HR Insights

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Creating a Mentally Healthy Workplace

Work environments can significantly impact the mental health of employees. In fact, research by the American Psychological Association found that 2 in 5 employees report that work negatively affects their mental health. Workers' poor mental health can, in turn, negatively impact employee communication, performance, morale and productivity. According to a recent report by Mental Health America, employees in mentally unhealthy workplaces were also more likely to leave their jobs.

This article highlights practices for employers to create work environments that foster positive mental health among employees.

How Does Work Impact Mental Health?

An employee's work environment can support or inhibit their mental health. Working in a negative environment can increase employees' stress, contributing to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and substance abuse. Numerous factors, including the following, may contribute to a mentally unhealthy workplace:

- Long hours

- Lack of support

- Understaffing

- Lack of separation between personal and work time

- Harassment, bullying or abuse

How Can Employers Foster Mentally Healthy Workplaces?

How employees think, feel and act can impact everything in the workplace, whether it's interpersonal relationships or worker safety. Employers can create workplaces that facilitate positive mental health among workers with the following practices:

- **Ensure employees are psychologically safe**. Following a four-year study, researchers at Google declared psychological safety is the number one predictor of team success. Psychological safety is engendered in a work environment where employees feel comfortable speaking up and voicing their opinions without fear of rejection, humiliation or other negative consequences. This increases innovation, creativity, and motivation among workers.

  Employers can create psychologically safe workplaces by embracing mistakes, encouraging workers to share constructive feedback, showing employees their contributions are valued, increasing trust, promoting diversity and individualism, and encouraging risk-taking. Employers can create mentally healthy and safe workplaces by hiring leaders who possess a growth mindset. Investing in the development of management skills can lead to a positive work environment.

- **Promote work-life balance**. Employees who feel they have a good balance between their jobs and personal lives are likelier to be healthy, happy and productive workers. Organizations can foster a healthy work-life balance among workers by providing them the time and flexibility they need for a flourishing personal life, requiring them to take minimum vacation time, and encouraging them to unplug from their jobs when not in the office or outside of working hours.

- **Reduce stigma.** Employers can build trust with employees by showing them they won't be fired or punished for mental health issues. They can do this by openly discussing mental health in the workplace, encouraging self-care and allowing flexible scheduling for employees to get mental health treatment. Additionally, employers can educate employees on improving their mental health with in-office training on self-care, stress management and mental health issues.

- **Support employee wellness.** Exercise, healthy eating and good sleep habits are crucial for mental health and resilience. Employers can boost employees' mental health by encouraging healthy behaviors through wellness programs and offering employee incentives, such as healthy lunches and free gym memberships. Employers should also consider offering employee assistance benefits, such as free counseling or therapy, to help employees struggling with their mental health or other problems.

Conclusion

Employers play a crucial role in facilitating positive mental health among employees by creating mentally healthy workplaces. They can boost employee mental health, productivity and retention by creating psychologically safe work environments and providing employees with the mental health resources and support they need.

Contact us today for more employment resources.