Why Your Employees' Mental Health Should Be Top Priority

May 27, 2020

On a global scale, more than [264 million people](#) struggle with depression. In the U.S., nearly [50 million adults](#) had experienced some form of mental illness in 2018, and in Canada, [1 in 5 adults](#) suffer from mental stress.

I've found that many individuals of all ages across organizations are faced with challenges linked to finding balance and peace in a fast-paced, high-pressure world where they are constantly connected to technology. Exhausted, anxious and often sleep-deprived, many people show up at work despite mental or physical ailments, knowing they could struggle to perform at their peak. This is known as "[presenteeism](#)." According to one [study](#), presenteeism costs $5,524 per employee in the U.S. and $4,270 per employee in Canada every year. The productivity losses and risks for organizations are immense.

What measures are being taken to lower employee stress?

Some governments have started implementing new laws to help mitigate stress and burnout within organizations. In France, for example, a law was passed so that employees have the [right to disconnect](#) and not answer emails after office hours. In Japan, a work reform law was passed to end "extreme work weeks," according to the [BBC](#). The law helps establish caps on excessive working hours and offer more flexibility to workers, among other amendments.

These legislative initiatives are positive, though I do wonder why some companies aren't more proactive in helping their employees prioritize their mental health. Of course, some companies have created cultures and environments where their teams flourish. For instance, Volkswagen and BMW set [restrictions](#) on contacting employees outside of their office hours.

But from my perspective, companies should look even further — beyond employee assistance programs — and consider how they can help their teams 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For inspiration, we can look to companies that believe more in the power of prevention of mental health problems, rather than fixing problems as they arise.

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Employees' mental wellness should be a top priority for organizations.

Putting the mental wellness of your employees first is essential. But what is "mental wellness," after all? Mental wellness means that you feel balanced, connected to others and ready to meet life's challenges.

Psychologist Carol Ryff's model for psychological well-being encompasses six key factors that are worth noting: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy and positive relations to others. These factors highlight the key elements that are essential to our well-being.

Given how much of our lives many of us spend at work, I believe leaders who prioritize employee well-being will make the company better for everyone involved.

Leaders should also accept that employees bring their lives' realities into the workplace on a daily basis. We are all human. If a person is struggling with a personal relationship or a health challenge, this weight will likely be brought into the organization. To tackle this, I've found that employees are often given technical training in their area of expertise. Although technical training is important, it likely does not help the individual with the weight they are carrying on their shoulders from their personal life.

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