

Why Talking About Mental Health at Work Should Be Okay

AND WHY WE NEED TO TALK MORE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

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Providing a psychologically safe place at work is a responsibility all employers share. Mental health is no different from physical health, as both affect a person's overall wellbeing. Why do we talk about one and not the other at work? For example, topics such as stress, anxiety, or depression are deeply personal and can seem taboo in comparison to slippery floors and fire drills—but they shouldn't be. Removing this very stigma is why we need to talk more about mental health at work.

WHERE TO EVEN BEGIN?

First, we need to understand that the components of mental health span a range as wide as the human mind. There are symptoms we can and cannot see as outsiders, and other afflictions may not be known even by those who are experiencing them.

Leaders at a company are not expected to be therapists, but there are [approaches](#) they can take to break down barriers in the workplace when it comes to mental health. A fundamental shift by those in leadership who can embrace prevention, care, and treating mental health in all its forms will impact their teams positively.

Taking the opportunity to reinforce the subject of mental health is okay to discuss at work, in everything from public all-hands meetings to individual one-on-ones, serves as a reminder that treating mental health is a priority for the employer and employee. Many organizations have gone one step further and tied mental health to their company's [vision and mission](#), as well as ways to measure their efforts. There is no right or wrong place to start—it's largely a matter of taking that first step.

PREVENTION FIRST!

It should come as no surprise that healthy humans do their best work. Programs and policies to ensure each individual can bring their best selves to work do not have to be overly complicated or costly. Company-wide mental health days off can be scheduled regularly and worked into deadlines. Software platforms are readily available, as are [anonymous surveys](#) to gauge how people feel.

Instituting some or all of these tools provides a jumping-off point to talk about mental health at work, as well as an opportunity to offer care for anyone who may need it.

SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER

When an organization's culture encourages talking about mental health at work, we remove barriers for those who need our support. Plain and simple: people are far more likely to ask for help when their struggle is met with empathy. Rather than quietly suffering, fearful of judgment from colleagues or leadership, we can instead help more people get the support they need with open conversations around mental health. Meeting others with open arms and open hearts can make the world a better place, one person at a time.

Support and encouragement are inherent in humanity, cost nothing to offer, and can mean the world to those on the receiving end. For example, feelings of loneliness can be combatted with something as simple as starting a conversation—on any topic—with a coworker. Regular "check-ins" like these provide the opportunity to ask "How are you doing?" and "How can I help?".

IMPACT ON PRODUCTIVITY

behind why so many people were “feeling blah” during the pandemic was a result of **languishing**, which in the words of the author is the “neglected middle child between depression and flourishing.” Languishing has zapped productivity in personal and professional lives, but it doesn’t need to be that way.

Improving productivity across the board can be achieved with something as simple as promoting **breaks during the workday**. The benefits of just a few breaks per day often lead to improved creativity, stress reduction, and returning to work with improved focus. Conversely, a direct byproduct of languishing is a lack of productivity in all aspects of life, potentially affecting work quality, missed deadlines, depression, and worse.



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), **depression** alone is estimated to cause 200 million lost workdays each year at a cost between \$17 billion to \$44 billion to employers. The impact on the lives of individuals and their families when battling depression is not only counted not in the dollars and cents of missed work days but also by damaged relationships.

RETENTION

Amid the Great Resignation, keeping employees is a challenge across all industries. The numbers do not lie. When only **34%** of the workforce across the country feels engaged, it is no wonder 48 million people quit their jobs in 2021.

Some more troubling statistics:

- **20%** of the population has quit their jobs due to mental health struggles.
- **50%** of Millennials and **75%** of Gen Z have left due to mental health reasons.
- **91%** of Gen Z say it is essential that their employer has a mental health policy in place.

The **ROI** in prioritizing mental health is plain to see, plus it is the right thing to do.

VALUE OF TIME

The loss of productivity and talent equals time and resources an organization can’t get back.

Calling in sick for a stomach bug or a migraine is widely accepted. So why is mental health looked at differently? Removing the stigma that mental health does not qualify for sick leave will empower employees to take time when they need it, no questions asked.

Whether a company has a formal sick leave policy, unlimited PTO, or another program for time off, talking about mental health in the workplace is an opportunity to reinforce mental health as a priority. Larger companies can empower their **HR teams** to build consensus and support across the organization.

CULTURE BENEFITS

Feelings of stress and anxiety can be common at work, and therefore easier to talk about than struggles with depression or bipolar. A company that cares about its people will find ways to promote mental health resources and provide support.

The author **Malcolm Gladwell** in his book *Outliers* hypothesized the three factors that lead to satisfaction at work: autonomy, the complexity of work, and a connection between effort and reward. When people struggle with mental health, it can be a frequent challenge to find the motivation to find the necessary effort to put in. When employees feel safe and are supported in the workplace, they are instead more open to collaboration and able to find motivation.



from becoming bigger challenges. Talking about mental health at work is the first step. Creating a plan which places a priority on employees' humanity and wellbeing, then putting it into action, comes next.

If you're ready to put a mental health program into action, check out this article: [Your Guide to the EAP Implementation and Search Process](#).

LEARN ABOUT THE POWER OF SELF-CARE

Download the Mental Health Tool Kit to learn about mental health in the workplace - what it is, why it matters, and how you can start supporting employee mental health!

[Download The Mental Health Toolkit](#)



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Amelia has exponentially grown her company from a solo living-room service business to an international technology brand.

Awards

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