as old as time. The older generation always thinks youngsters are lazy and entitled, and the young generation thinks the older ones are out of touch. We can mitigate this by both leaning in. It's nothing new. If we all extend an amount of grace to one another, regardless of generation, we can avoid a lot of this silly and largely made-up "conflict."
Rick Berres, owner, Honey-Doers

TREAT PEOPLE AS INDIVIDUALS
The best way to reduce generational tension is by treating people as individuals rather than according to age-related or other stereotypes. Approach each situation as if everyone intends to bring value, and enjoy learning about their unique perspectives. Use some empathy to recognize the struggles that people face.

Many zoomers and millennials were sold the false promise that a college education would guarantee a lucrative career, and instead find themselves burdened with debt. Many Gen Xers are caretakers for their boomer parents or face other struggles. Recognize that everybody has their own challenges in life that they may choose to keep private, and focus on collaborating through your differences toward a common purpose.
Dennis Consorte, digital marketing and leadership consultant for startups, Snackable Solutions

USE HISTORY TO PROMOTE SOLIDARITY
History provides us with some valuable lessons in resilience and unity. Take, for instance, the Great Depression or the 2008 financial crisis—times of immense hardship that ultimately brought people together across generations. In those moments, intergenerational solidarity emerged as a powerful force for overcoming adversity.

So, as leaders, it's crucial to learn from these historical examples and take proactive steps to bridge the generational gap. Instead of perpetuating stereotypes or placing blame, let's foster genuine understanding and collaboration among employees of all ages. This means promoting mentorship programs that facilitate knowledge sharing across generations, implementing policies that prioritize fairness and inclusivity, and cultivating a workplace culture that values and respects the diverse perspectives of all employees.

By embracing each other's strengths and experiences, we can turn this generational tension into an opportunity for growth and collective success in today's ever-evolving workplace landscape. After all, when we come together, we're not just overcoming challenges—we're building a stronger, more resilient future for everyone.
Manuel Schlothauer, founder, HeyManuel.com

CULTIVATE AN ALL-INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE
Work-related drives and requirements are quite different for all generations.

For example, contrary to common belief, younger employees may value career development and flexibility over pay packages. They are supposed to ensure they create programs or initiatives that cater to these diverse needs.

Moreover, employees in different life stages benefit from policies that enable them to balance their jobs with their personal lives. Another thing is for leaders to be taught how to recognize their own prejudices against people of different ages so that every worker feels appreciated and understood.

Finally, embracing a multigenerational workplace means accepting each generation's strengths and viewpoints, which would eventually contribute toward an efficient working environment.
Loretta Kilday, DebtCC spokesperson, Debt Consolidation Care

DITCH STEREOTYPES
On one side, you've got younger folks like me—frustrated, feeling stuck, and honestly, a little bitter that the "American Dream" feels more like a fairy tale. Homeownership? Laughable. Job security? More like a nervous laugh. Naturally, when you're stressed and struggling, it's easy to point fingers at those who seemingly had it easier—the older generations.

But here's the thing: They're not immune either. Imagine being called "lazy" and "entitled" just because the world you knew has shifted beneath your feet. It's a recipe for resentment, and that's where age discrimination creeps in. I predict we'll see it from both sides—younger folks feeling overlooked for promotions due to assumptions about work ethic, and older folks facing early retirement pressure or even hiring bias.

So, what can leaders do to avoid this workplace implosion? First, ditch the stereotypes. Judging individuals based on their age group is like judging a book by its cover—inaccurate and unfair. Instead, focus on individual skills and contributions. Second, foster open communication. Encourage honest conversations about these frustrations, where both sides can share their perspectives without judgment. Third, create a culture of lifelong learning. Invest in training and development programs for all ages, showing that everyone has the potential to grow and adapt.

By building bridges instead of walls, we can turn this generational tension into a source of mutual understanding and shared progress. After all, a diverse and inclusive workplace is a thriving workplace, right? Let's not let age get in the way of that.
James Parker, cofounder, LEONID

PRIORITIZE OPEN COMMUNICATION
The most effective strategy is to foster an environment that promotes open and honest communication across generations through regular one-on-one and team meetings. Ensuring everyone's voice is heard paves the way for mutual understanding and finding common ground, demonstrating that, ultimately, we all share the same goal—to engage in meaningful and satisfying work within a supportive environment alongside colleagues we respect and value.
Ana Colak-Fustin, founder, HR consultant and psychologist, ByRecruiters

USE COLLABORATION AND MENTORSHIP
My main suggestion for business leaders is to actively work to build more cross-generational connections within teams. The more that individuals from different generations interact with each other, the better they will understand each other's perspectives and the different kinds of challenges each faces or has faced, in their career and life progress.

There are multiple ways to encourage this kind of interaction. It can happen within the workplace when you build cross-generational teams to collaborate on projects or assignments. You can also create a mentorship system that pairs employees from different generations and encourages them to learn from each other. Having more cross-generational social opportunities can be valuable, as well, because this provides your team with the time and opportunity to open up a dialogue about these different concerns and perceptions.

The more exposure an individual has to workers from different generations, the less likely they will be to hold these generalized opinions about people from different age groups.
Rob Boyle, marketing operations director, Airswift

HIGHLIGHT STRENGTHS AND AVOID PAY DISCREPANCIES
To counter the effects [of stereotype threat theory and social identity theory], we need to do the opposite. Don't be simply age-blind. Rather, spell out and involve workers in thinking about how intergenerational understanding of problems and solutions drives results, and highlight the strengths of a diverse group.

Focus on an equal pay for equal work model, and encourage workers to challenge their assumptions about stereotypes. When it comes to performance evaluation, be transparent and objective—let the numbers that the company cares about speak.

Lastly, in case things don't go well, make complaint procedures for unacceptable behaviors easy to follow, with clear consequences for violations.
Adam Horvath, psychologist, Personal Psychology

LEAD BY EXAMPLE AND ASK DEEPER QUESTIONS
As one of the more than six million multigenerational households in the U.S., I have a different perspective. I have lived with older family members for many years, an experience that has enriched me and shifted my perspectives on different generations. Curiosity and asking questions have helped uncover the context behind viewpoints and opened the door to deeper

discussions on how the context in which we grew up shapes and colors how we see the world and each other.

As multigenerational households become more prevalent, I predict this will lead to greater empathy and understanding across generations and reduce age discrimination and bias.

Leaders can start with curiosity to lead by example in exploring the deeper reasons behind a point of view. Opportunities to engage with other generations and create multigenerational teams can offer a way to better understand each other as the team's work unfolds. It can be helpful to remind ourselves of how others viewed us when we entered the workforce.

Each generation sees the following generations as having it easier than they did—the old joke of "I had to walk to school uphill both ways" comes to mind. Younger generations can benefit from the lived experiences of older generations and learn how to avoid some of the mistakes they may have made as they build their careers.

There is an opportunity to learn from anyone, if we can approach interactions with interest and openness to a different perspective.
Meghan Anzelc, Ph.D., president, chief data and analytics officer, Three Arc Advisory

REVAMP MIDDLE MANAGEMENT
Older generations have been bemoaning (and belittling) the "youth of today" since before WWI. Revolutions like rock music, feminism, and Black power would never have happened if young people weren't fed up with old ways. So, it's not necessarily a bad thing that they are.

The risk I see is due to the outdated norms of leadership—especially when we look at middle management. The succession pipeline for middle managers is becoming concerningly small—Visier's research proves that only 9% of professionals are considering being a people manager, and only 4% are considering joining the C-suite.

The average professional sees managerial responsibilities as a nonstarter for work-life balance and is notably observing the growing pressure on middle managers and the absence of autonomy that they are permitted to wield in response. They feel that the role of middle manager is outdated and out of touch with what's needed by a modern workforce—and they're right.

It's time to change the common model of middle management—a model that has remained largely unchanged for 40 years.

We need to reshape the reputation, responsibilities, and rewards of mid-level leaders. C-suite leaders must stop middle management from being polarized as either a stepping stone or a dead end, and together we need to make it a career destination—attractive, appreciated, and appropriately empowered . . . or face the performance consequences to our businesses.

Neglecting our middle managers is becoming an existential threat. Without them, there is zero connection between younger workforces and older executives. We need them, at their best, now.
Rebecca Houghton, CEO, BoldHR

MITIGATE TENSIONS WITH CROSS-GENERATIONAL MENTORSHIPS
From my experience as a college professor, cross-generational mentorships are powerful—they encourage knowledge sharing and understanding between ages while tackling stereotypes. And leaders ought to adopt empathetic, transformational styles that tap into the strengths of diverse perspectives across generations. Working collaboratively is key.

With intention and compassion from management, I'm optimistic workplaces can overcome generational tensions. But it takes recognizing the problem and bridging divides through open communication and mutual learning.
Dr. Mark Farrell (FIA), founder, CEO, associate professor, and actuary, ProActuary Jobs

LEAD WITH EMPATHY
As someone who has found themselves very much in this situation, I think it's important that people across all generations lead with empathy and understanding. It feels very convenient and cyclical to label each generation, when in reality, every generation has its highs, lows, and struggles.

With the rising inflation, widespread economic disparity, and homeownership, among other things, becoming less accessible, I think it's important that our conversations around jobs, homeownership, and family building in the workplace need to be discussions that recognize the realities of the past and the present.
Matthew Sanjari, founder and business coach, PRIME Consulting

TAP GEN Z'S FRESH PERSPECTIVE
Despite prevailing stereotypes, Gen Z brings a fresh perspective characterized by ambition, a desire for fair compensation, flexibility in work arrangements, and a strong emphasis on meaningful contributions. Other generations deem us lazy, but we are just willing to step away. No one wants to be underpaid, underappreciated, and undervalued. While remote work holds appeal, hybrid options that offer flexibility are more in line with Gen Z's preferences.
It's worth noting that the majority of Gen Z's work experience has been shaped by virtual environments since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, traditional office structures may feel foreign to them, requiring organizations to reimagine workplace dynamics and communication strategies to accommodate this shift.

To foster collaboration across generations, organizations can implement innovative initiatives such as reverse-mentoring programs, storytelling workshops, and cross-generational lunches. These efforts not only promote mutual understanding but also drive innovation and inclusivity within the workplace.

Furthermore, aligning organizational values with those of Gen Z is paramount. This entails fostering open communication, providing opportunities for professional growth and development, and valuing the diverse perspectives that each generation brings to the table. By embracing diversity and creating inclusive cultures, organizations can effectively attract and retain Gen Z talent while ensuring that all generations thrive in the evolving landscape of work.
AJ Eckstein, founder, "The Final Round" Career Platform

PROVIDE VALUE AND GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES
First, we need to understand the systemic factors shaping this Gen Z perspective. The significant rise in living costs (e.g., rent increasing approximately 18% in urban areas since the pandemic), coupled with student debt and stagnant entry-level salaries, creates outsize economic issues for this generation.

While I wouldn't say that Gen Z necessarily "blames" millennials or boomers for their economic issues, they do express frustration with the lack of progression in the workplace. The labels of "lazy" or "entitled" come from managers resistant to change. Why would Gen Z want to manually type in data or perform tedious entry-level tasks when they understand the power of technology?

At Gen Z Journals, I coach senior leaders to incentivize their Gen Z employees by providing networking or upskilling learning initiatives, practicing reverse mentoring (two-way conversations), offering transparent feedback for growth, encouraging building a personal brand, etc.

As Gen Z continues to evolve and mature, the pizza party with ping-pong tables won't cut it anymore. They want to feel valued for their unique contributions and see clear paths for personal and professional growth within their companies.
Lana Ivory, product marketing lead, Alexa

IMPLEMENT A CULTURE SHIFT
As a 21-year-old woman in tech, I honestly thought that most of any kind of discrimination I would face would be based on gender, maybe even race (I'm Asian American). But surprisingly, it's mostly been ageism. People constantly question my knowledge, my experience, my credibility, and even my value solely based on my age.

I once got into an argument with an employee at my university about intern pay—I said they needed to raise the wages for our university internship program and the person asked what I thought was a good benchmark or example. I said cautiously, "The average wage for a software engineer Intern is $25-$35 per hour in Nevada." He replied, "No student is worth $25/hour." I dryly replied, "My last employer gave me $35/hour." This is just one personal example of the frustration Gen Zs have with older generations.

I think one of the biggest disconnects is what each generation is willing to tolerate. Past generations dealt with things like unpaid internships, huge wage gaps (racial and gender),

micromanagers, unfair workplaces, etc. But that was just part of going to work. This generation is a lot less accepting of those things and maybe I'm biased because I'm a Gen Z, but I think it's a good thing.

For leaders, there needs to be an entire culture shift. First, people need to stop lumping an entire generation together. There are bad apples in every generation, but that doesn't mean we're all the same. Second, workplaces should strive to move forward and provide things like salary transparency, real DEI efforts, and paid internships. Everybody stands to benefit from these things.

Realistically, at this present moment, most of the people who are leaders and have the power to make change are older people (over 40). I think the key lies in a culture of mentorship. In a mentor/mentee relationship, the two parties can both stand to learn something from each other. I think that doing this can help more younger and older workers see each other's sides and maybe come to a consensus.
Morgan Young, content creator, That LinkedIn Girl

EMBRACE GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY WITH HUMOR
Embrace the absurdity of it all. Millennials are caught in the middle, like a game of tug-of-war, between the boomers clinging to their fax machines and Gen Zers who've never known a world without TikTok. It's a generational showdown where the only winners are the memes. The key to avoiding disaster lies in embracing the chaos, celebrating the quirks of each generation, and maybe investing in a good office-wide latte machine.
Fanny Surjana, quench master, QuenchList

MODEL ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND APPRECIATION
No generation has inherited a perfect world, so we are overdue in the need to advance beyond collective finger-pointing. If left unchecked, the divide will continue to worsen. Age discrimination at both ends of the spectrum takes a huge toll on ROI, culture, customer, and employee experience.

The most powerful and productive stance leadership can take is to model and ensure there is acknowledgment, understanding, and appreciation for the value each generation brings.

https://www.fastcompany.com/91068581/playbook-combat-age-discrimination-at-work

White men targeted by harassment more likely to report race and gender bias, survey finds

HR industry observers have long noted the importance of male allies in curbing harmful workplace behavior.

White men targeted by harassment are more likely to recognize and report race and gender bias at work than White men who have not experienced harassment, according to a recent University of Michigan study published in the American Journal of Sociology.

The study, which examined survey data of more than 11,000 employees in 24 federal agencies, found that White male harassment targets were "more skeptical that their organizations operate meritocratically, and this greater skepticism is tied to more frequent recognition and reporting."

About a third of White men in the survey said they experienced workplace harassment, according to the university. Erin Cech, an associate professor of sociology and author of the study, said that asking White men to reflect on experiences of negative treatment "can foster fruitful skepticism" which, in turn, "may facilitate a greater willingness to acknowledge unfair treatment experienced by colleagues and take action."

"Of course, the takeaway is not that we should increase harassment toward white men," Cech said in the university's article discussing the study findings. "Rather, white men who have had the unfortunate experience of being bullied or threatened at work might be unexpected allies in diversity and inclusion efforts."

HR industry observers have long noted the importance of male allies, specifically, in curbing harmful workplace behavior. During a 2018 presentation, employment law attorney Jonathan Segal said that men have an opportunity to be "affirmative partners to stand up and speak out" about sexism, workplace discrimination and harassment.

Workplace cultures with strong allyship and inclusion were 50% less likely to see employees leave and 75% less likely to take sick days, a 2021 report by Bentley University's Larson Center for Women and Business found. The same report stated that such organizations saw improved productivity and were more likely to be recommended as a great place to work.

Reporting bias is not the end of the conversation, however. Most employees in a 2021 AllVoices survey who did report harassment said they reported it to managers, compared to roughly 36% who reported harassment to HR. This may be concerning given that managers are not always equipped to deal with harassment and related issues.

https://www.hrdive.com/news/white-men-targeted-harassment-report-workplace-bias/711556/

Why most workplace wellness benefits don't actually work

We need to fundamentally rethink corporate culture, not offer more meditation apps and coaching sessions, argues this writer.

Once, at a previous job, just after our annual insurance reenrollment presentation, I noticed that mental health deductibles were no longer offered in my insurance renewal options. I contacted my HR rep to see if my therapy would no longer be covered. It wouldn't—a session that previously cost me $35 out of pocket would now cost $175.

I asked to meet with her and explained how detrimental I felt this would be for myself and my colleagues. She put on her best concerned face, told me she really valued my input, and pivoted to a new company benefit she hadn't touched on in the reenrollment presentation: Certain plans came with two monthly coaching sessions. I asked whether or not these were personal coaches or certified therapists. She said she'd look into that and get back to me. She never did. A recent study by Oxford fellow William J. Fleming in the Industrial Relations Journal found that workers who participated in company-sponsored "wellness benefits"—including sleep apps, mindfulness seminars, and even the sort of one-on-one coaching sessions this HR rep offered— were no better off than their fellow workers who opted out of these initiatives.

The corporate wellness market is a billion-dollar industry, which makes sense since 39% of employees report experiencing poor mental health symptoms related to work. Ninety percent of employers report increasing their investment in mental health programs, which are touted as a way for progressive-presenting organizations to help combat employee burnout, low engagement, and the general U.S. grind culture that's inherently bad for everyone's mental well-being.

However, something about this rush to wellness-ify the workplace feels fishy to me. Wellness, in general, is an ambiguous term that can run the gamut from legitimate forms of mental and physical care, such as mediation, to pseudoscience-heavy marketing schemes like celery juice as a cure-all. I couldn't help thinking that there was a bit of a smoke screen going on. We've moved past the days of casual Fridays and office foosball tables being used to mask a lack of real office benefits. So, are wellness initiatives the new workplace happy hour?

When I reached out to Fleming to ask a bit more about the study's genesis, he agreed that things didn't add up. "In the last decade, there's been a huge increase in manager-led mental health initiatives, but the existing evidence didn't seem to back up this proliferation," he said. "There was also growing skepticism among academics as to the effectiveness and reasons for their popularity." It turns out the skepticism was warranted, as much of the other research on this topic has been done by the wellness vendors.

There seems to be a real discrepancy between performative wellness—mindfulness apps, in-office massages, calorie tracking tools—and benefits that, well, actually benefit employees—the

option for remote or hybrid work, increased flexibility, work-life balance, and commitment to DEI. The problem with the latter is that they require systemic changes.

I feel very fortunate that my current company offers flexible PTO and the ability to design the type of workday and schedule (to a degree) that sets me up for success. I can tell you firsthand how much better for my overall well-being this is than a meditation app, but it requires a leadership team very dedicated to making their organization a people-centric workplace. Finding said meditation app, meanwhile, just requires finding the right vendor.

"The main takeaway is that you can't expect change if you just try and change the worker and not the workplace. Individualized strategies like mindfulness and resilience training don't get to the root causes of work stress or tackle poor working conditions," Fleming says.

It's not all cynicism on the workplace wellness front, though. Fleming's study found a notable exception to the rule—workers who were given the opportunity to do charity or volunteer work did seem to have improved well-being. And an older study on the subject from the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine makes a very astute point when answering "Do Workplace Health Promotion (Wellness) Programs Work?" It depends. The 20-plus authors of the article conclude that while some wellness programs are empty failures, some make the workplace better. Per usual, the answer lies somewhere between black and white.

I ended up being let go from that job that offered me those coaching sessions, ironically, just a couple of days after presenting the same HR rep with some evidence I'd documented of what I felt was unethical behavior by upper management. When the HR rep emailed me later that day to tie up paperwork loose ends, she reminded me I could take advantage of my generous benefits for the remainder of the month.

I never ended up consulting any of those personal coaches, but I happened to run into her just a week later while playing tennis in the middle of the day (I was unemployed . . . not sure of her excuse). She made a point to come over, assure me she wished things ended differently . . . and check on my mental well-being.

https://www.fastcompany.com/91057933/leverage-ai-to-get-more-out-of-it-and-marketing-dollars

Anxiety Skyrockets To No. 1 Issue Among American Workers, New Study Shows

As the workplace headed into 2022—the third year of the pandemic—the incidence of job stress and burnout jumped to an all-time high. The American Psychological Association's Work and Well-Being study found that 79% of the 1,501 employees surveyed experienced work-related stress in the month before the survey, and 3 in 5 workers said work-related stress caused

them to have a lack of interest, motivation and energy at work. Plus, 36% had cognitive weariness, 32% emotional exhaustion, and 44% physical fatigue—a 38% jump from 2019.

Worker Anxiety Going Through The Roof In 2024
When reviewing 2023 survey data, APA psychologists widely agree there is mounting evidence that our society is experiencing the psychological impacts of a collective trauma. Although the pandemic might seem like a distant past, its aftermath along with the psychological impact of global conflict, racism, mass shootings, climate-related disasters and a turbulent economy are weighing on the mental health of the American workforce in 2024.

The latest data analysis from ComPsych analysis—based on a representative sample of more than 300,000 U.S. cases—found that anxiety is now the number one presenting issue among American workers, topping depression, stress, partner/relationship issues, family issues and addiction and grief among other topics people sought help for. In fact, in 2023 nearly a quarter of people (24%) who reached out for mental health assistance did so to get help with anxiety. This jump is especially notable as up until 2017, anxiety didn't rank in the top five presenting issues for Americans.

According to Dr. Richard Chaifetz, founder, chairman and CEO of ComPsych. "As a society, we're notably more anxious now than we were just five years ago, and it's not shocking considering current world events: from the lasting impacts of COVID-19 to civil unrest, an increasingly polarized political landscape, global turmoil, the border crisis and rising crime, the proliferation of AI and an unpredictable economy—there are so many macro issues impacting people's mental health in addition to interpersonal and personal situations."

This trend is important for business leaders to be mindful of, particularly as mental health related leaves of absences have exploded in recent years. ComPsych data shows these leaves have increased by 300% since 2017. "For business leaders, there is an imperative to help employees cope with these feelings," Chaifetz continued.

"Companies who invest in resources for employees ultimately benefit by attracting and retaining a healthier and more productive workforce, allowing both employees and companies to thrive."

Amp Up Your Work Health To Mitigate Anxiety
While employers share some responsibility to create a stress-free workplace, employees also have a responsibility to their work health that is essential for long-term mental and physical viability and the trajectory of their careers. If you toil in a toxic work culture, it's important to weigh your options and find a workplace that prides itself on employee-centered empathy and care.

These work cultures are increasing as a result of the pandemic and The Great Resignation and employee demands for positive change. Even if you work in a healthy environment, chronic anxiety doesn't give your body a chance to return to its natural resting state. The key is to create

an anxiety care plan to offset any potential damage so you can reset your brain and keep it healthy.

Here are 10 science-backed steps to help you create your own personalized anxiety care plan to mitigate chronic stress and thrive at work:

- Meditation limits cortisol levels by 25%, according to research, and it reduces mind wandering, free-floating anxiety and mistakes, keeping you on task at work.
- Anxiety prevention foods promote mindful productivity and work health. Aim for protein, Omega-3 fatty acids, eggs, pumpkin seeds, B vitamins and Vitamin D, dark chocolate, turmeric, chamomile, yogurt, green tea and Brazil nuts.
- Regular exercise such as brisk walking re-calibrates a fatigued brain and reduces your risk of developing anxiety by almost 60%.
- Positive self-talk can stop catastrophic mind chatter that causes anxiety and keep you calm in stressful situations.
- Sleep deprivation leads to anxiety, and ample sleep is restorative for calming your mind and contributing to your work health.
- Microbreaks—short breaks of five minutes—throughout the workday mitigate fatigue, reduce anxiety and keep your brain rested and clear.
- Mindful abdominal breathing keeps your mind sharp and focused in the present moment when anxiety tries to steal your breath away.
- An optimistic outlook prevents anxiety from ruling your mind and gives you better memory at work. Plus, looking for the opportunity in the problem helps you scale the career ladder faster and farther than pessimism, according to research.
- Brain scans of people who spend time outdoors show their prefrontal cortex has more gray matter plus a stronger ability to think clearly and self-regulate stress and anxiety.
- Social engagement mitigates cognitive decline, enhances gray matter in the brain and helps reduce anxiety. So it's important to avoid working in isolation and maintain social connections with coworkers to keep your mind active and healthy.

Our society has become more anxious since the pandemic. The macro events of the nation and world have impacted all of us, compounding the ongoing stressors in the workplace. Most of us can no longer depend on our employers to decide what's in our best mental health interests. You're the captain of your ship—not a passenger. You're in control of your mental health, not your employer. Evaluate your job and life and decide for yourself what reasonable steps you can take to mitigate your anxiety and amp up your work health.

As far as business leaders go, Chaifetz offers sage advice. "It's vital that employers understand this and invest in their workforce's well-being. Specifically, I recommend investing in training managers to talk about mental health and to know what their company's resources are for those struggling with anxiety or other mental health challenges. It's also important that organizations develop resources and programming that are specific to the unique stressors of the modern world beyond focusing just on mental health alone."

Nearly half of women report gender bias, discrimination during hiring process

Women in the C-suite were even more likely to report biased or inappropriate questions during job interviews, according to The Muse.

About 42% of women surveyed said they've encountered gender-biased or inappropriate questions during a job interview, and 41% said they've felt discriminated against during a job interview due to gender, according to a March 26 report from The Muse and RecruitmentMarketing.com.

In addition, 38% said they've hesitated to apply for a job based on perceived gender bias. "We have made some progress as a society, but there is significant room to grow with gender pay equity, inclusive leadership, female-friendly benefits and placing value on a woman's voice in our workplaces," Heather Tenuto, CEO of The Muse Group, said in a statement.

In the survey of more than 1,000 female-identifying professionals, 67% said they think women in their industry have a hard time getting promoted. In addition, 87% said they don't believe men and women receive the same reaction from managers when negotiating a salary increase. More than half of women (55%) said they don't believe there's enough female representation among the leadership team at their organization, yet 79% said they're more likely to seek out companies with equal representation in managerial and leadership positions.

Geographic disparities also exist. In the Southeast (including Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky and Tennessee), 74% of women said they faced discriminatory challenges — nearly twice the rate of other regions.

Seniority may play a role as well. As the seniority of the survey respondents increased, the likelihood of encountering biased or inappropriate questions during job interviews also increased. Among women in the C-suite, 55% said they've been asked inappropriate questions in an interview and 58% have felt discriminated against in an interview, as compared to approximately 41% of women overall for both issues.

Women of color face even greater barriers, with two-thirds of Black women saying they change their hair for job interviews, according to a report by Dove and LinkedIn. Although some states have passed laws prohibiting hair-based discrimination, Black women are more likely to be sent home from work, denied employment, be overlooked for promotions and face a variety of microaggressions for wearing their natural hair texture and hair styles.

About two-thirds of women don't believe they're being paid fairly for their work, according to a Glassdoor report, particularly in accounting, tech and consulting. In addition, 43% said there aren't enough women in leadership at their organizations.

Even still, men and women express different views about gender-related gaps in pay and promotions that differ from workplace realities, according to a HiBob report. These perception gaps likely exist due to a lack of transparency or a disconnect in cultural communications, the report authors wrote.

https://www.hrdive.com/news/gender-discrimination-interview/711747/

Age and Disability Discrimination Claims Fail

Takeaway: Although reasonable accommodations, including leaves, are required for qualified employees with disabilities if the accommodations don't result in an undue hardship, employers are not required to provide indefinite leaves of absence.

An employee was terminated because of her refusal to provide a return-to-work date after nine months of medical leave, the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals found, affirming a lower court's dismissal of the employee's claims of a hostile work environment due to age and disability discrimination.

The employee was hired as the director of the oncology department at a regional medical center. She was 61 years old at the time of her hire and had a heart condition that required a cardiologist's care. The medical center was aware of the employee's medical condition when it hired her.

Shortly after she was hired, the medical center also hired a new chief operating officer, who became her direct supervisor. After a year and a half, the supervisor issued a coaching document regarding the employee's performance. A year later, the employee complained to HR that the supervisor bullied employees and had created a toxic environment.

Two months after the complaint, the supervisor issued the employee a disciplinary warning for creating a divisive environment between staff and management and placed her on a performance improvement plan. Four days later, the supervisor issued the employee a final warning for refusing to make any efforts to communicate during the disciplinary process. Five days after receiving the final warning, the employee requested and was granted short-term disability leave.

After being on leave for nine months, the medical center asked the employee when she could return to work. She stated that her doctor had not cleared her to return, and the medical center terminated her employment.

The employee filed a lawsuit in state court for common-law violations and violations of the Missouri Human Rights Act (MHRA), alleging a hostile work environment due to her age and disability as well as discrimination based on her disability. The case was removed to the federal district court, which dismissed the common-law claims as pre-empted by the MHRA and granted summary judgment to the medical center. The employee appealed to the 8th Circuit.

In her hostile work environment claim, the employee cited several remarks made by her supervisor, including:
- Asking her when she was planning to retire, saying she "wasn't getting any younger."
- Asking the employee to downgrade a 72-year-old receptionist's performance rating, along with that of the oldest nurse.

In response to the employee's objection to the firing of an older employee because it would look like age discrimination, telling her, "If you're not on board, you're next."

Informing the employee that he would no longer allow her to work from home, saying, "I'm sick of hearing about your accommodations."

While on leave, the employee reported the supervisor to an ethics hotline for bullying. She also sent several anonymous letters addressing how she and other employees were treated, but all of them focused on bullying and did not mention age or disability. The employee did not claim that her treatment was discriminatory when she spoke with an inspector about her experiences.

An MHRA hostile work environment claim requires the plaintiff to show that:
- She is a member of a protected group.
- She was subjected to unwelcome harassment.
- Her membership in the protected group was a motivating factor in the harassment.
- A term, condition or privilege of her employment was affected by the harassment.
- The employee claimed protected status based on her age and disability.
- Age discrimination requires a showing that the employee suffered an adverse employment action and her age was the motivating factor, resulting in her suffering damages. A "motivating factor" requires that age actually played a role in and had a determinative influence on the adverse action.
- Disability discrimination requires the plaintiff to demonstrate that she had a disability, she was discharged and her disability was the motivating factor in the discharge.

The 8th Circuit pointed out that the comments cited by the employee occurred before she went on medical leave, more than nine months before her termination. Furthermore, the court

explained, the employee provided no evidence that she was fired based on her age, as opposed to her refusal to provide a date when she would return to work.

The court found that the employee's disability discrimination claims failed for the same reason—the employee failed to present any evidence that her disability, and not her refusal to provide a return date, was the motivating factor for her termination.

Lacking any evidence that the employer's stated reason for firing the employee was not the actual cause, the court affirmed the lower court's ruling.

https://www.shrm.org/topics- Re: Work placetools/employment-law-compliance/age-and-disability-discrimination-claims-fail

Do Employee Wellbeing Programs Improve Mental Health?

A new study reveals why work wellbeing programs aren't making you less miserable.

A study finds no benefits from participating in individual-level employee wellbeing interventions.

One-size-fits-all interventions are poorly designed, promote blame-shifting and fail to target root causes.

Sustainable wellbeing requires systemic changes to job design, organizational culture and work practices.

A happy and healthy worker is a productive worker... right? This belief has fueled the rise of the multi-billion-dollar employee wellness industry. Organizations spend an estimated $8 billion annually on individual-level initiatives like mindfulness training, resilience workshops, wellness apps, and workplace counseling. The reasoning? Helping employees reduce stress and anxiety will make them happier, more engaged, and thus more productive. However, mounting scientific evidence reveals this isn't necessarily the case. Despite the persistent marketing hype, employee wellness programs rarely improve worker wellbeing, engagement, performance, or provide evidence of real return on investment.

New research from Oxford University sheds light on these interventions' ineffectiveness, questioning the wellness industry's value. The study by William Flemming, published in Industrial Relations Journal, analyzed responses from 46,336 workers across 233 UK organizations. His conclusions? Those who participated in employee wellbeing programmes were no better off than those who didn't. In practical terms, participants did not show to be happier, more engaged, more mentally healthy, or more engaged than before. In fact, for some

interventions like resilience training, participants reported worse mental health than non-participants. This study joins a growing body of academic literature questioning the efficacy of work-related wellbeing interventions.

Why Do Employee Wellbeing Interventions Fail?
So why do these enormously popular programs fail? There are several potential reasons:
Addressing Symptoms, Not Root Causes: Programs largely center on addressing outcomes of larger organizational issues (e.g., disengagement) instead of treating their causes (e.g., excessive workload, time pressure, poor cultures, etc). Mindfulness can't give you more control over your workload. Wellness apps can't fix toxic cultures. You can't simply breathe or meditate your way out of high-pressure environments controlled by ineffective leaders. Without changing the actual root causes, individual interventions are mere band-aids on gaping wounds.

Lack of Data-Driven Approach: Interventions fail because organizations implement them without understanding the specific factors contributing to or detracting from employee wellbeing in their unique contexts. Without leveraging predictive models and empirical data, identifying the most impactful antecedents to target and effective interventions becomes challenging.

They Promote Unhealthy Blame-Shifting. Corporate wellbeing shifts the burden of the problem from the organisation to employees. If you're feeling stressed, anxious or burned out, the implication is that it's your problem — maybe you're not resilient enough or not managing yourself well enough. The company's role becomes "fixing" employees through mental conditioning rather than improving working conditions and operational practices, thus absolving itself of responsibility.

Evidence-Based Practices Failing the Reality Test. Workplace interventions developed and validated in clinical or academic settings tend to be small-scale and highly supervised, so benefits can't be generalized to real-world contexts. Once these "evidence-based programs" roll out in actual work environments, beneficial effects tend to disappear.

Poor Intervention Design. Most real-world interventions are poorly designed, ignoring basic behavior change models, neglecting validated diagnostic models, focusing on problem outcomes rather than causes/moderators, and cherry-picking unproven activities. Further, they show poor person-activity/intervention fit, employ inappropriate dissemination methods, aren't implemented/supported long enough for the effect to take place, and neglect important cultural and contextual factors influencing effectiveness.

They Adopt a One-Size-Fits-All Approach. These interventions assume all employees across business units present with the same problems, and the drivers are the same. Interventions not tailored to individuals' needs, capabilities, and problems will never yield tangible wellbeing changes.

They Are Events, Not a Process. Employee wellbeing is an ongoing process, not a one-time event. Without sustained organizational effort, consistently reinforcing and integrating interventions into the culture, any potential positive effects will be short-lived.

https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/happybytes/202403/do-employee-wellbeing-programs-improve-mental-health

Researchers are questioning how helpful mental health apps are for workers

Professor Emily Rosado-Solomon and her colleagues reviewed over 550 academic studies on mental health, mental illness, and work.

Discussion around mental health challenges in the workplace, including both poor mental health and chronic mental illness, has never been more important. In a survey conducted by the American Psychological Association, over 90% of people said that it was important for them to work for an organization that values their psychological well-being. It's such an impactful issue that the U.S. Surgeon General labeled it as a priority.

Thankfully, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, companies are taking more action to prioritize employees' mental health, and there's an increasing awareness that work can impact employees' mental health in profound ways.

Unfortunately, my team's research suggests that some of the programs companies use to improve employees' mental health are not entirely supported by research, which means that well-intentioned organizations may be investing in programs that don't create the intended benefits.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH
As an academic, I research organizational behavior and human resource management, with an emphasis on mental illness, mental health, and interpersonal connections at work. In this work I have seen that there are many reasons for companies to care about employees' mental health. Some of the reasons are moral: If employees are going to devote a third of their waking hours to a company, the company might reasonably be expected to do what it can to promote employees' well-being. If nothing else, companies shouldn't make employees' mental health worse. Moreover, companies have the potential to contribute positively to society, as work can be a powerful tool to improve mental health. Good work can provide dignity, financial stability, and social connection, and companies in any industry can benefit society by providing opportunities for meaningful work that improves mental health.

If that's not convincing, there's a business case as well. Companies in which there are numerous psychological hazards—meaning workplace attributes that cause stress, strain, or interpersonal problems—typically have a harder time attracting top talent. This is especially true for organizations that are trying to recruit employees from Generation Z, who prioritize their

mental health and expect the same from their employers. Companies with psychological hazards are also less likely to retain employees which can lead to costly turnover. When employees leave for jobs that are more conducive to good mental health, companies with toxic workplace cultures must spend money to recruit, hire, and train new employees to take their place.

RESEARCH ON WORKER MENTAL HEALTH
My colleagues and I recently reviewed over 550 academic studies on mental health, mental illness, and work. We believe our research reveals profound implications for how companies might best support their employees' mental health. Perhaps most importantly, our review suggests that what employers are currently doing is not as effective as one might hope.

First and foremost, we found an overwhelming body of evidence to suggest that work can profoundly impact employees' mental health. Some features of work that can degrade mental health are straightforward: for example, it's likely no surprise that employees who experience harassment at work are more likely to have poor mental health. However, other features of work that can harm employees' mental health may be less obvious. For instance, jobs that have high role ambiguity, in which employees are unsure about what tasks they're accountable for, are also associated with poor mental health. This is important because many companies do not see job clarity as a "mental health issue." Rather, job design and role clarification are often considered mundane HR functions. Yet, our review suggests job design has an undisputable impact on employees' mental health.

In reviewing existing research, we grouped workplace influences on mental health into two categories: features of a given job and the organizational context of a given job. In addition to role ambiguity, common features of a job that impacts mental health include role overload, where employees are regularly responsible for more tasks than they can reasonably accomplish; low job autonomy, in which workers don't have authority to decide how they do their work; and work-life conflict, in which employees' work regularly conflicts with their non-work responsibilities.

The elements of a job's organizational context that impact mental health are not particularly surprising. We found ample research to suggest that employees who face bullying or harassment, and those who have abusive supervisors, are more likely to have mental health challenges. Conversely, having social support from managers and colleagues is associated with better mental health.

Second, we found that too much attention is spent on reactive, individual-level interventions instead of proactive, structural changes. However, in keeping with the findings of other recent studies, we found inconclusive evidence to support the impact of individual-level interventions, such as access to well-being smartphone apps or mindfulness training.

This does not mean that such benefits are not effective—some evidence suggests they are. It just means that more information is required about when, and for whom, these benefits

improve mental health. Additionally, consistent with other reviews, we found inconclusive evidence for the efficacy of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), which are offered by many companies, have been widely researched, but have questionable large-scale impact.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE WORKER MENTAL HEALTH

There are significant practical implications for these findings. To be clear, this research does not imply that organizations should abandon individual-level interventions or EAPs; there is ample reason to think they are beneficial for some employees under some circumstances. This research does, however, indicate that organizations already have many tools at their disposal that may improve mental health, they just don't recognize them as such.

Thankfully, research suggests that human resource (HR) departments can help. Many of these tools fall in the domain of companies' HR departments, who are often responsible for designing jobs, writing job descriptions, and crafting flexible work policies. This means that devoting resources to improve seemingly mundane HR functions, such as updating and improving job descriptions, may be a worthwhile investment in employees' mental health.

There's also opportunity for both HR and managers to help improve employees' mental health through improvements to organizational context. Many of these opportunities can be found in the hiring process. Given the disproportionate impact harassment and bullying has on worker mental health, hiring managers should assess candidates respect for others during the application process. As tempting as it may be to hire a stellar technical performer for a vacant position, if there's evidence that the candidate may be a bully, then organizations shouldn't hire them. Practically speaking, this means HR and hiring managers should include interview questions to evaluate whether someone is likely to be respectful and supportive, and these considerations should weigh heavily in hiring decisions.

Given the association between abusive leadership and poor mental health, HR and management should also consider interpersonal factors in promotion decisions. This may mean that the best technical performer is not the one that should be promoted if there's a chance they will engage in abusive supervision. Unfortunately, without a path to promotion, some top performing technical employees may leave the organization, but replacing one employee is likely easier than addressing poor mental health—and associated reductions in productivity—of an entire department.

Managers also have the power to create an environment that supports workers, both directly by supporting employees and by enabling employees to support one another. This does not mean that managers need to personally provide mental health support services to an employee who may be struggling. Instead, we find that being generally supportive is associated with better mental health. In addition, managers should allow opportunities for employees to connect and support one another, which may require a shift in norms. For instance, when a manager sees employees taking a few minutes to chat in the break room, do they see a lapse in productivity?

Or do they see maintenance of social ties that can support employees' long-term mental health? Of course, there's a balance—all members of a team need to get their jobs done—but social connections should be supported whenever possible.

This finding is consistent with many employees' preferences as well. Indeed, a recent study by Mind Share Partners reports that employees view a healthy work culture as more beneficial to their mental health than self-care benefits. This further suggests that companies should not overspend on mental health perks at the expense of investing in systematic changes.

HOW TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE WORKER MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS
Finally, a major finding of our review was that researchers often don't make a good distinction between the terms "mental health" and "mental illness." This is problematic for two reasons. First, it may inadvertently promote negative stereotypes about people with diagnosed mental illness. To clarify, poor mental health affects most people.

The Mind Share Partners's survey found that nearly 60% of employees experienced at least one symptom of poor mental health, with burnout being the most common. There's strong evidence to suggest that employees do not perform as well when they are suffering from poor mental health, which makes improving mental health a business decision worthy of significant attention.

In contrast, mental illness refers to chronic conditions that can impact the way people think, feel, and act. Our review underscores that people with chronic mental illness excel at work, but this fact is obscured if they are oversimplified as being "unwell." Of course, challenges can impact work during periods of severe mental illness symptoms, but there is evidence that mental illness-related disruptions are no more impactful than disruptions for other medical conditions. Moreover, there are countless examples of high-performing people with chronic mental illness that are at the top of their fields, further underscoring the potential of those with mental illness to perform well.

The other problem with conflating mental health and mental illness is that it obscures the need for researchers to specifically focus on the work experiences of people with mental illness, and see whether there are factors of work that support their ability to thrive compared to employees without mental illness.

At least one in five adults in the United States experience mental illness, and companies are unlikely to know exactly who these people are because employees often hide their diagnoses to avoid discrimination. Given the prevalence of these diagnoses and the potential contributions of those with mental illness, it is in a company's best interest to learn how to help those people thrive in their work. If researchers don't identify who has mental illness in their studies of mental health interventions, then companies don't have any reliable data about how to best support a fifth of their workforce.

Our review is just the beginning of understanding how companies can best support employees' mental health, including those with and without chronic mental illness. Going forward, researchers need to shift their focus and rigorously evaluate the efficacy of proactive, systematic mental health interventions, and also attend to the unique work experiences of employees with chronic mental illness. Companies should also broaden their view of what constitutes an investment in their employees' mental health. If researchers and companies work together and investigate novel approaches, we have an opportunity to not only prevent harm to employees' mental health, but to actually make a positive impact.

https://www.fastcompany.com/91056421/the-behind-the-scenes-superstar-of-e-commerce

4 strategies to fix 'broken' EAP programs

Although more than 90% of employers offer employee assistance programs, according to the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans, experts say employees have underused them for decades. Even as employee wellness concerns have skyrocketed following the pandemic, the percentage of workers relying on EAPs has remained at just 5%- 10% since the early 1980s, according to the foundation and other experts.

That's well below the 20% use rate HR would be "thrilled" to see or the 50% rate that would send employers "over the moon," says Julie Stich, vice president of content for the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans.

Several factors—including access challenges, misunderstandings about the scope and purpose of EAPs, and confidentiality concerns—explain why more employees don't turn to EAPs. But HR typically spends $10 to $100 per employee on such programs every year, depending on the program's structure—which could be money wasted if employees aren't taking advantage of the offering.

EAPs done right, however, can ultimately boost employee wellness, drive organizational productivity and engagement, and improve ROI. For example, in a 2023 report by Attridge Consulting—which reviewed U.S. government data about over 72 million workers with access to employee assistance programs as part of their benefits—researchers found that 60% of employees reported problems with being present and productive at work. This figure dropped to 34% after EAP-provided counseling.

Landscape shifting—again

EAPs were originally conceived in the 1940s to help employees tackle alcoholism. By the 1970s, these programs expanded to combat drug addiction and support mental health and employees' family members. Over the past decade, Stich says, EAPs have again extended their scope with

the addition of legal, financial, childcare, and eldercare support, as well as guidance for managers on navigating employee conflicts.

Despite the increase in professional services added to employee assistance programs, their structure largely remains the same: EAPs are designed to give employees and their families access to providers who can help them stabilize their immediate crisis with a limited number of treatments, therapy sessions or consultations. The program is not intended for ongoing support, compared to mental health benefits offered through an employer's health plan.

"We hear a lot of corporations say, 'We've got it covered. We offer health insurance and an EAP for our employees,'" says Haeli Harris, a marriage and family therapist and also a director of clinical operations at employee mental health platform provider Nivati. Harris will present a session titled "Preparing managers to talk about mental health" at HRE's upcoming Evaluate People, Ignite Change (EPIC) conference in Las Vegas. "That's actually very discouraging, because I don't think companies are really looking at how we really help our employees."

According to the Attridge report, roughly 5%-15% of all EAP counseling cases have individuals who need a long-term care approach.

Although EAPs are not meant to offer long-term support, employees can benefit from the free employer-sponsored access to mental health providers, lawyers, financial consultants and other professional services. The vast majority of these services are currently provided by external EAP providers that employers directly pay or through employers' health plan providers that contract with these third-party vendors. With internal EAPs, organizations will employ providers to cover EAP services.

Telecom giant AT&T recently moved away from its EAP program and instead selected mental health benefits platform provider Lyra Health to integrate into its main healthcare plan, reports Fortune magazine. Like a traditional EAP added to a health plan, with Lyra, insured AT&T employees have access to a set number of counseling sessions per issue treated. However, there is no limit on the number of issues an employee can be treated for.

4 strategies to improve the use of EAP programs
- Rebrand your EAP
  Telecommunications giant T-Mobile rebranded its EAP as LiveMagenta in 2017, and the number of employees and family members who accessed the program's resources nearly doubled in its first year, according to the company. As part of the rebrand, all references to "EAP" were stripped from T-Mobile's printed and online materials about the program, and EAP counselors were reclassified as coaches. The goal of the rebrand was to remove the negative stigma around contacting an EAP for help, Stich says.

- Identify an EAP advocate
  Find an employee whom colleagues trust and can champion the benefits of the EAP, Stich advises, and enlist them as an advocate. "It can be someone in management,

leadership or even a peer who can talk about how the EAP has helped them. Maybe they used the EAP to find an assisted living arrangement for their mother or some other issue," Stich says.

- Recruit managers to issue EAP reminders
  Employees often do not think of their organization's EAP resources when they are in a crisis. But managers who are aware an employee is struggling can direct them to EAP resources during this critical time, Stich says. HR can also prompt managers to issue EAP reminders.

- Try new models for EAPs
  New models for EAPs are emerging, and they may help improve their usefulness for employees. Some of these include digital services where employees can get faster access to mental health providers via teletherapy sessions or online, self-guided sessions with videos and educational content, Stich says. By speeding up and expanding access, employees can tap into timely care.

"If it takes too long for someone to get a referral, they may not come back for help," Stich warns.

https://hrexecutive.com/4-strategies-to-fix-broken-eap-programs/

NLRB protects worker's right to wear 'BLM' marking on Home Depot uniform

The employee's decision to put "BLM" on their uniform was tied to racial discrimination in the workplace, NLRB held.

Dive Brief:
The National Labor Relations Board held on Feb. 21 that Home Depot violated federal labor law when it discharged an employee for refusing to remove "BLM" — the acronym for "Black Lives Matter" — from their work apron, according to an agency news release.

NLRB said the employee's refusal to remove the BLM marking was covered by the National Labor Relations Act because it was tied to previous employee protests about racial discrimination in the workplace and employees' working conditions. Home Depot in a statement said the company disagrees with the NLRB's decision and doesn't "tolerate any kind of workplace harassment or discrimination."

"It is well-established that workers have the right to join together to improve their working conditions — including by protesting racial discrimination in the workplace," Chairman Lauren McFerran said in the release. "It is equally clear that an employee who acts individually to support a group protest regarding a workplace issue remains protected under the law."

Dive Insight:
The NLRA gives both unionized and nonunionized employees the right to work together to improve their wages and working conditions.

In the Home Depot worker's case, the employee had been wearing the BLM marker on their apron for months and raising issues of racial injustice in the workplace before management ordered them to remove it in February 2021, according to court documents. The Home Depot store involved is located miles away from where George Floyd was murdered.

Wearing the BLM marking "was a logical outgrowth of earlier group protests about racial discrimination in the workplace, which is protected," Eric Meyer, an employment lawyer and founding partner at Pierson Ferdinand LLP, told HR Dive.

Tom Luetkemeyer, a partner in the labor and employment practice at Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP, said employers often mistakenly believe that the NLRA only applies to unionized workers. Luetkemeyer said one takeaway from this case for employers is that dress codes need to be applied consistently. Home Depot allegedly had previously allowed workers to personalize their aprons with "LGBTQ Pride symbols, the Pan-African flag colors, [and] holiday symbols," according to court documents.

"They had a neutral policy, but they didn't enforce it consistently," Luetkemeyer said. Home Depot managers allegedly told the employee they would have to let workers wear swastikas on their aprons if they were permitted to wear the BLM marking because the company's dress code prohibited displaying political messages, per court documents.
"It's a false equivalency," Meyer said.

https://www.hrdive.com/news/nlrb-protects-workers-right-to-wear-blm-marking/709481/

Neurodivergent Employees Experience Workplace Discrimination

Research findings from CIPD and Uptimize indicate that only half of employees feel their organisation or team has an open and supportive culture where workers feel safe to talk about neurodiversity.

One in five neurodivergent employees surveyed have experienced harassment or discrimination at work because of their neurodivergence, according to research from CIPD, working with corporate neuroinclusion training specialists Uptimize.

Neurodiversity refers to natural differences in human brain function and behavioural traits. It's estimated that as many as 20% of people may be neurodivergent in some way, an umbrella

term that can include those with autism, dyslexia, or ADHD. However, despite this potential figure, support and awareness of neurodiversity is lacking in many U.K. workplaces.

The report, Neuroinclusion at work, surveyed over 1,000 employed adults about their working life, of which 790 identify as neurodivergent. It finds that only half of neurodivergent employees feel that their organisation (52%) or team (54%) has an open and supportive climate where workers feel safe to talk about neurodiversity.

In response, CIPD and Uptimize are calling on employers to raise awareness of the value of neurodiversity and build open and supportive cultures at work.

The research shows three in 10 (31%) neurodivergent employees surveyed haven't told their line manager or HR about their neurodivergence. While 44% of this group say it's a private matter that they don't want to share, over one-third (37%) say they are concerned about people making assumptions based on stereotypes. One-third (34%) say they feel there's too much stigma, 29% say they are concerned about the possible impact on their career, and almost one-fifth (18%) say they don't think their organisation would be understanding or offer support.

"Neurodiversity needs to be a key focus in an organisation's equality, diversity, and inclusion network," says Dr. Jill Miller, senior equality, diversity, and inclusion policy adviser at CIPD. "The design of workplaces and people management approaches haven't traditionally considered neurodiversity, meaning many employees may not be able to perform at their best. Action is needed to create neuroinclusive organisations and fairer workplaces, with equality of opportunity for neurodivergent employees, free from harassment and discrimination."

Additional key findings from the survey are below.
- Only 37% of neurodivergent employees feel their organisation provides meaningful support to neurodivergent individuals.
- One-third (33%) say their experience at work has had a negative impact on their mental well-being.
- Neurodivergent employees are more likely to always or often feel exhausted (45% versus 30%), feel under excessive pressure (35% versus 29%), and be lonelier at work (23% versus 17%) than neurotypical employees.
- CIPD and Uptimize have set guiding principles for employers in the report, which include the following.
- Focus on creating an open and supportive culture where people feel comfortable talking about neurodiversity.
- Understand what individual employees need to perform their best at work and ensure clear access to reasonable adjustments.
- Embrace flexible working, both in working hours and where employees work.

https://www.hrotoday.com/diversity-inclusion/neurodivergent-employees-experience-workplace-discrimination/

More Workers Taking Mental Health Leave

This continues a years-long trend: ComPsych data shows that from 2017 to 2023, mental health related leaves of absence have increased a stunning 300%.

ComPsych Corporation, a provider of mental health and absence management services, says a new study finds that mental health leaves of absence increased by a third in 2023 over the prior year. This continues a years-long trend: ComPsych data shows that from 2017 to 2023, mental health related leaves of absence have increased a stunning 300%.

This increase has largely been driven by female employees. In 2023 nearly seven in ten (69%) of mental health related leaves of absence were taken by women. Of these, a third (33%) were taken by millennial women, followed by Gen X women who accounted for 30% of mental health related leaves.

"Our data shows that millennial and Gen X women are most likely to need a mental health related leave of absence," said Dr. Richard A. Chaifetz, Founder, CEO and Chairman of ComPsych. "HR teams must invest in resources and programming that relates to issues commonly faced by these demographics: from the pressures of managing teams, the stress of buying a home for the first time, acclimating back at work as a new parent, or worrying about care for aging relatives."

"As the leader in the integration of mental health and leave administration, we have a unique view into how these two areas intersect," continued Dr. Chaifetz. "It's clear that proactively investing in employee mental health is a key strategy for HR teams trying to mitigate the cost and impact of employee leaves of absence."

https://www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/2024/03/01/more-workers-taking-mental-health-leave/102183/