

How Your HR Team Can Champion Employee Self-Care

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Everyone seems to be talking about “self-care” lately, with advertisers and social media influencers throwing the term around to sell you the latest brightening skin cream or pore-reducing mask. But real self-care is much more than a TikTok trend.

Even the World Health Organization (WHO) promotes self-care as a way for people across the world to live a healthier lifestyle. They define self-care as “the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider.”

For HR leaders, encouraging and enabling self-care amongst employees contributes to a healthier, more productive workforce. According to a study by SHRM, HR professionals play a valuable role in health and work behavior management. They say the best wellness programs are closely integrated with related HR functions, like health care benefits administration, employee assistance programs, and workers’ compensation.

Why self-care matters for employee wellbeing and job performance

If employees weren't stressed out before (which studies show they already were), the events of 2020 and 2021 pushed many near their breaking point. Mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and burnout are on the rise, and it's not only affecting people's wellbeing, but also their ability to do their jobs.

The Mind Share Partners' 2021 Mental Health at Work Report found that 76% of people have experienced at least one symptom associated with a mental health condition in the past year and 77% experienced a decline in productivity due to mental health. And according to SHRM, employee stress alone results in \$809,475 in lost productivity for an average mid-sized company every year.

Study after study proves that employees are more likely to deliver optimal performance at work when they're more mentally and emotionally healthy. Encouraging self-care and offering more useful options for employees to take care of themselves can help you build more engaged, high-performing teams.

HR: Supporting humans with resources

Employees must be responsible for their own self-care (hence the word "self"), but companies also have a responsibility to their people to enable self-care to take place. If an employee can't get time off for rest or can't afford to pay for mental health services, taking care of their own wellbeing can be difficult.

HR leaders can champion initiatives and benefits that offer structural support for employees and make self-care more accessible. At our recent HR Superstars Summit, we brought together a panel of people leaders to discuss mental health in the workplace and how to support employees.

Jennie Yang, VP of People at 15Five, shared that taking a "whole person approach" allows HR leaders and their companies to support their people physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially.

"We want 15Five to be a healing organization. It starts with healing our own selves and the relationships we have with others. We started offering unlimited therapy with Better Help for all employees and a dependent. We are also providing access to Headspace, Wellness Coach, and online fitness subscriptions," Jennie shared.

In their Promoting Employee Well-Being guide, SHRM recommends five vehicles for promoting employee wellness:

1. Organizational cultures that can be transformed into dynamic, evolving health-promoting venues.
2. Policies that enhance employee health and productivity.

3. Employee-valued incentives to motivate employees to engage in healthy practices.
4. Wellness programming that implements customized employee-centric health programs.
5. Integration of HR functions with employee wellness and work/life quality initiatives.

Why wellness and DEIB must work in unison

Also at our HR Superstars Summit, we brought together a panel of experts on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB). The panel discussed how HR leaders must think about DEIB more holistically, and integrate it into every company process, procedure, action, and initiative — including health and wellness. This is an important area where companies must put more focus, to ensure self-care is accessible to all.

The Kaiser Family Foundation's 2021 Employee Health Benefits Survey found that while 83% of large companies offer their employees health and wellness programs, these programs alone fail to address an important link between well-being and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Companies can help close the health and wellness gaps that exist for marginalized groups by building a more diverse, more inclusive workforce and providing that workforce with programs and policies that holistically address employee well-being.