MAY MENTAL HEALTH AND DE&I UPDATE
"Mental Health Awareness Month"

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MENTAL HEALTH

To Address the Mental Health Crisis, Start With the Workplace

Sometimes people managers are part of the problem without even realizing it. I had a habit of sending emails outside of regular working hours. It was when I could focus on my inbox. I didn't realize I was putting unintended pressure on my team. Because of my habits, they felt they had

to respond at any hour of the day or night. What was working for me was causing other people anxiety. This small example served as an entry point for the team to talk about our work style and managing our time, but ultimately lead to how we could work better together to integrate work and life. By creating a safe place to start a conversation, I was learning to be more mindful of the mental health of my team.

But training managers to be open to change is just one way that organizations can promote better employee mental health. Whether you work virtually, in-person, or hybrid, your job may offer the most immediate path to mental health support.

After two years of living with COVID-19, the need has never been greater.

Potential for change
During the pandemic, the share of adults who report symptoms of anxiety and depression jumped from 1 in 10 to 4 in 10 — and these mental health impacts disproportionately affect women and communities of color. Today, fewer than 1 in 5 U.S. workers report feeling a sense of mental well-being. According to a recent survey by the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM), 65 percent of working Americans feel down, depressed, or hopeless often, very often, or sometimes.

We will be managing the impact of the pandemic on our mental health for years to come. Global efforts to produce and deliver vaccines for COVID-19 were rapid and vigorous. We now need to devote the same energy and resources to restoring our mental health and well-being.

The workplace may hold the greatest potential
Human resource (HR) teams are charged with identifying and selecting appropriate mental health resources, helping connect individuals to the right services, and educating people managers to ensure workplaces are mental health friendly and psychologically safe.
But they can't do it alone. Beyond HR, people managers need help understanding how to respond to those with mental health challenges, even as they address their own mental health needs. Business leaders have a vital role to play in creating an organizational culture that values mental health just as much as physical health. Employees at every level need help overcoming stigma, promoting psychologically safe workplaces and spaces, and accessing mental health tools and support.

Empowering HR professionals
The SHRM Foundation is empowering HR professionals and managers to help lead the way. We regularly curate and update a range of mental health resources, as well as convene HR professionals to share best practices and learn from mental health experts. In partnership with Psych Hub, we've developed a Workplace Mental Health Ally Certificate that educates HR professionals about common mental health topics and how to respond. We have a forthcoming report that will showcase what evidence-based solutions could be most powerful in improving on workplace mental health.

By equipping organizations with effective tools that support and promote mental health, and by creating cultures that are conducive to having conversations about one's mental health and its impact on the workplace, employers can drive the movement to break the stigma that accompanies the topic of mental health, and change the conversation, ultimately improving the lives of people, who are an organization's most valuable asset.

https://www.futureofpersonalhealth.com/mental-health/to-address-the-mental-health-crisis-start-with-the-workplace/

<u>Mental Health at Work</u>

Resources to help employers follow the law and create workplaces that prioritize mental health.

What do I have to do? & Things employers are required to do by law

Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA)
Under MHPAEA, health benefit plans that cover mental health or substance use benefits cannot impose more restrictions on those benefits than what generally applies to comparable medical or surgical benefits.

Details about the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equality Act
Factsheet: Mental health and substance use disorder parity

Mental Health Conditions and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)
Under the FMLA, covered employers must provide up to 12 weeks of job-protected leave to eligible employees.

When covered employees can use FMLA leave for a mental health condition

Reasonable accommodation and discrimination protections for employees with mental health conditions

Under federal law, workers with mental health conditions may be protected against discrimination and harassment at work related to their condition, have workplace confidentiality rights, and have a legal right to reasonable accommodations that can help them perform and keep their job.

Anti-discrimination laws and reasonable accommodations for workers with mental health conditions

Accommodations for workers with mental health conditions

Mental health accommodation solutions from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

Questions about mental health conditions and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
The ADA limits an employer's ability to ask workers disability-related questions.

[Guidance for employers on disability-related questions and medical examinations of employees](#)
*Note: Other federal and state laws may apply

How can I help create a mentally healthy workplace?

[Mental health resources for employers](#)

[Checklist for mentally healthy workplaces](#)

[Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion Mental Health Toolkit](#)

[Framework for workplace mental health and well-being](#)

["Support One Another" poster](#)

["Mental Health at Work: What Can I Do?" PSA Campaign](#)

How can I help reduce workplace stress and fatigue?

[Workplace stress toolkit](#)

[Workplace stress sample survey questions](#)

[Worker fatigue resources](#)

How can I help grieving workers?

[Helping workers in the aftermath of loss](#)

How can I help prevent suicide?

Help is available. Anyone can call or text 988 or [get help online here](#).

[Suicide prevention poster](#)

[Preventing suicide in the construction industry](#)

[Preventing suicide among veterans](#)

[Get immediate help in a crisis](#)

[Find support for concerns with mental health, drugs or alcohol](#)

[Know what treatments your health insurance covers](#)

[How to make the most of your mental health and substance use benefits](#)

Worker "Know Your Rights" Documents:

[Depression, PTSD and other mental health conditions in the workplace](#)

[Use of codeine, oxycodone, and other opioids](#)

[Parity for mental health and substance use disorder benefits](#)

https://www.dol.gov/general/mental-health-at-work

The Latest Trends and Innovations in Corporate Wellness Training

In recent years, the importance of employee health and wellness has become increasingly recognized by companies. As a result, corporate wellness programs have become a popular tool for businesses to promote healthy lifestyles and reduce healthcare costs. In this article, we will discuss the latest trends and innovations in corporate wellness training.

Technology Integration

One of the most significant trends in corporate wellness training is the integration of technology. Technology can help streamline and personalize wellness programs. For example, wearable technology can track physical activity and monitor sleep patterns, while apps can provide personalized nutrition and fitness advice. Moreover, telehealth technology allows employees to consult with healthcare professionals remotely, reducing the need for time-consuming and costly doctor visits.

Mindfulness Programs

Mindfulness practices, such as meditation and yoga, have become popular in corporate wellness programs. They can help employees reduce stress and increase focus and productivity. Many companies now offer mindfulness training sessions to their employees, and some have even integrated meditation rooms into their offices.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a critical factor in the success of any corporate wellness program. To encourage engagement, companies are increasingly using gamification strategies, such as

rewards programs and challenges. These programs motivate employees to participate in wellness activities and create a sense of community among coworkers.

Mental Health Support

Mental health support is becoming increasingly essential in corporate wellness programs. Many companies are now offering counseling services to their employees to help them manage stress and anxiety. Furthermore, some companies are providing mental health first aid training to their employees, allowing them to identify and support coworkers who may be struggling with mental health issues.

Health Coaching

Health coaching is another growing trend in corporate wellness training. Health coaches provide personalized guidance and support to employees, helping them set and achieve health and wellness goals. Health coaching can be provided in person or remotely, making it a flexible option for companies of all sizes.

Nutrition Programs

Nutrition education is another essential component of corporate wellness programs. Companies are now offering healthy food options in their cafeterias and vending machines, as well as providing nutrition education sessions and workshops to employees. Nutrition programs can help employees make better food choices, leading to better overall health.

Financial Wellness Programs

Financial stress can have a significant impact on employees' mental and physical health. To address this issue, many companies are now offering financial wellness programs to their employees. These programs provide education and resources to help employees manage their finances and reduce stress related to money.

Physical Environment Improvements

The physical environment of a workplace can have a significant impact on employees' health and wellness. Companies are now implementing improvements to their offices to promote wellness. Some examples include ergonomic workstations to reduce physical strain, natural lighting to improve mood and circadian rhythm, and indoor plants to improve air quality.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Wellness Programs

DEI is a growing concern in the workplace, and companies are now recognizing the importance of including diversity and inclusivity in their wellness programs. For example, some companies are offering culturally appropriate wellness programs that consider the unique health concerns

of different communities. Additionally, some companies are offering LGBTQ+ inclusive programs to support the health and wellness of employees who identify as part of the community.

Mental Health Days

Mental health days have become more widely accepted by companies as a legitimate reason for taking time off work. Employees can take these days off when they are feeling overwhelmed or stressed, and companies are recognizing the importance of supporting employees' mental health in this way.

Sleep Wellness Programs

Sleep is a crucial component of overall health and wellness, and companies are now recognizing this. Some companies are offering sleep wellness programs that provide resources and education to help employees improve their sleep hygiene. These programs can include sleep workshops, sleep tracking devices, and tips for creating a sleep-friendly environment.

Hybrid Work Models

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way many companies operate, and hybrid work models have become increasingly popular. These models combine in-person and remote work, and companies are now adjusting their wellness programs to accommodate this shift. For example, some companies are offering virtual wellness activities and resources for remote workers, while others are providing in-person wellness activities for employees who work on-site.

Community Service Opportunities

Volunteering and community service opportunities can be a great way for employees to engage in meaningful work and improve their overall well-being. Some companies are now incorporating community service opportunities into their wellness programs, providing employees with opportunities to give back to their communities while also improving their mental health and well-being.

Stress Management Programs

Stress is a significant health concern in the workplace, and companies are now offering stress management programs to their employees. These programs can include stress-reduction workshops, relaxation techniques, and mindfulness practices. By providing these resources, companies can help employees manage stress and improve their overall health and well-being. Corporate wellness training continues to evolve, with new trends and innovations emerging to address the health and well-being of employees. Employers who invest in wellness programs

can see significant benefits, such as improved employee morale, increased productivity, and reduced healthcare costs.

https://www.corporatewellnessmagazine.com/article/the-latest-trends-and-innovations-in-corporate-wellness-training

How Workplace Accommodations Can Bring Out the Best In People

Do your employees feel empowered to ask for what they need to thrive in their role? What procedures are in place to ensure your people can make adjustments that help them both personally and professionally?

What "rules" or expectations exist in your workplace that may be negatively impacting employees?

The Center for Disease Control reports that approximately one in four Americans have a disability that might interfere with their ability to work. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that all organizations allow employees with a disability access to reasonable accommodations to do their job.

Those in leadership roles are responsible for employee wellbeing in the workplace, as they're the ones with the power to make changes and grant accommodations.

But some organizational cultures don't value flexibility or meeting employee needs. In these workplaces, it's preferred that people push through or quietly accept the status quo, even if this interferes with their ability to do their job well.

If you value a healthy work culture, you want your employees' needs to be met. This not only fosters retention, but allows everyone to do their best work.

Here's how to create an environment that makes it easy for employees to get the workplace accommodations they need—or don't even have to ask for them because of what's already in place.

Adjusting expectations, to make adjustments

Much of what is considered "normal" in the workplace comes from arbitrary expectations. Our systems are set up one way, and we continue to accept these standards—even though they don't always promote productivity or wellbeing for all employees.

For example, why are typical working hours still nine to five? If a project doesn't have to be done at a set, scheduled time, does it matter if they complete the work outside those hours?

If a task can be done from home, why do so many companies continue to mandate [returning to the office](#)?

Allowing employees to make simple and reasonable adjustments can bring out the best in them. This is true for employees who have a disability and those who simply prefer to work a little bit differently.

By exploring your values around what productivity and professionalism "ought to" look like, you might find that simple adjustments make your employees happy and produce better work.

Understanding stigma and risk of discrimination

Even though employees may actually do better work when they adjust their schedule and environment to meet their needs, many experience pushback and face an uphill battle when they request accommodations.

A recent survey revealed that [61% of employees with a disability](#) report facing discrimination at work. This may be unacceptable under the ADA, but protections only help people if they are enforced.

Because of stigma and risk for discrimination, many employees with a disability might feel uncomfortable or unsafe disclosing this to their employer. And even though the ADA prohibits employers from requiring workers to share their specific diagnosis when seeking disability accommodations, many ask anyway.

Again, regulations only matter when they are enforced and followed.

Some employees may feel comfortable or even prefer to disclose their disability status or their diagnosis. They might feel like their supervisor can better support them by having this information.

Of course, this is just as valid as an employee who does not want to share this information. It should be up to the individual to choose what is right for them, not a mandate from leadership.

A streamlined process for requesting accommodations

If your workplace empowers employees to make reasonable adjustments on an as-needed basis, without disclosing disability status, they can create and implement their own accommodations.

This also allows employees to improve their mental health and productivity without bureaucracy. Employees feel valued, like their needs matter, and they can focus their energy on doing their job—rather than on jumping through hoop after hoop to get their needs met.

Of course, not every accommodation is simple to implement. In these cases, the process of requesting and receiving support should be simple and streamlined.

Cultivate a healthy workplace culture where people:
- Feel comfortable asking for support when they need it
- Know who to turn to when they need an accommodation
- Receive a response quickly
- Understanding the true purpose of accommodations
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Workplace flexibility and accommodations can help all employees be their best.

For example, many traditional workplace expectations are tailored to extrovert personality types, while about half of workers are introverted. An introverted employee might benefit from support that deviates from extroverted expectations.

Different brains work differently and thrive in various environments. Ask yourself if you want your workplace to look and run based on strict, traditional values, or if you want your employees to be and do their best.

Sometimes leadership misunderstands the purpose of accommodations. They may view accommodations as "special treatment" or employees asking to have different expectations than their peers.

This is not the case! Accommodation requests are your employees communicating to you what they need to do their best work for you.

With flexible policies, you can create a workplace where your employees' needs are met without having to formally request accommodations, or where the process of making such a request is streamlined and low-stress.

There are simple changes that can ensure accommodations are accessible or even unnecessary for your employees.

Take these **four steps to foster a healthy workplace culture** that improves retention and employee mental health.

Give employees a say in their schedules

People are at "peak performance" at different times. Let employees decide when they want to complete projects rather than mandating a traditional 9-5 schedule.

If your office needs someone present or clocked in at certain hours, work with your team to figure out how you can support individual needs while maintaining this expectation.

If tasks are completed on time and meet expectations, does it really matter when your team works on them?

Give employees control over their work environment

If your employees come into the office, let them decide what their workspace needs to look and feel like for them to be at their best. For employees who don't need to do most or any of their jobs in a physical office, let them individually decide if they prefer to work from the office or from home.

People know their own needs better than anyone else. If they express that they need lower lighting, a different chair, or to work from home, honor their requests. This can bring out their best work and improve their job satisfaction.

Regularly ask employees what they need, then follow through

Due to the power differential between employees and management, you can't assume that your workers just know they can be open and honest with you about their needs.
Make a point of soliciting feedback, and then formulate a plan to meet the needs that are expressed.

With ongoing attention to employee needs, you can create and maintain a culture where accommodations are natural, expected, and respected by leadership.

Communicate flexibility

Some employers don't realize that certain aspects of their work environment could change without negatively affecting productivity. Similarly, employees who haven't had a voice at work in the past might not realize they could benefit from an accommodation.

By communicating to your teams that they can ask for accommodations (and you will provide them), you can help employees realize what their needs are, and then make sure they're met.

Eliminating the need for accommodations

It is easier than you may think to design a work environment that meets each employees' individual needs, often without having to ask—and when a request is necessary, to simplify the process of asking for support.

When you're flexible and willing to reassess your assumptions about what a workplace "should" look like, your employees can be more engaged and satisfied. And you can be a leader who brings out the best in your people, both professionally and personally.

Workplace bullying can affect employees' mental health – Expert

What are the factors that pose risks on workers' mental health?

Various job-related factors can affect employees' mental health and well-being. Excessive workload and long working hours can lead to feelings of stress, burnout, and fatigue. When employees feel that they have little or no control over their work or work environment, it may cause anxiety, frustration or powerlessness. Negative workplace relationships such as bullying, harassment or conflicts with co-workers can also cause emotional distress and affect mental health.

Job insecurity is another factor that can impact employees' mental health. When employees feel that their job is unstable or uncertain, it may result in anxiety, depression or other mental health concerns. This issue is even more pertinent given the economic situation in recent years. Poor work-life balance is also a factor that can lead to feelings of stress, guilt, or frustration. When work responsibilities interfere with personal or family time, it can negatively affect employees' mental health.

Lack of support is another factor that can affect employees' mental health. When workers feel that they lack support from colleagues or supervisors, or when they do not receive adequate training or resources to do their job, it can lead to feelings of isolation, frustration or inadequacy.

Finally, traumatic events can have a significant impact on employees' mental health. Workers who experience or witness traumatic events such as workplace accidents or violence may experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder or other mental health concerns. It is crucial for employers to prioritize the mental health and well-being of their employees and take proactive steps to address these factors. Some of these factors are what we currently test for when carrying out stress and mental health assessments via our WellNewMe platform.
What economic implication does an organisation suffer for ignoring workers' mental health concerns?

Yes, mental health issues can have significant economic implications for any organisation. When employees are struggling with mental health issues, their productivity and performance can be affected, leading to decreased efficiency and output. This can result in increased costs for the organisation, including lost productivity, absenteeism, and increased healthcare expenses.

Moreover, mental health disorders can also lead to higher rates of employee turnover, which can be costly for organisations. High turnover rates can result in additional recruitment, hiring,

and training expenses, as well as reduced productivity and decreased morale among remaining employees.

In addition to direct costs, mental health disorders can also lead to indirect costs for organisations such as lower job satisfaction, reduced motivation, and increased conflict among employees, all of which can impact the overall workplace culture and productivity.

Furthermore, poor mental health can lead to employees needing time off work to manage their mental health concerns. Additionally, if mental health issues go unaddressed, it can lead to legal risks for organisations, including discrimination, harassment claims, and prosecution from the government for failure to comply with the mental health act.

How can workers' mental wellbeing be protected?

There are several ways in which workers' mental wellbeing can be protected. Organisations can raise awareness of mental health issues among employees by providing information, training, and resources to help them identify and manage mental health concerns.

The second is reducing the stigma surrounding mental health can prevent individuals from seeking help, which can exacerbate mental health issues. Organisations can work to reduce stigma by creating a supportive culture that encourages open communication and acceptance of mental health concerns. Then, encourage employees to practice self-care, such as regular exercise, healthy eating and taking breaks. These can help to reduce stress and improve overall mental health. Organisations can also provide access to mental health resources such as employee assistance programmes, counselling services, and support groups so as to help the employees manage their mental health concerns.

There is also the need for mental health risk assessments such as those developed by WellNewMe, can help organisations to identify employees who may be at risk of developing mental health issues. By identifying these individuals early, organisations can provide targeted support to help them to manage their mental health concerns and prevent more significant problems from arising.

How can organisations support the recovery of employees from mental health conditions? Supporting recovery from a mental health condition requires a holistic approach that addresses both the individual's needs and the workplace environment. Three simple ways by which organisations can support employees with mental health conditions are, firstly, to provide flexibility in work arrangements such as allowing remote work, flexible hours, or reduced workload. This can help employees manage their symptoms while still contributing to the organisation.

Secondly, offering accommodations such as providing a quiet workspace, allowing for frequent breaks or modifying job tasks can help employees with mental health conditions to perform their duties and reduce stress.

Lastly, fostering a supportive workplace culture that values open communication, empathy and understanding can help employees feel more comfortable in seeking help and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues.

https://punchng.com/workplace-bullying-can-affect-employees-mental-health-expert/

Survey shows workplace stress is adding up, but still not easy to talk about

CINCINNATI (WKRC) - Mental health isn't an easy thing to talk about at work for many, according to recent research, but a few recommendations might make it a little easier to cope.

A new survey shows stress on the job is adding to a lot of people's mental health struggles, and indicates workers want employers to step up their support.

The survey found discussing mental health in the workplace is still a taboo topic for some employees.

To find out what employers are doing to try to offer support, JobSage surveyed more than 1,000 Americans. The survey found:

- Mental health has prompted 41 percent of Americans to consider quitting their job.
- An increased number of employees wish they had more mental health support from their employer.
- 49 percent said their company doesn't do enough to support their mental health in 2023, and in 2022, that number was only 20 percent.
- More than half of Americans have taken a mental health day, but 48 percent didn't tell anyone it was a mental health day.
- The stigma around mental health prevents 22 percent from discussing it at work.

While work can be a major source of stress, TriHealth employee assistance program supervisor Patty Banks says there are things that can be done to help employees manage their emotions. "There may be things that the organization can do to assist, whether through FMLA, which is the family and medical leave, that may offer some opportunity for people to step out or step out intermittently if they need to do that," Banks said.

She also says finding a safe person at work, which is usually a human resources manager or an employee assistance counselor, is a great place to start a conversation about what a person may be struggling with when it comes to their mental health.

"Life happens, and so, they're able to find ways to manage that and not have the retaliation that workers are concerned about," said Banks.

A Mental Commute Can Help Prevent Remote Worker Burnout

Key Take-Away
Remote workers can prevent burnout by creating their own "mental commute" to establish work-life boundaries and provide time for recovery and transition. Mental and physical breaks during the day can also improve well-being and decrease burnout…

As the shift to remote work continues, it's more important than ever to understand the impact it has on our mental and emotional wellbeing. A recent study in the Organizational Psychology Review shows that remote work can lead to burnout if proper work-life boundaries are not established. This is because the loss of "liminal space," a time free of both home and work roles, can result in role blurring and stress.

My clients who I help transition to hybrid and remote work arrangements often express concern about employee burnout as part of this transition; the study reinforces the focus on work-life boundaries and mental and physical breaks that I encourage my clients to provide to their staff.

The Role of Commutes in Mental Transition and Recovery

The study found that commutes were a source of "liminal space" — a time free of both home and work roles that provides an opportunity to recover from work and mentally switch gears to home. During the shift to remote work, many people lost this built-in support for these important daily processes. Without the ability to mentally shift gears, people experience role blurring, which can lead to stress and burnout.

The study reviewed research on commuting, role transitions, and work recovery to develop a model of a typical American worker's commute liminal space. The model showed that the liminal space created in the commute created opportunities for psychological detachment from work and psychological recovery from work. However, day-to-day variations in commutes can affect whether this liminal space is accessible for detachment and recovery.

The Benefits of Creating a Commute for Remote Workers

An additional follow-up study examined the commutes of 80 university employees to test the conceptual model. The results showed that most workers used the commute's liminal space to both mentally transition from work to home roles and to start psychologically recovering from the demands of the workday.

The study also confirmed that daily variance in commutes predict the ability to do so. On days with longer-than-average commutes, people reported higher levels of psychological detachment from work and were more relaxed during the commute. However, on days when commutes were more stressful than usual, they reported less psychological detachment from work and less relaxation during the commute.

The findings suggest that remote workers may benefit from creating their own form of commute to provide liminal space for recovery and transition — such as a 15-minute walk to mark the beginning and end of the workday.

It's important to note that our [cognitive biases](#) can impact how we handle remote work and the loss of liminal space. Confirmation bias and optimism bias can lead us to downplay the impact of remote work on our wellbeing. On the other hand, loss aversion and pessimism bias can cause us to overestimate the negative effects and resist change.

Enhancing Work Detachment and Relaxation During Commutes

For those who have returned to the workplace, the study suggests seeking to use the commute to relax as much as possible. Commuters can try to avoid ruminating about the workday and instead focus on personally fulfilling uses of the commute time, such as listening to music or podcasts, or calling a friend. Other forms of commuting such as public transit or carpooling may also provide opportunities to socialize.

The data shows that commute stress detracts from detachment and relaxation during the commute more than a shorter or longer commute. So some people may find it worth their time to take the "scenic route" home in order to avoid tense driving situations.

Improving Well-Being With Breaks During the Day

[Other studies](#) reveal that taking breaks for both the mind and body can combat exhaustion, boost productivity, and minimize errors. Therefore, I urge my clients to support their workers, whether working in the office or remotely, to allocate at least 10 minutes of break time each hour, with at least half of those being physical in nature, like stretching or moving around, to counteract the hazards of prolonged sitting. The remaining breaks should comprise restful mental activities, such as meditation, napping, or anything else that brings rejuvenation.

To make these breaks possible, organizations such as the University of Southern California's Information Sciences Institute, one of [my clients](#), have trimmed hour-long meetings to 50

minutes and half-hour meetings to 25 minutes. That offers employees a chance to recharge both mentally and physically while also providing transition time.

Most of what can be accomplished in an hour-long meeting can be achieved within 50 minutes. Just be mindful to wrap up at the 40-minute mark and 20-minute mark for 25-minute meetings. Attendees welcome shorter meetings, and managers learn to be more effective and timely.

In conclusion, remote work can lead to burnout if proper work-life boundaries are not established. Understanding the concept of liminal space and how it affects our ability to detach from work and recover is crucial in avoiding burnout and protecting our wellbeing. By creating our own form of commute and focusing on relaxing activities during the transition, we can take control of our mental and emotional health while working remotely.

The shift to hybrid and remote work has had a significant impact on the traditional line between work and home life. The study in Organizational Psychology Review highlights the importance of having good work-life boundaries for remote workers to avoid burnout and protect their wellbeing. By creating a form of commute, remote workers can provide themselves with liminal space for recovery and transition. For those who have returned to the workplace, the study suggests seeking to use the commute to relax as much as possible to enhance work detachment and relaxation during commutes. And mental and physical breaks during the day can further improve well-being and decrease remote worker burnout.

https://medium.datadriveninvestor.com/a-mental-commute-can-help-prevent-remote-worker-burnout-9114e886bf78

Hybrid And Virtual Workplaces: Employees Love Them, Managers Are Still Uneasy

The latest data shows hybrid or virtual work continues to deliver advantages to both employees and their organizations, and are now a permanent fixture across the business landscape. However, only 26% of executives indicate they have strongly pivoted to these approaches, which have upended traditional notions of corporate culture. Building a productive culture is still a work in progress for many.

That's the takeaway from a survey of 2,000 executives and employees with medium to large enterprises, conducted by HFS Research, in partnership with Unisys. The survey found a wide chasm between the perceptions of managers and employees for hybrid or virtual work: Nearly half of employees (49%) believe their hybrid work environments operate very effectively, compared to only 33% of employers.

Industry observers agree that executives and managers still haven't completely bought into the concept of employees setting their own schedules and work locations. "Managers are now

forced to learn a new skill set for managing remote work," says Dr. Christian Busch, director of the global economy program for the Center of Global Affairs at New York University and the author of The Serendipity Mindset. "While this is difficult, a manager set to work on this uncertainty and overcome such will likely yield the best results."

A viable corporate culture needs to be developed that recognizes the autonomy of employees as a key productivity tool. "Giving employees a wide range of options to do their best work in a fashion that maximizes their contribution and productivity is a key lever to drive a positive culture," says Kemi Akinsanya-Rose, chief operating officer of Cambium Learning Group. "With these flexible work options comes responsibility and accountability - leaders must trust their employees and vice versa in this virtual workplace contract. Without trust and ongoing communication, a high-performing virtual organization is hard to realize."

Individual empowerment in the workplace is also an essential piece of a supportive culture — something of which many managers aren't quite on board yet either. Seven in 10 employees (70%) in the HFS-Unisys survey state decision-making power is a critical factor for their motivation, compared to only 57% of management citing this as being important.

Such a virtual or hybrid-oriented culture is based on an understanding of "the complexities and challenges of engaging their employees virtually and actively works with those challenges to ensure employees feel heard and valued," Busch relates. "It proactively responds to uncertainty by tackling employee isolation and collaboration difficulties." As part of such a forward-looking culture, Busch urges extended childcare benefits, manager training, employee training, and support for employee mental health. Importantly, he adds, organizations need to "create realistic plans for managing workloads, along with a clear set of rules for when an employee must be available."

There is a case to be made for hybrid arrangements, in which people have opportunities to interact and work in person on a regular basis. "The least experienced workers need the office the most," says Busch. "Those who did not have much in-person experience prior to the pandemic feel they are lacking valuable professional experience. Studies suggest these workers are less productive and value in-person meetings more so than their experienced colleagues." Technology is an important part of the equation as well.

Of the employees surveyed by HFS and Unisys, 62% indicate access to technology as a highly motivating factor in their work performance. Technology "can be a powerful tool to offer leaders and employees ways to collaborate and communicate effectively — across time zones, countries, and modalities," says Akinsanya-Rose. "This provides better access to information flow, more opportunities to collaborate across teams, and new ways to build relationships peer-to-peer and with senior leaders. My hope is that leaders actually use technology creatively and intentionally to create a more level playing field for employees who want to develop and grow in their careers."

Still, she cautions, "virtual companies that lack the infrastructure — tools and technology — and routines to drive a sense of community for their employees can turn into places that lack a meaningful culture. When organizations lack intentionality around setting up their virtual culture, employees suffer the consequences of feeling disconnected from the mission or purpose of the organization and how they contribute to the purpose. My worry is this disconnection may have a downside impact on the organization's quality of products and services."

https://www.forbes.com/sites/joemckendrick/2023/04/30/hybrid-and-virtual-workplaces-employees-love-them-managers-are-still-uneasy/?sh=3e62c9bc1dc2

The Truth About Remote Work Well-being

For example, Malcolm Gladwell said that there is a "core psychological truth, which is we want you to have a feeling of belonging and to feel necessary… I know it's a hassle to come into the office, but if you're just sitting in your pajamas in your bedroom, is that the work life you want to live?"

These office-centric traditionalists reference a number of prominent articles about the dangers of remote work for mental well-being. For example, an article in The Atlantic claimed that "aggravation from commuting is no match for the misery of loneliness, which can lead to depression, substance abuse, sedentary behavior, and relationship damage, among other ills." An article in Forbes reported that over two-third of employees who work from home at least part of the time had trouble getting away from work at the end of the day. And Fast Company has a piece about how remote work can "exacerbate existing mental health issues" like depression and anxiety.

The trouble with such articles – and claims by traditionalist business leaders and gurus – stems from a sneaky misdirection. They decry the negative impact of remote and hybrid work for wellbeing. Yet they gloss over the damage to wellbeing caused by the alternative, namely office-centric work.

Remote Work Wellbeing According to Remote Workers

It's like comparing remote and hybrid work to a state of leisure. Sure, people would feel less isolated if they could hang out and have a beer with their friends instead of working. They could take care of their existing mental health issues if they could visit a therapist. But that's not in the cards. What's in the cards is office-centric work. That means the frustration of a long commute to the office, sitting at your desk in an often-uncomfortable and oppressive open office for 8 hours, having a sad desk lunch and unhealthy snacks, and then even more frustration commuting back home.

So what happens when we remove bias and compare apples to apples? That's when we need to hear from the horse's mouth: namely, surveys of employees themselves, who experienced both in-office work before the pandemic, and hybrid and remote work after COVID struck.

Consider a 2022 survey by Cisco of 28,000 full-time employees around the globe. 78% of respondents say that remote and hybrid work improved their overall well-being: that applies to 83% of Millennials, 82% of Gen Z, 76% of Gen Z, and 66.3% of Baby Boomers. And 79% of respondents felt that working remotely improved their work-life balance, most keenly felt by Millennials (83%) followed by Gen Zers (80.3%), Gen X (77.4%), and Baby Boomers (69.5%). Of the small number who report their work-life balance has not improved or even worsened, the number one reason, cited by over two-thirds, is due to the difficulty of disconnecting from work.

Much of that improvement stemmed from saving time due to not needing to commute and having a more flexible schedule: 64% saved at least four hours per week and 26% saved eight or more hours. What did they do with that extra time? The top choice of 44% was spending more time with family, friends and pets, which certainly helped address the problem of isolation from the workplace, while for 20%, the top choice for investing that extra time was in self-care. Indeed, 74% report that working from home improved their family relationships, and 51% strengthened their friendships. 82% report the ability to work from anywhere has made them happier, and 55% report that such work decreased their stress levels.

Other surveys back up Cisco's findings. For example, a 2022 Future Forum survey compared knowledge workers who worked full-time in the office, in a hybrid modality, and fully remotely. It found that full-time in-office workers felt least satisfied with work-life balance, hybrid workers were in the middle, and fully remote workers felt most satisfied. The same distribution applied to questions about stress and/or anxiety. A mental health website called Tracking Happiness found in a 2022 survey of over 12,000 workers that fully remote employees report a happiness level about 20% greater than office-centric ones.

A CNBC survey from June 2022 found that 52% of fully remote workers say they are very satisfied with their jobs, compared with 47% of workers working fully from the office. And according to a late 2022 Gallup survey, 71% of respondents said that, compared to in-office work, hybrid work improves work-life balance and 58% report less burnout. When asked about burnout among workers who could work fully remotely, those who were fully office-centric had rates of burnout at 35% and engagement at 30%. By contrast, 37% of hybrid workers were engaged and 30% burnt out, while for remote workers, the percentage for engagement was 37% and burnout at 27%, further belying the myth about remote work burnout.

Academic peer-reviewed research provides further support. Consider a 2022 study published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health of bank workers who worked on the same tasks of advising customers either remotely or in-person. It found that fully remote workers experienced higher meaningfulness, self-actualization, happiness, and commitment than in-person workers. Another study, published by the National Bureau of

Economic Research, reported that hybrid workers, compared to office-centric ones, experienced higher satisfaction with work and had 35% better retention.

Burnout and Remote Work Wellbeing
What about the supposed burnout crisis associated with remote work? Indeed, burnout is a concern. A survey by Deloitte finds that 77% of workers experienced burnout at their current job. Gallup came up with a slightly lower number of 67% in its survey. Clearly, it's a problem, but guess what? Both of those surveys are from 2018, long before the era of widespread remote work.

By contrast, an April 2021 McKinsey survey found that 54% of those in the US, and 49% of those globally, reported feeling burnout. A September 2021 survey by The Hartford reported 61% burnout. Given that we had much more fully remote or hybrid work in the pandemic, arguably full or part-time remote opportunities decreased burnout, not increased it. Indeed, that finding aligns with the earlier surveys and peer-reviewed research suggesting remote and hybrid work improves wellbeing.

Still, burnout is a real problem for hybrid and remote workers, as it is for in-office workers. Employers need to offer mental health benefits with online options to help employees address these challenges.

Setting Boundaries and Expectations to Improve Remote Work Wellbeing
While overall being better for wellbeing, remote and hybrid work does have specific disadvantages around work-life separation. To address work-life issues, I advise my clients who I helped [make the transition](#) to hybrid and remote work to establish norms and policies focused on clear expectations and setting boundaries.

Some people expect their Slack or Microsoft Teams messages to be answered within an hour, while others check Slack once a day. Some believe email requires a response within three hours, and others feel three days is fine.

As a result of such uncertainty and lack of clarity about what's appropriate, too many people feel uncomfortable disconnecting and not replying to messages or doing work tasks after hours. That might stem from a fear of not meeting their boss's expectations or not wanting to let their colleagues down.

To solve this problem, companies need to establish and incentivize clear expectations and boundaries. Develop policies and norms around response times for different channels of communication and clarify the work/life boundaries for your employees.

Let me clarify: by work/life boundaries, I'm not necessarily saying employees should never work outside of the regular work hours established for that employee. But you might create an expectation that it happens no more often than once a week, barring an emergency. Thus, if

such work after hours systematically happens more often outside of emergency situations, there's a problem that you will need to address.

Moreover, for working at home and collaborating with others, there's an unhealthy expectation that once you start your workday in your home office chair, and that you'll work continuously while sitting there (except for your lunch break). That's not how things work in the office, which has physical and mental breaks built in throughout the day. You took 5-10 minutes to walk from one meeting to another, or you went to get your copies from the printer and chatted with a coworker on the way.

Those and similar physical and mental breaks, research shows, decrease burnout, improve productivity, and reduce mistakes. That's why companies should strongly encourage employees to take at least a 10-minute break every hour during remote work. At least half of those breaks should involve physical activity, such as stretching or walking around, to counteract the dangerous effects of prolonged sitting. Other breaks should be restorative mental activities, such as meditation, brief naps, or whatever else feels restorative to you.

To facilitate such breaks, my clients such as the University of Southern California's Information Sciences Institute shortened hour-long meetings to 50 minutes and half-hour meetings to 25 minutes, to give everyone a mental and physical break and transition time.

You can get the vast majority of what you usually do in an hour-long meeting done in 50 minutes, just remember to start wrapping up at the 40-minute mark, and at the 20-minute mark for meetings that last 25 minutes. Very few people will be reluctant to have shorter meetings.

After that works out, move to other aspects of setting boundaries and expectations that facilitate work/life balance. Doing so will require help team members get on the same page and reduce conflicts and tensions. After that, once your group feels the benefits of such changes, you can implement activities that have more of a ramp-up.

By setting clear expectations and boundaries, you'll address the biggest challenge for wellbeing for remote and hybrid work: work/life boundaries. As for other issues, the research clearly shows that overall remote and hybrid workers have better wellbeing and lower burnout than in-office workers working in the same roles.

https://ceoworld.biz/2023/04/29/the-truth-about-remote-work-well-being/

The Ultimate Guide to Corporate Wellness: Top Programs and Solutions for a Healthier Workforce

Corporate wellness has become a critical issue for companies worldwide. With the rise of sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy eating habits, many employees struggle to maintain their health and well-being. As a result, companies are increasingly investing in wellness programs and solutions to improve employee health and reduce healthcare costs.

One of the most effective ways to improve employee health is by offering fitness and wellness programs. These programs can range from gym memberships to on-site fitness classes and wellness challenges. Companies that prioritize fitness and wellness see increased employee engagement and productivity. Employees who participate in fitness programs report feeling more energized and less stressed, leading to a better work-life balance.

Mental health is another critical aspect of corporate wellness. With the rising prevalence of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, it is essential for companies to offer resources to support employees' mental health. This can include access to counseling services, mindfulness programs, and mental health workshops. Companies that prioritize mental health see a reduction in absenteeism and an increase in employee retention.

Nutrition is also a crucial factor in employee wellness. Companies that prioritize nutrition see a significant impact on employee health. This can include offering healthy food options in the workplace, hosting nutrition workshops, and providing access to registered dietitians. Employees who eat healthier are more productive and have fewer health issues.

Health coaching is another effective way to improve employee wellness. Health coaches work with individuals to create personalized wellness plans, set goals, and provide support and accountability. Companies that offer health coaching to their employees see a reduction in healthcare costs and an increase in employee satisfaction.

On-site health screenings are an essential part of any corporate wellness program. These screenings can identify health risks and provide employees with the information they need to improve their health. Many companies offer on-site screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol, and glucose levels, as well as screenings for various cancers.

Ergonomic assessments can help prevent injuries and improve employee comfort in the workplace. These assessments evaluate employees' workstations and suggest changes to improve posture, reduce strain, and prevent injuries. Companies that prioritize ergonomics see a reduction in workers' compensation claims and an increase in employee productivity.

Wellness incentives can also motivate employees to prioritize their health and wellness. These incentives can include rewards for participating in wellness programs, achieving health goals, and completing health assessments. Companies that offer wellness incentives see increased employee engagement and improved health outcomes.

In addition to these programs and solutions, companies can also promote a culture of wellness by encouraging employees to take breaks throughout the day, offering standing desks, and hosting team-building events that prioritize physical activity and healthy eating.

Overall, a comprehensive corporate wellness program is essential for promoting a healthier workforce. The programs and solutions outlined in this article can make a significant impact on employee health and well-being. However, it is essential to remember that corporate wellness is an ongoing effort, and companies should continue to assess their wellness programs and make changes as needed.

https://www.corporatewellnessmagazine.com/article/the-ultimate-guide-to-corporate-wellness-top-programs-and-solutions-for-a-healthier-workforce

5 reasons to encourage friendships in the workplace

Few things can add joy to a day like the company of a good friend. This is not just true for people's personal lives, but within their professional setting as well.

Yet forming those relationships is harder today, as employees adjust to different locations, schedules and demands. This is impacting their mental health and wellness: more than 80% of employees have felt or feel lonely at work, and nearly half feel lonelier today than they did prior to the pandemic, according to a recent EY Belonging Barometer 2.0 study. Of these, 90% said they would not tell their manager if they were struggling.

However, when friendships exist within a workforce, both employees and employers find that these factors decrease. Nearly 71% of people working in management or human resources said friendships in the workplace had a positive effect on their workers, according to a survey by Paychex. The study found that workplace friendships have an impact on employees' happiness, work ethic, and job satisfaction.

Workplace environments can determine best practices for helping employees communicate and bond. Technology platforms, mentorship programs, and ERGs are especially effective at encouraging regular, in-depth communication and connection.

Management can also model the behavior they hope to see by acknowledging the value of their individual employees and teams, encouraging teamwork and collaboration, and setting up resources that employees can use to keep in touch on a regular basis.

Here are some of the ways friendships among co-workers can benefit a business, and how to help foster these relationships within a workforce:

 Improve employee mental health and wellness

Research has found that friends prevent isolation and loneliness, increase a sense of belonging and purpose, boost happiness and reduce stress, according to the Mayo Clinic. Creating ways for employees to interact, such as in-office common rooms and in-person or virtual meetups among co-workers and teams can help foster socialization and increase workers' sense of companionship and belonging.

Boost morale and trust

By creating opportunities for teamwork and engagement through things such as employee events and mentorship programs, employees build comfort and camaraderie that feeds into their professional success. For example, workers with four or more friends at work feel extremely comfortable asking for work-related help or advice, versus those with two friends, who do not feel at all comfortable doing so, according to Paychex's survey.

Increase productivity and engagement

According to a survey by Wildgoose, 57% of people say having a best friend in the workplace makes work more enjoyable, 22% feel more productive with friends, and 21% say friendship makes them more creative. Data also shows that those who have friends within the workplace are better at engaging with customers and produce an overall higher quality of work.

Increase retention

Employees who have a friend at work are [less likely to search for other jobs](#). Work friendships provide a sense of work-life balance that allows employees to enjoy a social life in their workplace, according to research from Gallup. Establishing an onboarding buddy program is a great way to promote relationships quickly, and data shows new hires have a 36% increase in satisfaction at the completion of a 90-day onboarding buddy experience.

Increase overall employee satisfaction

Keeping employees happy is a crucial part of building a lasting, loyal workforce. Part of this is creating an environment where they feel appreciated, trusted, and supported. People with close work friends are more confident and composed in finding solutions to their problems because they have friends supporting them, according to both the Gallup and Wildgoose surveys. Research also shows that employee satisfaction skyrockets nearly 50% when a worker develops a close relationship on the job.

https://www.benefitnews.com/list/5-reasons-to-encourage-friendships-in-the-workplace

3 Steps CEOs Need to Take to Support Employee Mental Health

Now that we've passed the three-year mark of the pandemic, it's clear that [employee mental health](#) and well-being have been significantly strained -- and by extension, so have [American workplaces](#). At the height of quarantine, businesses enthusiastically implemented initiatives that assisted their employees in these areas, but in some instances, those programs seem to have fallen by the wayside in a rush to return to "normal."

However, some businesses have continued with these pandemic-motivated programs and are continuing to see much success. In a [recent episode of my top-ranked podcast](#), Keith Nealon, CEO of [Bazaarvoice](#), the product review and user-generated content solutions provider, shared three powerful steps he's taken to improve mental health in the workplace.

Extend flexible work policies

McKinsey found last year that a [third of employees](#) experienced a negative impact on their mental health from return-to-work requirements by their employers. Work-life balance is key to employee mental well-being, and organizations need to implement more flexible work policies or extend existing ones. From there, business leaders must create opportunities for employees to build a "culture of connection" even when employees are remote.

Keith acknowledges that his company has employees working all over the world and living in a variety of circumstances. He suggests offering flexible work-from-home policies so they can manage their families or work more flexible hours to fit in with what's happening in their lives. Many call this "work-life balance," but he prefers to call it "work-life integration," with the two co-existing more fluidly.

Because this flexibility relieves stress and allows autonomy, employees are more likely to want to participate in company culture. Further culture-building efforts can include recurring company-wide meetings, optional in-office events, fun Slack/virtual groups, and employee-led culture groups. All of these foster connections, even in companies where many workers are remote.

Prioritize mental health from the top-down

Many employers already offer mental health support services. However, it's not enough to show people the door; business leaders must encourage people to walk through it. Open, transparent communications from senior leaders break the assumption that CEOs are invincible, encouraging all employees to prioritize their mental well-being.
Especially since the beginning of the pandemic, Keith has modeled vulnerability by hosting open talks about mental health and how he ensures that he prioritizes his own. He says, "It wasn't easy at first, but it was so worth it because employees didn't want to feel alone. They wanted to know what they were feeling was normal, what they were going through was normal. I had to get more comfortable being vulnerable. And I've learned over the years, the more vulnerable somebody is, the quicker you connect with others."

Doing this demystifies and humanizes the CEO of a company, not only making that person more approachable, but also making employees more willing to be open and honest about their own struggles, which helps them more easily find a solution. Keith says, "What I was looking to accomplish was for folks to say, 'OK, if the CEO is feeling these things, and is uncomfortable and is going through ups and downs, it's OK for me to as well.'"

Keep open ears and an open mind

Mental health conversations aren't easy and can often be downright uncomfortable. While it's important that CEOs display vulnerability and talk openly, it's equally important to take a step back and listen to different minorities who may have completely different experiences -- whether that's based on race, gender, or sexual orientation. Eventually, this culture of openness and support will become the norm.

Mental health is slowly losing its stigma, and by allowing flexibility, vulnerability, and an open ear, companies can help make massive strides in supporting their employees. Not only is it the right thing to do, but a company with employees healthy in body, mind, and spirit can only be good for business.

https://www.inc.com/marcel-schwantes/3-steps-ceos-need-to-take-to-support-employee-mental-health.html

How Organisations Can Integrate DEI & Zero Tolerance Policies To Build An Inclusive Workplace

DEI initiatives are crucial for any organisation to succeed in the competitive job market and attract and retain skilled talent

Zero-tolerance policies can sometimes contradict an organisation's commitment to DEI, but mediation and restorative justice options can help

HR and management play crucial roles in integrating DEI and zero-tolerance policies and creating a safe and inclusive workplace for all

In today's competitive job market, attracting and retaining skilled talent requires more than just offering a good compensation package with benefits. Employees seek out workplaces where they feel valued and supported. It's clear that a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) isn't just a "nice-to-have". It's rather a must-have for any organisation that wants to prioritize talent acquisition.

From addressing unconscious biases to breaking stereotypes, focusing on DEI initiatives is a prerequisite for any organisation to succeed in today's talent war.

In many ways, the practices and policies constructed around DEI and zero tolerance serve complementary purposes. While the former ensures that all employees are given an equal chance to succeed and that diverse perspectives are valued, the latter provides a framework for addressing any incidents of misconduct, discrimination, or harassment that may occur. To ensure that these policies are effective, it's important to implement them in a way that considers the diverse experiences and perspectives of all employees. So, how can organisations balance DEI and zero-tolerance policies?

DEI & Zero Tolerance Policies Explained

The first step towards creating this balance is to clearly understand and integrate the meaning of these terms.

Diversity is acknowledging and embracing the differences that make people unique, including their race, gender, age, religion, and sexual orientation.

Equity is about ensuring a fair and impartial platform for all, and inclusion involves cultivating an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation where every person is valued and treated with dignity.

Taking the DEI concept one step further is the idea of belonging, which means that employees feel accepted, included, and valued as members of a group or workplace. As the paradigm expands, the shift from DEI to DEIB (diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging) will be one of the key HR trends that are increasingly going to become part of the mainstream.

Zero-tolerance policies, on the other hand, are intentionally created to establish a secure and salubrious working environment by strictly disallowing any type of verbal or physical harassment, nuisance, or misconduct without any tolerance whatsoever.

These zero-tolerance policies, meant to create a safe work environment, can sometimes contradict an organisation's commitment to DEI. For instance, in situations where an employee makes a comment that could be interpreted as offensive, a zero-tolerance approach may require disciplinary measures. But then, it becomes important for organisations to consider the employee's context and intentions and to carefully weigh the potential outcomes before taking any action.

Best Practices For Combining Zero Tolerance And DEI

Implementing zero-tolerance policies while [maintaining DEI](#) can be a delicate balancing act.

Here are a few ways organisations can successfully implement zero-tolerance policies and DEI practices:

1. Establish mediation or restorative justice options as an alternative to disciplinary action. This approach allows for resolving conflicts in a more constructive and inclusive way and also encourages open communication and understanding, while still holding individuals accountable for their actions.

2. Cultivate a culture of accountability where all employees, regardless of their position or identity, are held to the same standards of conduct. This strategy involves setting clear expectations for conduct, enforcing policies consistently, and creating a safe reporting system for employees to speak up about misconduct.

3. Create a culture of respect and inclusivity that requires consistent reinforcement of DEI expectations and a strong leadership commitment. To implement it successfully, the leaders must be willing to communicate the organisation's values clearly and hold themselves and others accountable for upholding these values. They must set an example by promoting a safe and inclusive environment for all employees, regardless of their background or identity.

4. Organisations must consistently measure progress and adjust strategies, as needed to ensure the success of zero-tolerance and DEI initiatives. Regular evaluations of policies and training programmes, coupled with feedback from employees, can provide valuable insights into areas for improvement and enable organisations to make necessary changes.

5. Conducting regular DEI training and awareness campaigns can be helpful in creating an inclusive workplace. Organisations should develop a comprehensive programmes that educates employees on the impact of their words and actions, encourages respect and inclusivity, and emphasizes the importance of diversity and equity.

Organisations must carefully navigate the intersection of DEI and zero-tolerance policies to build a workplace free from discrimination and harassment. Organisations must integrate belonging into their DEI strategy to create more connectedness among employees and build an experience of feeling accepted in the workplace.

The roles of HR and management in integrating these concepts are crucial. They must adopt a culture of accountability, invest in training, and establish clear reporting and investigation guidelines to create a safe and inclusive workplace for all, benefiting employees, customers, and shareholders.

https://inc42.com/resources/how-organisations-can-integrate-dei-zero-tolerance-policies-to-build-an-inclusive-workplace/

Only half of U.S. gen Z workers say employer cares about their mental health: survey

Only half (51 per cent) of U.S. generation Z employees say their employer cares about their mental health, according to a new survey by the Hartford Financial Services Group Inc.
The survey, which polled more than 500 human resources decision-makers and more than 1,100 workers, found among gen Z workers, 53 per cent said they're highly stressed during a typical workweek and 44 per cent said they feel depressed or anxious at least a few times per week. Two-fifths (41 per cent) said stigma related to mental health prevents them from seeking care.

It also found gen Z (38 per cent) and millennials (32 per cent) are more likely to say mental health impacts their productivity, compared to just eight per cent of baby boomers. Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) of HR decision-makers said employees' deteriorating mental health is negatively impacting their company's financial performance, down from 71 per cent in 2022.
A majority of U.S. workers said employers should provide more mental-health training for managers (58 per cent), additional mental-health tools for employees (59 per cent) and better resources for their dependents (58 per cent). Similarly, a majority of HR decision-makers agreed managers need additional mental-health training (71 per cent) and resources (65 per cent), but half said a lack of funding prevents them from making these changes.

"The future of work depends on meaningful action today to support workers' emotional and mental well-being," said Christopher Swift, chairman and chief executive officer at the Hartford, in a press release. "Employers have the power to transform mental health through empathetic leadership, inclusive and collaborative workplaces that foster connection and more resources tailored to the unique needs of employees and their families."

https://www.benefitscanada.com/benefits/health-wellness/only-half-of-u-s-gen-z-workers-say-employer-cares-about-their-mental-health-survey/

US study finds link between discrimination and high blood pressure

Adults who reported feeling discriminated against at work had a higher risk of developing hypertension

US researchers have explored the connection between experiencing discrimination at work and an individual's risk of developing high blood pressure.

The study, which was published in Journal of the American Heart Association, found that those who reported feeling highly discriminated against at work had an increased risk of hypertension compared to those who reported low workplace discrimination.

Research carried out by the AOP as part of its [100% Respect campaign](#) found that one in four optometrists had [experienced or witnessed discrimination over the past four years.](#)

In the latest US study by University of California researchers, those who experienced high levels of discrimination were 52% more likely to report high blood pressure during an eight-year follow-up period than those with low workplace discrimination.

Those who experienced intermediate levels of discrimination at work were 22% more likely to develop hypertension than those with low workplace discrimination.

The study involved 1246 adults who were free of high blood pressure at the start of the observation period.

Questions that were asked to determine levels of workplace discrimination included whether study participants felt they were unfairly treated, watched more closely than others or ignored more often than others.

Researchers also asked about frequency of ethnic, racial or sexual slurs or jokes at work, as well as if respondents felt job promotions were given fairly.

Lead study author, Professor Jian Li, of the University of California, shared that the study represented the first evidence indicating that workplace discrimination may increase an individual's long-term risk of developing high blood pressure.

"Scientists have studied the associations among systemic racism, discrimination and health consequences. However, few studies have looked specifically at the health impact of discrimination in the workplace, where adults, on average, spend more than one-third of their time," he said.

https://www.aop.org.uk/ot/science-and-vision/research/2023/04/29/us-study-finds-link-between-discrimination-and-high-blood-pressure

Fired Employee Can Take Disability-Based Associational Discrimination Claim

Takeaway: An employee who was fired after he took time off on an emergency basis to care for his disabled father could go forward with his claim for disability-based associational discrimination.

An employee who was terminated from his job after he took time off on an emergency basis to care for his disabled father could proceed with his claim under the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) for disability-based associational discrimination, a California appeals court recently held. A lower court had dismissed the claim before trial.

The employer, which operates an automotive parts distribution facility, hired the employee as a general assembly worker. He later worked as a machine operator and then in the packing department.

From his hire in 1999 until October 2015, the employee received mostly positive annual performance reviews. In 2015, the employee began working as a "closer" in the packing department, packaging orders for shipment. His supervisor required everyone in his department to sign in and punch in on the time clock at the start of every work shift. The employee had been signing in as required. However, on Dec. 4, 2015, he refused to sign in for his shift. The employee was cited for insubordination and agreed to sign in going forward. The employee was cited two more times for insubordination in February and March 2016 for failure to follow his supervisor's directives and for using profanity toward his supervisor. In December 2016, the employee's supervisor informed his managers that the employee was leaving work at the end of his scheduled shift but before the orders were closed without informing anyone he was leaving, which he was required to do.

The employee explained that he had left early because he needed to be available for his father, who was in the hospital. According to the employee, his father was suffering from serious health ailments, including diabetes, lung and kidney disease, and prostate cancer. The employee was not disciplined at that time but was told to inform his manager if he had to leave early. On Dec. 28, 2016, an HR representative met with the employee to discuss family care leave. The HR representative told the employee that he could take an unpaid leave of absence to care for his father. However, the employee said he could not afford to take unpaid leave and would rather use vacation time when he needed to take time off.

In late 2016 and early 2017, the employee took three days off work, using his accrued vacation time to care for his father during medical emergencies. In each instance, on the same day the employee learned of his father's medical emergency, he told his supervisor that he would be absent that day.

On Feb. 27, 2017, the same day that the employee's third request for leave was approved, his supervisor told him that he would be moved to a different position within the department. The employee said that he did not want to change jobs. On Feb. 28, 2017, the employee reported to work at the usual time. One hour later, he was fired, allegedly for insubordination.

The employee subsequently filed a lawsuit against his employer, claiming that the company terminated him because of his association with his disabled father in violation of the FEHA. The trial court dismissed the claim before trial, and the employee appealed.

Associational Discrimination Claim

The FEHA prohibits an employer from subjecting an employee to an adverse employment action based on the employee's protected status, including his or her physical disability. The act

defines a "physical disability" as including a perception that the person is associated with someone who has a physical disability.

Therefore, the court explained, when the FEHA forbids discrimination based on a disability, it also forbids discrimination based on an employee's association with another person who has a disability.

A plaintiff may establish his or her initial case of disability-based associational discrimination by submitting evidence that the employer had a motive to discriminate against a nondisabled employee who is merely associated with a disabled person, for example, by showing that the employer viewed the employee's association as an expense, a distraction or a disability by association.

The employee, the court said, raised a triable issue of fact about whether the employer viewed the employee's need for time off to care for his father as a distraction and an inconvenience. The time off requests, though processed and approved as requests to use accrued paid vacation time, were made on an emergency basis and on the same day as the requested time off. The employee took time off on an emergency basis three times in the three months before his termination.

Further, there was evidence that the last-minute requests placed a burden on the employer. The employee's supervisor testified that the company was left short-staffed and that the employee's co-workers had complained. In addition, the court said, the temporal proximity between the employee's time-off requests and the company's termination decision provided further support for the employee's case.

The company argued that even if the employee proved his initial case of associational discrimination, he had not shown that the employer's proffered legitimate, nondiscriminatory business reason for the termination (the employee's insubordination) was pretext for discriminatory animus. The employee argued that he raised a triable issue of pretext based on his supervisor singling him out for reassignment on the same day he approved the employee's third emergency request for time off to care for his father—the day before he was terminated. The court agreed with the employee and reversed the trial court's order dismissing the FEHA claim before trial.

Leyva v. Motorcar Parts of America, Calif. Ct. App., No. B307525 (April 20, 2023).

https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/state-and-local-updates/pages/court-report-california-associational-disability.aspx

How Loneliness At Workplace Can Affect The Mental Health Of Employees

Workplace loneliness will also lead to a decline in performance.

The feeling of loneliness has increased in the recent past as most of the work has become virtual. Workplace loneliness can result in the employee leaving the job.

Loneliness is an emotional response to the perceived feeling of being alone. It is not actually being alone but the feeling of isolation that a person can get even when around other people. Loneliness is a negative psychological emotion that has been linked to mental health issues. For instance, loneliness at work greatly worsens how stressed-out employees feel at work, and those who do not experience loneliness are better able to manage stress at work.

In a work environment, the employees can often feel lonely as it is an environment where individuals are in constant fear that they are being judged by other employees or their seniors or even the head of the company. Therefore, they abstain from reaching out in difficult situations and so end up feeling lonely gradually. This can mostly happen with new employees. The feeling of loneliness has increased in the recent past as most of the work has become virtual and as human beings are social animals they feel cut from the social touch and hence result in feeling lonely.

Loneliness At Workplace Make Employees Leave The Job

An individual feeling lonely in the workplace will not feel like attending the office in the first place as other than work individuals are also in need of emotional satisfaction which is surely lacking if he is feeling lonely in the workplace environment. The individual will not find job satisfaction and so will be unhappy. He will not be committed to finishing the work or towards the turnover as motivation is lacking. It will also lead to a decline in performance. Ultimately, struggling with all the negative emotions, lack of confidence and motivation, and also by feeling very sad and anxious all the time, workplace loneliness can result in the employee leaving the job as he is not able to adjust to the workplace environment.

In a recent survey conducted by EY including more than 5,000 workers in Brazil, China, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S., as many as 82 per cent of the respondents indicated they felt lonely at work. Nearly half of those polled (49 percent) experience loneliness more now than before the COVID-19 pandemic, according to EY's report. Among the workers surveyed, 46 per cent indicated they may leave their job because of loneliness. This sentiment was particularly strong among members of Generation Z (54 percent) and Millennials (52 percent). 42 per cent of Generation X and 31 per cent of Baby Boomers said they were likely to leave an employer if they felt lonely.

How To Help Employees Struggling With Loneliness

The pandemic has only exacerbated this problem, with many employees working remotely, leading to isolation and disconnection. Having an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can provide crucial support for employees struggling with loneliness and related issues. EAPs offer a

safe and confidential space for employees to talk about their feelings and receive counselling, which can help them overcome loneliness, anxiety, and other related issues. By addressing these issues early on, employers can promote a positive work environment, improve productivity, and ensure the overall [well-being of their workforce](#).

When employees admit they're struggling, they could feel awkward or shy. That is why cultivating a compassionate culture is so crucial. Try beginning internal meetings with check-ins or informal reports on people's days in addition to scheduling team outings. As much as you can, incorporate genuine, cordial conversation into your daily activities. People are more likely to open up when they believe you genuinely care about them and value their opinion. Simple actions can have a significant impact. When we take the time to show genuine care and interest in others, we build trust and create meaningful connections. By valuing their opinions, we empower them to share their unique perspectives, ultimately enriching our own lives and experiences.

https://www.thehealthsite.com/diseases-conditions/mental-health/how-loneliness-at-workplace-can-affect-the-mental-health-of-employees-972762/

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion: Mental Health at Work

A New Era of Support for Employee and Business Well-being

We are in a new, much-needed era for mental health at work. Businesses only perform as well as their employees, and nearly one-fifth of U.S. workers rate their mental health as fair or poor. Construction specifically has the second highest suicide rate among major industries. Leaders need to be in lockstep with this paradigm shift to create an effective, supportive mental health program so everyone succeeds.

Establish the Business Imperative
Construction is complex, grueling work set in demanding environments. Years ago, I declared both safety and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) business imperatives. We introduced Shawmut and our network to the concept of safety of the entire person—expanding the notion of safety beyond physical to incorporate psychological and mental health. To create accountability and drive progress, our executive leadership team has safety and DEI efforts as goals and KPIs.

Lead by Example
New programs are only as strong and successful as the support behind them. Leaders need to address mental health stigmas head-on, lead by example, and model self-care and work-life balance. Being cognizant of energy drains and managing teams' energy levels to help them thrive is a responsibility and goal for our leaders—they've undergone training focused on how to avoid or manage burnout.

Transparency is also key—as an employee-owned company, we share DEI and safety initiative progress, celebrating successes while highlighting areas of work. This creates a sense of ownership and shared responsibility, opening channels for grassroots initiatives.

Operationalize the Work

Core to creating an inclusive workplace is providing an environment where people feel safe opening up about their struggles—without blame, stigma, or judgment. It needs to be integrated into the fabric of a company. We now have mental health included in all meetings and during our new hire orientation; we launched an Inclusion Learning and Awareness Plan with trainings on how to understand and interrupt unconscious biases.

Provide Accessible Mental Health Benefits

At Shawmut, we have an intentional benefits strategy designed to support mental health and nurture wellness. This starts with our strong healthcare package, ample vacation and holidays, flexible work arrangements, and summer Fridays. Our mental health support includes well-being webinars, services for emotional and mental health support, and a confidential and free Employee Assistance Program available 24/7 that offers short-term counseling and referrals. An effective approach to mental health is critical—it allows everyone to bring their best selves to work each and every day, which leads to a strong and successful business.

https://www.crainsnewyork.com/thought-leader-report/sponsored-shawmut-mental-health-work-new-era-support-employee-and-business

The Hartford's New Research Finds Next-Gen Workers Are Most in Need of Mental Health Support, Least Likely to Feel Their Employers Care

Gen Z workers report higher levels of anxiety and depression, decreased productivity due to mental health, and stigma as a more significant barrier to care than their Boomer and Gen X counterparts

HARTFORD, Conn.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--New research by The Hartford, a leading provider of workers' compensation and employee benefits, found Gen Z workers are the most in need of mental health support compared to other generations—53% are highly stressed in a typical week and 44% feel depressed or anxious at least a few times per week—yet are less likely to believe their employers care greatly about their mental health (51%). Also, Gen Z workers are more likely than other generations to report stigma prevents them from seeking mental health care (41%).

"A View from the Top: Leaders Prioritizing People, Policy, and Potential"

While the youngest generations in the workplace are more likely to say their mental health affects their productivity (38% Gen Z and 32% Millennials), the oldest generation in the workplace are less likely to report mental health impacts (Baby Boomer 8%). The Hartford's research could foretell an even greater effect on worker productivity and the bottom line of businesses, as an estimated 75 million Boomers are expected to retire by 2030—the year the U.S. workforce is projected to be two-thirds Millennial and Gen Z.1

"The stakes could not be higher," said The Hartford's Chairman and CEO Christopher Swift. "The future of work depends on meaningful action today to support next-gen workers' emotional and mental well-being. Employers have the power to transform mental health through empathetic leadership, inclusive and collaborative workplaces that foster connection, and more resources tailored to the unique needs of employees and their families."

Year over year, The Hartford's Future of Benefits Study has shown a connection between employee mental well-being, mental health support, and the impact on a company's bottom line. For example, nearly one-third (30%) of U.S. workers in 2023 reported feeling depressed or anxious at least a few times a week, compared to 34% in 2022. Also, a majority of Human Resources (HR) professionals (64%) feel the deteriorating mental health of their workforce has a negative financial impact on their company, which is down compared to 71% last year.

A majority of U.S. workers believe employers should provide more mental health training for managers (58%), additional mental health tools for employees (59%), and better resources for their dependents (58%). Also, a majority of HR professionals agree managers need additional training (71%) and mental health resources (65%), but half said a lack of funding prevents them from doing so.

Swift, a vocal advocate for stigma-free workplaces, will discuss the well-being of next-gen workers during a panel titled "A View from the Top: Leaders Prioritizing People, Policy, and Potential" at the 26th Annual Milken Institute Global Conference.

To better support employers, The Hartford is expanding its partnerships with the Milken Institute, a nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. With these partners, The Hartford will increase its ongoing research and provide educational programs and resources for business leaders and workers across the U.S.

https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20230420005584/en/The-Hartford's-New-Research-Finds-Next-Gen-Workers-Are-Most-in-Need-of-Mental-Health-Support-Least-Likely-to-Feel-Their-Employers-Care

How to Encourage Staff to Take Advantage of Mental Health Benefits

Employer-provided mental health programs improve staff well-being on and off the job. However, these resources often go untapped by employees. An expert shares how cultivating a culture of support and education can encourage staff to use these benefits.

Last December, Employee Assistance Professionals Association CEO Julie Fabsik-Swarts, MS, CFRE, CAP, made the decision to close the EAPA office between Christmas and New Years. "We'd been on overdrive," Fabsik-Swarts said. "We recently had our annual conference, transitioned to a new website, and moved everything to a new database program."

While giving staff time to recharge is one way to prioritize employee mental health, organizations should also focus on making sure that employees know about and are using their employer-provided mental health benefits. According to One Medical's "[The State of Workplace Health Report](#)," 64 percent of workers reported struggling with mental or behavioral health issues in 2022, but only 19 percent of employees used their mental health benefits. "When employees use these benefits, we see an increase in productivity and a decrease in employee turnover and [presenteeism](#)," Fabsik-Swarts said.

She shared how associations can encourage their staff to make use of mental health benefits by reminding employees of their availability, providing regular education, and having leaders and managers share their importance.

Onboarding and Onward

Fabsik-Swarts recommends educating new staff on the association's available mental health benefits during onboarding. Taking a few minutes to review the benefits can have a big impact on employees.

"Don't review the benefits as though you're checking items off a list, talk about how employees can actively use these benefits," she said. "Getting the message across will show employees that you embrace mental health as part of your culture."

In addition to the onboarding process, associations should offer educational sessions on these benefits at least once or twice a year. The sessions serve as important reminders for new and seasoned employees about what the programs entail and how they can use them. "Associations need to make sure staff have the information about these benefits and are encouraged to use them," Fabsik-Swarts said.

A Culture of Caring

Another reason employees may not be using mental health benefits is if their personal health—both physical and mental—is getting pushed to the backburner.

In these situations, organizations can prioritize mental health by giving employees time off or encouraging them to take mental health days. The time away can help employees decompress

or get the care they need. After the EAPA annual conference, for example, staff receive one day off for each weekend day they worked. Fabsik-Swarts also can choose to close the office as she sees fit without staff having to take vacation.

"Taking time off, especially after a large conference, isn't up for debate because they'll burn out," she said. "Staff need time to relax, be with family, go on walks, whatever it takes to make the mental health conversation positive."

Support From the Top
As organizations continue to emphasize mental health in the workplace, leaders should work to normalize seeking support for mental health.

"If you broke your leg, no one would think twice about taking time to recover, but people worry about how it will look if they take time off for a mental health crisis," Fabsik-Swarts said. She recommends managers have open conversations with employees about the importance of using mental health resources. If comfortable, leaders may consider sharing occasions when they've used employer-provided programs or sought outside help.

"Employees need to feel that these benefits are embraced by everyone in the organization," Fabsik-Swarts said. "This openness sends a message from the top down that mental health is health, and that the organization wants employees to take care of themselves physically and emotionally."

https://associationsnow.com/2023/04/how-to-encourage-staff-to-take-advantage-of-mental-health-benefits/

Are You Killing Off Your Best and Brightest Employees?

Four renewal strategies to increase worker performance and longevity

- A majority of Americans identify work-related stress as one of the most significant sources of stress in their lives.
- Work-related stress significantly impacts employee productivity, creativity, work quality, engagement, and loyalty.
- Employers who meet employees' physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs can greatly reduce employee stress and burnout risk.
- Leading by example by working in more sustainable ways boosts employee engagement, focus, and retention.

One of the most common frustrations I hear from high-achievers is that there aren't enough hours in a day to get things done. Just when they feel like they're close to completing a task,

their boss throws more into their in-box, making it seem like no matter how hard or long they work, the "to-do pile" never goes down.

Moreover, the ease of sending digital "communications" 24/7 is a major contributing factor, exposing workers to an unpredictable inflow of information that many feel they have to respond to even when they're "off work."

This constant barrage of seemingly endless expectations from employers often results in workers who feel overwhelmed, depleted, and hopeless to effectuate a positive change. This aligns with the most recent results of the American Psychological Association's Stress in America poll (2022), which revealed that work is one of the most significant sources of stress for a majority of Americans, and one that carries over to negatively affect almost all other aspects of their lives. In fact, more than a quarter of adults in the poll reported feeling so [stressed](#) most days that they simply couldn't "function" (APA, 2022).

Obviously, this type of intense and ongoing stress is unsustainable. It drains a person's energy and agility, diminishes their creativity and engagement, and decreases performance and [productivity](#). This isn't good for employees, nor is it good for employers who, without proactive intervention, risk losing their best and brightest workers to [burnout](#). But what can employers do to most effectively combat the epidemic of stress that seems to be running rampant in American workplaces and burning out their best and brightest employees?

For two decades now, Tony Schwartz and his team at The Energy Project have worked to answer this question. Partnering with Harvard Business Law Review, they surveyed more than 20,000 employees across a broad range of industries to better understand what most influenced worker engagement and productivity. They discovered that workers were significantly more satisfied and productive when their work environment met four core needs: physical, emotional, mental, and [spiritual](#).

Physical needs can be met by companies who offer workers regular opportunities to renew and recharge at work. The Energy Project survey discovered that workers who take a break every 90 minutes reported a 30 percent higher level of focus than workers who took one or no breaks during the workday. They also discovered close to 50 percent greater [creative thinking](#) capacity and a 46 percent higher level of health and well-being among employees who are given regular breaks.

The more hours worked beyond 40 per week, the worse workers reported feeling and the less engaged they felt. In addition to regular breaks, providing employees with wellness programs, nap rooms, and healthy food options also appear to fuel worker productivity and enhance their sense of engagement.

Emotional needs can be met when workers feel valued and appreciated for their contributions and performance. The Energy Project survey revealed that "feeling cared for by one's supervisor has a more significant impact on people's sense of trust and safety than any other

behavior by a [leader]." In addition, workers who perceive their employers and supervisors as being supportive were found to be 67 percent more engaged and 1.3 times more likely to remain with the company.

Mental needs can be met by providing workers with opportunities to focus in an absorbed way on their most important tasks and define when and where they get their work done. Only 20 percent of survey respondents said they were able/allowed to focus on one task at a time at work, but those who could were 50 percent more engaged.

Only one-third of respondents said they were able to effectively prioritize their tasks, but those who did were 1.6 times better able to focus on one thing at a time. In addition, employees who were given more flexibility about when and where they worked were significantly more engaged and productive.

Spiritual needs are met when workers are encouraged and allowed to do more of what they excel at and enjoy most, and when they feel connected to their company's mission. In fact, when employees experience meaning and significance from their work and feel that their work accomplishes a higher purpose, they are more than three times as likely to stay with their companies. They also report 1.7 times higher job satisfaction and were 1.4 times more engaged at work.

Meeting any of these core needs is better than meeting none, but employers that prioritize providing all four core needs to their employees are likely to reap a wealth of benefits. These benefits come not only in the form of decreased employee stress and lower turn-over rates, but also increased employee productivity, engagement, work quality, energy, loyalty, and job satisfaction.

Finally, the benefits appear to trickle from the top down. As Schwartz and Porath (2014) write, "The energy of leaders is, for better or worse, contagious. When leaders explicitly encourage employees to work in more sustainable ways — and especially when they themselves model a sustainable way of working — their employees are 55 percent more engaged, 53 percent more focused, and more likely to stay at the company ...." In other words, lead by example.
The bottom line, both literally and figuratively, is ... if you value the overall well-being of your employees and the well-being of your business, invest in both by being a "do-as-I-do" leader and incorporate these four core needs into your business model. It's likely to be a win-win strategy for everyone involved.

https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/high-octane-women/201406/are-you-killing-off-your-best-and-brightest-employees