

The Importance of Mental Health in the Workplace and How to Help Improve It

9 min read



According to 2020 statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 20% of American adults have experienced a mental health issue, and 5% live with a serious mental illness (such as bipolar disorder, major depression, or schizophrenia) [1].

Key Takeaways

- **What the Mental Health of the Nation Has to Do With Business:** An estimated 12 billion working days are lost each year due to anxiety and depression, and this results in an estimated productivity loss of \$1 trillion U.S. dollars...
- **8 Strategies for Supporting Better Mental Health in the Workplace:** Developing emotional intelligence in these ways can improve communication and conflict resolution, reducing overall stress in the workplace.
- **Use Your Back Office to Measure the Impact of Good Mental Health:** As you begin to focus on promoting better mental health in your workplace, you should notice a variety...

Anyone who has been alive over the last few years understands the toll that global issues can have on the mental well-being of the individual. We've all been subjected to nearly constant worries about a global pandemic, supply shortages, staggering inflation, an economy teetering on the edge of recession, political unrest, uncertainty, and countless additional stressors all piled on top of the regular anxiety of simply living life daily (i.e. worries about work, family, home, health, etc.).

So, it really comes as no surprise that Mind Share Partners' 2021 Mental Health at Work Report noted a that sizeable increase in mental health concerns has occurred over the previous two years. In 2019, 59% of surveyed individuals had reported experiencing at least one symptom of a mental health concern over the previous year. In 2021, 76% reported experiencing at least one symptom of a mental health concern [2].

What Does the Mental Health of the Nation Have to Do With Business?

Apart from simply caring about the health and well-being of yourself and your employees, it turns out that the two are highly interdependent; mental health can have a major impact on business, and workplaces can have a major impact on mental health.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) [3]:

- An estimated 12 billion working days are lost each year due to anxiety and depression, and this results in an estimated productivity loss of \$1 trillion U.S. dollars.

- Poor working environments (toxic workplace culture, low job security, no job control, and excessive workloads) contribute to poor mental health.
- A good job can help promote good mental health with a livelihood, increased confidence, a sense of purpose, a sense of belonging, the development of good relationships, and the necessity of living within a structured routine.
- Employers have the power to prevent mental health risks at the workplace while supporting better mental health at work.

8 Strategies for Supporting Better Mental Health in the Workplace

1. Make Sure Your Benefits Plans Actually Help Address Healthcare Costs

Although the Affordable Care Act requires that insurers provide coverage for behavioral and mental healthcare, the biggest and most prevalent barrier to mental healthcare is still the cost [4]. With or without insurance, the average cost of a single 60-minute therapy or counseling session ranges from \$100 to \$200 [5]. With just weekly appointments, that could cost an individual \$10,400 annually.

However, for effective treatment, many people require more frequent sessions. This means that the cost of seeing a mental healthcare provider can quickly balloon well beyond the bounds of most people's disposable income.

Plus, these numbers are only considering the cost of therapy sessions and do not take into account the cost of medications or further treatments that might be needed to effectively address an individual's mental health concerns.

Read More: [Quiet Quitting- What Business Owners Can Do](#)

2. Help to Remove Healthcare Access Barriers

The second most common barrier to mental healthcare is access to providers. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration, nearly half of Americans live in locations that are federally designated as Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas [6]. As a result, this portion of the population struggles to access mental healthcare simply because available services are lacking. These individuals may struggle to find affordable care or access to consistent care as a result of supply and demand issues.

If your workplace is located in one of these areas, you can help your team get access to affordable and consistent care through virtual therapy providers. Some websites that provide therapy online include BetterHelp.com and Accolade.

Whether or not these virtual services are covered by your insurance policy, however, will vary, but many online providers offer care at special rates that make it more accessible and affordable to individuals with different levels of coverage and different levels of income.

3. Build Mindfulness Into the Workday

The most common or well-known method of practicing mindfulness is through meditation, and, although meditation, has strong roots in religious practices, it can still be practiced secularly in a way that is appropriate for everyone in your workplace. Mindfulness meditation is simply the practice of learning to clear your mind and control inner judgments while applying awareness and focus to everything you do.

Mindfulness in (and out of) the workplace offers several benefits such as reducing stress and anxiety to improve mental well-being. Practicing mindfulness also provides neurological benefits that are linked to improvements in emotional intelligence including the ability to regulate one's own emotions and the ability to empathize with others. Developing emotional intelligence in these ways can improve [communication](#) and conflict resolution, reducing overall stress in the workplace [7].

With this in mind, it might be a good idea to build a mindfulness practice into your workday. For example, the whole office can begin the day with five minutes of group meditation. This will help both you and your employees get in the habit of practicing mindfulness while improving mental health in your workplace.

Read more: [Lead The Pack With Emotional Intelligence](#)

4. Build a Positive Workplace Culture

Workplace culture is responsible for the entire atmosphere and climate of your business's workplace. A toxic culture breeds negativity and anxiety and also lacks feelings of safety and security. This kind of culture can be incredibly difficult to work in. It not only hampers productivity but harms mental health and happiness, leading to burnout and depression.

On the other hand, a positive workplace culture can actually help to promote better mental health by creating the kind of environment where good mental health can thrive and where individuals with mental health concerns can be reassured and supported. A positive workplace culture that promotes mental well-being should include the following components:

- Psychological Safety - Open and transparent communication makes employees feel safe to speak their minds and to be themselves.
- Teamwork vs. Competition - Rewarding team success rather than individual success prevents individuals from comparing themselves to others while strengthening bonds between coworkers, creating a sense of belonging, and promoting professional and interpersonal support between coworkers.

- Opportunities for Development and Fulfillment - Providing employees with opportunities to improve themselves through training, education, and career development creates a stronger sense of self-fulfillment. Additionally, providing opportunities for employees to give back by promoting a good cause in the workplace creates a stronger sense of purpose.
- Rewards, Recognition, and Building Each Other Up - A culture that recognizes and rewards hard work in addition to encouraging employees to notice and recognize the positive actions of their coworkers makes people feel appreciated and important in their roles.
- Practice Gratitude -Be grateful for your employees' hard work and the time that they choose to give your business. No matter how much you show your appreciation with their salaries and benefits packages, a word of thanks goes a long way to help someone feel important and appreciated.

5. Get Outdoors and Bring the Outdoors Inside

Being outside and spending time in green spaces has been strongly correlated with a decreased risk of depression in addition to accelerating the time needed to recover from psychological stress [8]. If you can, help your employees spend more time outside around the trees and flowers. For example, sometimes, you might be able to hold meetings or host a picnic lunch at the park across the street.

Read More: [Why Do Employees Quit?](#)

If it's difficult to actually move your office outdoors for any amount of time, then bring the outdoors inside by growing lots of living plants in your office. Live plants provide more oxygen, they remove pollution and a variety of toxins from the air [9], and they've been shown to help reduce stress and anxiety simply by being near people [10].

6. Remove the Stigma: Provide Mental Health Training and Awareness for Management and Employees

Society has come a long way over the last few decades to normalize mental health conditions and recognize them as real concerns that require professional attention. Despite this, it's important that you stress the fact within your business. Mental health conditions are legitimate and very real health conditions [11] and that is not something that should be questioned or looked down upon any more than one would question someone with a different type of health concern.

Beyond removing the stigma surrounding mental health in your office, it's important to provide training to your managers and employees about mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, and burnout. Teach the people in your organization to recognize the signs in themselves and in others while providing tools and training to help them address these concerns and work with your employees to access the resources and support they need.

7. Make Reasonable Accommodations for Individuals With Mental Health

Concerns

Workplaces cannot discriminate against individuals with psychiatric disabilities or a history of psychiatric disabilities, and they are required to provide accommodations for these individuals under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA).

"The ADA defines disability as *a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities*. When job applicants or employees have a mental health condition that meets this criteria, they have workplace rights under the ADA. The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) recently broadened the definition of disability to provide legal protections against employment discrimination for more individuals with disabilities, including people with psychiatric disabilities." [12]

Depending on each individual employee's situation and needs, reasonable accommodations might include adapting the work environment to accommodate the needs, preferences, and capacities of workers with mental health concerns. Workplace accommodations could include actions such as offering:

- Additional time off for health appointments
- Routine check-ins with supervisors
- A hybrid office environment that allows people to work from home when necessary
- Flexible working hours
- Extended deadlines
- Tasks and assignments that are modified to reduce anxiety

8. Keep a Close Eye on Employee Satisfaction in the Workplace

Workplace satisfaction can have a major impact on employee happiness and mental well-being. You can implement programs designed to measure workplace satisfaction. This might include tracking productivity in addition to employee attrition rates.

This type of initiative should also include a more proactive approach, as well, such as routinely surveying employees on their workplace satisfaction. For example, you can ask them to rate their happiness, satisfaction, and engagement on a scale of one to ten in addition to asking them what they enjoy about their jobs, what aspects of their jobs could be improved, and how their jobs could be improved.

Use Your Back Office to Measure the Impact of Good Mental Health

As you begin to focus on promoting better mental health in your workplace, you should notice a variety of positive benefits related to both the improvement in your employees' health and the

financial health of your business. To measure the impact of good mental health and your efforts to support employees on their mental health journeys, track metrics such as PTO use, employee turnover rates, productivity, ROI of labor costs, and, of course, the data collected in your workplace satisfaction surveys.

1. <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/mental-health-myths-facts>
2. <https://www.mindsharepartners.org/mentalhealthatworkreport-2021>
3. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-at-work>
4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8214217/>
5. <https://www.forbes.com/health/mind/how-much-does-therapy-cost/>
6. <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/careers/careers-blog/mindfulness-at-work-benefits>
8. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/features/wellness-benefits-great-outdoors>
9. <https://ntrs.nasa.gov/api/citations/19930073077/downloads/19930073077.pdf>
10. <https://online.maryville.edu/blog/benefits-of-stress-relief-plants/>
11. <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/March-2018/Mental-Health-Conditions-are-Legitimate-Health-Conditions>
12. <https://adata.org/factsheet/health>