



Workplace mental health – The benefits of being mindful

The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development survey* revealed that 55% of 1,000 respondent organisations had experienced an increase in work place related mental health conditions with 37% reporting increases in stress related absence. Increased workload was the most significant cause of stress by far (38%).

With the Government forecasting that one in four of us will experience mental health problems in our lifetime and the Royal college of Psychiatrists (RCP) reporting that, in the past decade, claimants of incapacity benefits, due to mental health, has increased from 25% to 40%, employers need to be mindful of mental health and its impact on their work force.

Causes of workplace mental health

The challenges of managing and delivering heavier workloads can leave some people feeling overwhelmed

and demoralised. Failing to deal with the early signs could result in severe stress. The key is to open a dialogue that helps employees better manage a heavy workload before it becomes a health issue. Support mechanisms include time management training and project planning skills. Everyone should have a clear idea of what needs doing, by when and what part each person plays. Clarity removes one of the causes of stress. This can be achieved by holding regular 'brief' briefings or simply write the focus on old fashioned white boards, so it's plain to see.

Authentic recognition and appreciation will enhance the way most people feel about work and can go a long way to boosting morale.

Financial concerns – is the second highest cause of stress in the workplace. Poor mental health can make managing money harder and worrying about money can make mental health worse. Your employee's own situation may be secure but that of their partner or others in their household, might not be. Practical support can help employees manage their financial concerns:

- Provide information about debt management and organisation who can provide advice e.g. their local CAB or Credit Union. Some such organisations provide in-company 'surgeries' or training sessions - with information and advice on everything from better budgeting and managing debts, to the importance of paying into a pension.
- Help staff spread the impact of costly items, such as rail cards, by the company buying upfront, when it's often cheaper, and collecting repayments monthly.

Be mindful of the impact on your business

UNISON research revealed** that 60% of workers had experienced or witnessed bullying in the workplace. Strategies to open dialogue with staff and end workplace bullying have a financial as well as moral importance. ACAS have estimated that workplace bullying-related absence, staff turnover and productivity losses, costs the UK economy around £18bn a year! The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health estimates that the total cost of mental health at work (including the consequence of bullying) is £26bn.

Helping to create a Mental Health Culture

The Company policy on mental wellbeing and bullying should be known to all staff. Behaviour needs to reflect a concerned and anti-bullying culture within your organisation. You can start with a zero tolerance of 'bullying banter' at senior management level with managers helping to identify and deal with any issues.

Talk to the experts - Before you can offer support to an employee struggling with mental health issues, you need to be able to identify the tell tail signs and typical triggers of stress. Often the best people can be found in your local community e.g. charities, some of which have a deep understanding of mental health. Many such organisations offer valuable training especially tailored for staff and managers.

Evidence shows that the earlier a mental health issue - like stress, anxiety or depression - is detected the easier it is to manage and treat. Make it easy for your employees to talk about mental health at work & ensure that there are trained colleagues on site who know how to point people in the direction of help needed.

When we enjoy good mental health, we have a sense of purpose and direction, the energy to do the things we want to do, and the ability to deal with the challenges that happen in our lives.

* The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD.co.uk) monitoring trends in absence management survey of 1021 respondents Nov 2017.
** UNISON research 2011