



DEAR HRK

As an organization, what are some strategies we can implement in order to support our employees' mental health and promote well-being?

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May is Mental Health Awareness Month. The purpose of the month's spotlight is to raise awareness around the importance of mental health and its impact on the well-being of all individuals. We have been living in an ever-changing pandemic for over two years, which has in many ways highlighted the importance of mental health and the impact of our everyday life stressors, both at home and in the workplace. The good news is that the pandemic has forced many organizations to consider their employees' mental health and overall wellness and see the positive impact of proactively engaging in conversations around mental well-being in the workplace.

Employers are beginning to look at mental health proactively as a collective priority for their organization, rather than with a reactive focus when an employee may bring it up in a conversation. By shining the light on awareness of mental health and putting small changes in place in the organization, increased job performance and productivity, higher retention, deeper engagement, improved communication, and a more balanced workforce can all result.

Mental health and wellness must be an organizational priority, where connection and communication are encouraged and welcomed.

Here are helpful proactive approaches an employer may want to consider when supporting mental health awareness and promoting well-being in the workplace.

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- **Communication/Keeping an Eye Out** - Recognize the existence of stress and start a dialogue. In addition, regular check-ins can be a great opportunity to connect with your teams. Those meetings are often reserved to go through tasks and project updates, but try to make time for the question, "How are you?" and make it genuine.
- **Promote Well-Being** – Build as much flexibility as possible into work schedules, encourage employees to use their paid time off, and remind employees regularly to take their lunch away from their desk, go for a walk or take a break.
- **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** – If you haven't already, consider establishing an EAP; they offer several resources to assist, counsel, and support employees and their family members – including mental health, child- or elder-care, substance abuse, relationship challenges, financial and legal resources and much more.
- **Meditation Programs** – There are many programs and memberships that offer mindfulness programs, such as Headspace and Calm, that can be used both in the workplace and at home. Reach out to your health insurance provider to find out what mental health benefits might already be included in your health insurance plan.
- **Emergency Contact Information** – Ensure you have up-to-date personal information for all employees, including emergency contact information. It's a good idea to remind employees, at least annually to check their information – many employers do this during annual open enrollment.
- **Regulatory Compliance** – It is important to remember and consider that mental illness is an illness and can be a disability as well. This means employees may be covered by one or more of the following: the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and numerous state leave laws.

Supporting employees' mental health is as important as ensuring their physical well-being. Employee well-being is important, and when it becomes proactive, it may lead to a healthier workplace where everyone wins. By raising mental health awareness, organizations can transform their culture, which can lead to their business' continued success. A happy and healthy workforce is essential for the growth of the organization.

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