

LEAD

# 3 Things You Can Do to Address Mental Health in Your Workplace

*Mentally healthy employees are engaged and productive. By taking the following steps, leaders can improve both employee well-being and business outcomes.*

in f 🐦



By **Dave Kerpen** *Founder and CEO, Likeable Local* 🐦 [@davekerpen](#)



GETTY IMAGES

**Mental health** is just beginning to **receive the attention** it deserves, but smart business leaders already know this focus should extend into the **workplace**. With some basic initiatives, leaders can improve **employees'** mental health while making a profound impact on the **business's bottom line**.

It should come as no surprise that mentally healthy employees are more productive, but you may not realize the full impact. Research suggests workplaces that address employee well-being improve productivity by **up to 12 percent**.

When you consider that an estimated [one in five Americans](#) is diagnosed with a mental illness at some point, it becomes clear how focusing on employee well-being can have such a positive effect. To be part of the mental health solution in your workplace, take these three steps:

### **1. Lead by example.**

As a business leader, the whole team suffers if your mental health is on the decline. Not only do mental health issues impact your ability to make smart business decisions, but they'll also make it much more difficult for you to spot employee problems. [According to HR advisor Karen Gately](#), "You need to create an environment that's safe both physically and mentally, not just for your staff but also for yourself."

Research shows that your own stress management strategies will [trickle down to your team members](#). If you create good stress-relieving habits -- like holding walking meetings or getting involved in an after-work hobby -- your employees will likely do the same.

Also, be sure to share with your team when you're feeling burned out and what you're doing to address the problem. Maybe you're taking a day off to catch up on sleep and relax or delegating a task currently on your plate. [Being open about your struggle](#) and solutions will encourage your teammates to come to you when they, too, are suffering from burnout or extreme stress.

### **2. Reach out to struggling team members.**

Business leaders who frequently interact with employees are in a great position to spot when something is wrong. There are lots of [changes in behavior](#) that can signal an employee is depressed. These behaviors aren't always obvious, such as excessive sleeping or unexplained aches and pains. An inability to keep up with a normal workload can also be a sign of depression. Don't try to diagnose an employee -- instead, show your support if you suspect an employee is struggling. Make it clear you're concerned about him or her as a person, not just as a worker.

Point out specific behaviors that seem atypical. For example, say an employee who was punctuality personified is now chronically late. Don't make assumptions about what that behavior may mean. Instead, acknowledge that you've noticed it, and ask whether anything has been going on inside or outside the office to contribute to that recent struggle.

The individual may or may not want to talk with you about what's been going on. Either way, offer to help. Let the person know about your employee assistance program (EAP) or other workplace resources, and find a way to help him or her with workplace challenges. With the late arrival, for example, you could offer to adjust the employee's schedule to allow him or her to sleep an extra hour in the morning and make up the time in the afternoon.

### **3. Bring mental health to the forefront.**

It's easy to shy away from discussions about mental health, but you need to raise awareness of available resources all year -- not just during Mental Health Awareness Month. Business leaders should share myths about depression, suicide and drug and alcohol abuse, as well as warning signs.

Establish an EAP to ensure employees have access to the mental health resources they need. In addition to letting your employees know such a program is available, make sure they know [it's confidential](#), so they're more likely to take advantage of it. Above all, don't bury it in a thick employee handbook, never to bring it up again.

Dr. Ann Clark, founder and CEO of ACI Specialty Benefits, [urges leaders](#) to audit their benefits to ensure they're offering 24/7 assistance. "In a time when people crave connection, check to see if every single call, text, email, mobile app intake, and live chat is answered by a real person, ready to listen," she says. "If someone is brave enough to ask for help, there is nothing more discouraging than being confronted with automated prompts, long hold times, and password stress."

You and your employees spend at least eight hours at work each day, and the emotions experienced there are often brought home as well. Creating a workspace that prioritizes mental health not only improves quality of life, but it also contributes to a more successful business. Take the above steps, and your employees -- and your bottom line -- will thank you.

PUBLISHED ON: MAR 21, 2019

*The opinions expressed here by Inc.com columnists are their own, not those of Inc.com.*