

## **Prioritizing Mental Health in the Workplace: The Key to Thriving Employees and a Stronger Business**

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a time to spotlight the importance of mental well-being in the workplace. For business and HR leaders, it isn't just a once-per-year conversation. Workplace mental health and wellness impact all aspects of your business: performance, culture, retention, and the bottom line. Additionally, the company's reputation and employer value proposition (EVP) are built over years, sometimes decades, yet can be easily damaged in minutes if employee well-being is neglected. In today's landscape, prioritizing employee mental health isn't just a "people issue." It's a business necessity.

The workforce is making a statement that mental health matters. Employees value workplaces that make them feel seen, safe, and supported, allowing them to speak up without fear of judgment. The shift presents a challenge for HR leaders and employers, but also a great opportunity. By prioritizing employee mental health and well-being, organizations can enhance their reputations, foster a strong internal culture, and secure a lasting competitive advantage in the labor market.

### **The Workforce's Expectations**

Conversations around employee/workplace mental health have become far more prevalent in recent years, and expectations have grown. The workforce places significant value on mental health support and a strong culture.

According to the [American Psychological Association's 2022 Work and Well-Being Survey](#):

- 81% of individuals said they look for workplaces that support mental health when seeking future job opportunities.
- 30% of workers strongly agreed that employer support for mental health will factor into their future job decisions.

These results show that employees view mental health support as a dealbreaker. It isn't a perk or benefit; it is critical to recruiting and retaining top talent.

### **The Business Case**

There's no doubt that mental health is a deeply personal and sensitive subject for many people. That said, it is also a business issue. When mental health struggles in the workplace go unaddressed and employees don't feel supported, the impacts can be significant. While the bottom line is the most critical measure of performance, it is essential to look deeper. Absenteeism, disengagement, and burnout aren't isolated issues. They are symptoms of larger problems that affect performance, productivity, retention, and ultimately, the bottom line.

On the other side, companies that invest in their employees and support their mental health are likely to see long-term, tangible returns. According to [Deloitte's article on ROI in workplace mental health programs](#), organizations that proactively address mental health see reduced turnover and improvements in job satisfaction.

It is essential to acknowledge, however, that supporting employee mental health is not straightforward. Programs are most successful and more likely to achieve a positive return on investment (ROI) when they support employees across the entire spectrum of mental health. This includes promoting overall well-being, providing early intervention and access to care, offering time off when needed, and identifying and eliminating workplace hazards that could cause psychological harm to employees.

### **Mental Health as a Core of the Employer Value Proposition**

The organizational stance on mental health is more than just an internal issue; it becomes part of your external brand. Candidates and employees pay attention to how companies treat their employees, and mental health policies are becoming a critical part of the employer value proposition (EVP). Companies that lead and innovate in this area will find it easier to attract and retain top talent, particularly the younger generation, which constitutes the largest segment of the labor force. More recent entrants into the workforce value work-life balance, company values, and culture over salary alone. When your value proposition reflects a genuine, well-rounded commitment to supporting employees, your brand becomes stronger, more authentic, and more attractive to the labor market.

### **The Challenge for HR and Managers**

As mentioned, mental health has a direct impact on employee retention. For HR leaders, the challenge becomes twofold, with the added responsibility of recruiting new talent. In today's competitive labor market, benefits that support employee well-being, such as mental health support, leadership coaching, and flexible working environments and scheduling, can serve as key differentiators from the competition.

Equally important are front-line managers, who are often the first point of contact for employees struggling with mental health issues. These managers must be equipped with the proper training and resources, enabling them to lead with empathy and offer the support their team members need, while also understanding the importance of confidentiality.

### **Actionable Steps: What Employers Can Do**

Creating and maintaining a supportive and healthy workplace isn't just about remaining compliant and checking boxes with surface-level programs.

Here is where employers and HR leaders can start today:

- **Normalize the conversation around employee mental health:** Leadership and front-line managers should speak openly about mental health in the workplace and encourage employees to do the same in appropriate settings while not pressuring anyone to share more than they feel comfortable. Creating an environment where these conversations are welcomed is a crucial step toward fostering a strong and supportive culture.
- **Promote and Protect PTO:** Encourage employees to take their paid time off and fully disconnect from work during that time. Leaders should avoid off-hours communication and respect the boundaries between their personal and professional lives. This is especially important in remote and hybrid work environments, where the distinction between work and home can become easily blurred. Supporting actual time off helps prevent burnout and reinforces a culture of well-being.
- **Expand mental health and wellness benefits:** Go beyond the traditional Employee Assistance Program (EAP) by offering access to creative and impactful wellness benefits, such as mindfulness training, stress management programs, mental health hours, and in-person or virtual counseling services. Broadening your range of benefits in this area can provide a strong and sustainable competitive advantage.
- **Listen to what your people are saying:** Provide opportunities for peer connection and open dialogue, recognizing that employees are your most valuable source of insight when it comes to improving mental health support. Listen without bias, and seek to understand challenges and impacts from the employee's perspective. Creating a culture where feedback is not only welcomed but also acted upon is key to building that trust.

## Looking Ahead

Mental Health Awareness Month is an excellent opportunity to renew a meaningful conversation. Mental health struggles don't begin and end in May, and neither should your efforts to create a supportive environment for all employees. By prioritizing mental health, you foster a workplace where both your employees and your business can thrive. Bottom line: when you take care of your employees, they take care of you. As always, The Workplace Advisors is here to support you and your organization with whatever comes your way.

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