

# 6 Ways to Support Mental Health Wellness at Work

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How can People Companies ensure they're supporting employees' mental wellbeing? Here are six tips on supporting mental health within your organization.

**Mental health is a workplace concern.** In fact, four in ten adult Americans reported feeling symptoms of anxiety or depression during the pandemic, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Stress and mental health issues are having a significant impact on people and, in turn, on the economy.

The impact is huge – both on the individual, but also for organizations, who may already be struggling with low productivity in the workplace (our research found employees admitted to being productive for less than 30 hours a week).

So, what can People Companies do to ensure they're supporting employees' mental wellbeing effectively? Here are six tips on how to support mental health within your organization.



## **1. Break down the stigma of mental health**

The first step in tackling mental health issues is to break down the culture of silence surrounding it, and creating an environment where people feel comfortable to talk.

UK banking giant Barclays has launched 'This is me' to do just that, by supporting people to tell their own stories. The campaign includes over 200 employee stories that have been captured on film and in writing, manager training, and policy reviews.

Barclays has also made a commitment to normalize mental health issues by signing onto UK mental health initiative Time to Change, a pledge to support employees facing these challenges.

### **How to break down the stigma**

- Encourage the leadership and senior staff to talk to employees about their own mental health and stress related experiences
- Signpost free help and resources from mental health charities by way of posters, online resources, magazines and pamphlets in common areas and canteens
- Observe mental health awareness week by arranging events for people to talk about mental health, invite external speakers in
- Support mental health charities and campaigns

## 2. Educate employees

In any given year, anxiety and depression affects more than 40 million adults in the United States, according to the Anxiety & Depression Association of America.

Educate employees, and specifically managers, to spot the early warning signs of mental health problems in their colleagues and how to provide support.

Accounting firm EY has set up the 'r u ok?' program to enhance EY's culture of caring by equipping workers to approach colleagues who may be struggling, ask if they are OK and refer them to internal and external resources to help them.

This could prevent any individual from reaching crisis point that requires extended sickness absence.

### How to educate employees

- Train employees to spot the warning signs of mental health illness; these could be irritability, signs of fatigue, quality of work subsiding, punctuality sliding, for example
- Teach them how to approach colleagues without feeling awkward or causing embarrassment. Remember, workers are not expected to diagnose, just to notice, be empathetic and supportive. Sometimes an individual might not feel they are the right person to do this. They can then talk to someone closer to the individual or a member of the HR or People team for advice first
- Refer employees to internal or external resources such as counseling



### **3. Promote mental wellbeing**

Addressing well-being at work increases productivity by as much as 12%.

Consumer goods company, Unilever has a wellbeing steering committee to address the physical, mental, emotional and purposeful well-being of employees.

Unilever believes that for its employees to be happy at work, they need to feel a sense of purpose. Therefore, 10,000 employees have so far been given a place on a Purpose workshop, to address what they want from their career and take time for 'deep reflection'.

Smoothies company Innocent Drinks offers a yoga club, and fitness specialist Sweaty Betty gives employees the option to start later in the day so that they can concentrate on personal goals in the morning.

#### **How to promote mental wellbeing**

- Provide exercise (if you aren't already) such as yoga, running, providing bikes to cycle to work
- Consider starting work later to dedicate time to mindfulness in the morning
- Encourage workers to take their lunch break, to walk, to sit in a quiet place, or to read – any activity of their choice to relax

### **4. Provide mental health counseling**

Globally, more than 300 million people of all ages suffer from depression. Among those newly diagnosed, only about a third get treatment. And it's even lower among people of color, older Americans, and other underrepresented groups.

Financial experts, American Express have an award-winning mental health program.

The Healthy Minds program provides part-time counselors at each employee clinic and has hired a clinical psychologist to run the employee assistance program to continuously improve its services.

#### **Tips for providing counseling services**

- Make sure you provide free online or 24/7 telephone counseling
- Pay or part pay for counseling services, so your employees know the organization sees it as important
- Provide information to employees about counseling services provided by the government and by charities and how to refer themselves also

### **5. Create quiet places at work**

A study found two minutes of silence to be more relaxing than listening to 'relaxing' music, based on changes in blood pressure and blood circulation in the brain.

Health insurer Medibank offered its staff a choice of more than 26 types of work settings, ranging from indoor quiet spaces and collaborative hubs to WIFI-enabled balconies and places to stand and work.

Four months after moving into the new HQ, it surveyed employees – and found that 70% said they were healthier and 66% reported they were more productive, while its call center wing had seen a 5% fall in absenteeism.

Provide quiet, safe, de-cluttered zones that workers can go to, to break away and decompress. This will have a positive effect on everyone's mental well-being and avoid stress escalating.

### **How to create quiet places at work**

- Create a quiet, relaxing, 'no phone' zone with plants – nature has a proven positive effect on general wellbeing
- Designate a part of a garden, if you have one
- Provide guided meditations and visualizations employees can use in the quiet place to reset, refocus and relax

### **6. Provide flexible working**

81% of employees we polled placed importance on flexible working.

At streaming service Netflix, employees don't observe traditional 9-to-5 workdays or prescribed holiday and vacation schedules. They have the flexibility to choose what's important to them, especially when their 'mind and body need a break'.

Giving employees the flexibility to choose their schedules and offering generous parental leave can alleviate many of the causes of stress.



## **How to promote flexible working**

- Have a policy on flexible working. This should focus on productivity rather than hours worked
- Provide the technology to work remotely
- Provide discrepancies for workers with mental health issues, working with them to find the best balance of remote vs. office working. If they are returning from work after a bout of mental health illness, you could phase their return so they can start working from home and eventually come in. Also, you could alter their working hours in order to help with specific times that trigger anxiety such as the morning or afternoon rush hours, for example

## **The importance of getting mental health wellbeing and support right**

Mental health issues could have a devastating effect on your people and in turn your business. Create a workplace environment where people can be themselves and can access the support they need.

As well as a legal duty to adjust for workers with long-term mental health illness, businesses have a moral duty to ensure that as many people as possible stay in work despite their mental health issues.

If you get it right, you could even prevent stress from escalating into much more serious mental health issues, helping your workers to be happier and healthier – something every true People Company wants.