

# 13 Ways to Support the Mental Health and Wellness of Employees

HR Exchange Network | Francesca Di Meglio | May 23, 2023

Mental health and wellness is now an essential part of Human Resources' responsibilities. The connection between the physical and mental health of workers and their ability to achieve is clear. As a result, employers see this duty as essential to arriving at positive business outcomes.

It's also the right thing to do because people are clearly struggling with a variety of relevant problems, including stress from an economic downturn, heavy workload, and personal matters. HR Exchange Network's community has shared their concern. In fact, the number one challenge to employee engagement is burnout, according to the latest State of HR report.

As a result, HR Exchange Network recently turned to Terkel.io to ask HR and business professionals for their suggestions on how to support the wellness of employees:

## **Make Vacation Part of the To-Do List**

"Encouraging employees to take their entitled annual leave to properly rest and recharge is essential for better physical and mental health. Burnout is a serious precursor to a lot of stress-induced illnesses associated with work, which can then turn into a vicious cycle.

Sending out a friendly email reminder encouraging employees to take their entitled annual leave will help to motivate employees to take well-deserved breaks and rest away from work to recharge and come back happier and more productive.

Plus, you can take the opportunity to push people to plan for holidays and work cover in advance, avoiding further stressful situations that could negatively impact their mental health in the future."-Eleanor Holmes, Marketing Executive, MyHRToolKit

## **Be an Ally and Leader**

"Mental health is already [impacted by] factors such as job insecurity, expensive child care, money problems, and illness. As a leader and a human being, you have an obligation to notice when employees are struggling and do all you can to alleviate their pain.

Organizations should think about adding measures like flexible scheduling and other advantages for employees with mental health concerns, so they can feel supported and give their best work. The stress of deadlines could be lessened, and non-traditional work environments explored.

As an employer, one must frequently laud others for their efforts and accomplishments. Don't be shy in heaping praise on anything you can. By the way, praising an individual for an action rather than the group as a whole is more valuable and effective."-Aleksandar Ginovski, Career Expert, Resume Expert, and Product Manager, Enhancv

## **Offer Mindfulness, Peace of Mind**

"Empowering employees with practical tools that make a difference is one of the most effective ways to show commitment to mental wellness. For example, provide access to digital mindfulness resources, such as meditation apps, online mindfulness programs, and mindfulness podcasts. These tools can enable employees to practice mindfulness at their convenience, both at work and outside of work.

You can provide access by recommending specific apps, programs, or websites to employees or by incorporating them into the company's wellness program or employee intranet. By offering a variety of options, employees can choose the resources that resonate with them and integrate mindfulness practices into their daily routines."-Ben Lamarche, General Manager, Lock Search Group

## **Create a Culture of Work-Life Balance**

"One way employers and HR can help employees manage stress and focus on their mental health and wellness is to create an environment that supports work-life balance. Some ways to do this are to encourage screen-free time or to implement a no emails on the weekend policy.

As upper management, it's important to lead by example, so to create the culture, you must also try to focus on your own mental health and wellness."-Azmaira Maker, Ph.D., Founding Director, Aspiring Families

## **Build Mental Health into the Work Week**

"Mental health and wellness should be integrated into one's everyday life. Sometimes people can treat mental health like physical health—dedicating a specific time each week to 'concentrate' on their mental well-being. While activities, such as meditation or yoga are fantastic, neglecting to think about your mental health throughout the rest of the week can limit the impact these activities can have.

Instead, employers and those in HR can help employees focus on their mental wellness throughout the week by providing an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). These apps provide resources and interactive content that help employees build mental resilience when used consistently throughout the working week.

This, in turn, helps employees to manage stress. Making mental wellness a lifestyle, rather than an activity, will have a much greater positive impact on employee mental health long-term."-John Everton, Technical Director, Bravo Benefits

## **Create a Culture of Self-Care**

"Employers should strive to weave self-care into the fabric of their culture by communicating and modeling working norms that support mental wellness.

Company culture is the product of both explicit norms (for example, policies in an employee handbook) and implicit norms (for example, what is considered acceptable to talk about over lunch). During new hire onboarding, HR should proactively highlight mental wellness as an

organizational value and offer examples of how employees can practice self-care. Continue to give everyone clear permission and encouragement regularly.

Leaders and managers also need to model healthy behaviors for them to become implicit norms. They can achieve this by being vulnerable about their own challenges, sharing how they're taking time off to prioritize self-care, and checking in with employees to see if their needs are being met. And if employees report feeling stressed, leaders and managers should partner with them to resolve the root causes."-Alex Lahmeyer, Founder and DEI Consultant, Boundless Arc

### **Set the Tone**

"The best way for employers to help employees manage stress and focus on mental and physical wellness is to model that behavior themselves. To do that, leadership must be more transparent and vulnerable about their own needs and show that they value wellness through their behavior toward themselves and their employees.

For example, managers can normalize talking about stress and self-care in routine check-ins with their employees. They can build self-care into the structure of the workday, such as taking actual lunch breaks, taking time off, or working flex hours to allow for physical exercise or psychotherapy.

Finally, creating a positive learning environment where employees can feel emotionally safe to try new things allows employees to stay engaged and experience more of the good kind of stress—the kind that comes from working hard and achieving a common goal."-Christie Pearl, EMDR Therapist and Consultant, Christie Pearl, LMHC, LPC

### **Have Reasonable Expectations**

"As a manager, you need to set appropriate expectations when assigning work because it removes ambiguity about the task at hand, which could reduce stress.

Employees should feel comfortable asking about all stressful points they have about a particular assignment, and managers should be open to reducing/raising expectations as appropriate depending on how the employee is feeling.

Setting appropriate expectations requires a healthy relationship between employee and manager, where expectations are not a constant moving target."-Ryan Igo, Revenue Marketing Manager, Surety Systems

### **Consider Financial Wellness**

"Providing financial wellness resources to your employees can help them manage their stress more effectively and contribute to better mental health. Money worries are among the biggest contributors to mental health issues, with more than 66% of employees experiencing diminishing mental health owing to financial stress. Their productivity and quality of output are also severely impaired as a result.

Employers can combat this issue by providing regular financial awareness training that teaches employees to manage their financial situations effectively and escape debt cycles. There should

also be programs that provide personalized investment training to employees on how to grow and manage wealth, how to prepare for retirement, and how to plan for and cope with financial shocks, such as job loss or major illness.

Also, providing comprehensive insurance coverage, among other valuable financial benefits, can ease some of the financial stress that may be affecting employees."-Dr. Willy Portier, Co-founder, Concerty

### **Recognize the Importance of Physical Health**

"Many of my personal training clients have actually been from companies or organizations where they had a set budget to spend on how they best wanted to work out in line with their fitness goals and general approach to keeping fit.

I learned firsthand just how important not only having this regular one-to-one fitness regime was for my clients in reducing their stress, but also how there was a noticeable positive shift in their demeanor in a matter of weeks just by having these regular sessions as part of their overall wellness benefits package from their places of work."-David Mason, Personal Trainer, Barbells Abroad

### **Encourage Healthier Diets**

"Promoting healthy eating habits in the workplace can be a powerful tool for managing stress and improving mental health.

The food we eat has a significant impact on how we feel, both physically and mentally. By providing nutritious food options in the workplace and offering healthy eating education programs, employers and HR professionals can help employees make better food choices and improve their overall well-being.

While it may seem obvious, it is the foundation for overall well-being...A nutrient-rich diet can positively impact mental health by improving mood, reducing stress, boosting energy levels, and improving gut health.

For example, eating foods high in omega-3 fatty acids, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables can help improve mood, reduce stress and anxiety, and provide sustained energy throughout the day."-Kristina Zalnieraite, Head of Nutrition and Wellness, Kilo Health

### **Allow Venting**

"One effective way is when employers and HR prioritize introspection, communication, and create a safe space for expression. This involves actively checking in and observing their behavior during informal interactions to foster personal connection and getting insight into their state of mind.

Once a connection is established, employers need to create a judgment-free space for employees to express thoughts and feelings about their difficulties. After the expression, comprehensive communication comes into play. Instead of giving tips to reduce stress, employers can schedule regular check-ins, either one-on-one or in a group for open dialogue.

Art can also serve as a medium to encourage employees struggling to express emotions verbally. Hosting workshops in drawing, painting, origami, or music can defocus them from their stressors. Regardless of an immediate solution, the act of venting out feelings gives employees the space to contemplate and explore ways to restore optimal working."-Darsha Patel, Associate Consultant, Naman HR

### **Provide Comprehensive Wellness Support**

"One effective way for employers and HR to support employees in managing stress and prioritizing mental health and wellness is by implementing comprehensive wellness programs. These programs can include various initiatives and resources aimed at promoting a healthy work-life balance and fostering a positive work environment.

For instance, employers can provide flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options or flexible scheduling, to accommodate employees' personal needs and reduce stress associated with commuting or conflicting responsibilities. Regularly organizing wellness activities, such as yoga classes, mindfulness sessions, or team-building exercises, can also help alleviate stress and promote overall well-being. By investing in comprehensive wellness programs, fostering a supportive culture, and providing resources for mental health support, employers and HR can play a pivotal role in helping employees manage stress and prioritize their mental health and wellness."