

# How to promote wellbeing at work...

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...and simultaneously improve the productivity of your workforce



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With one in four of us experiencing a mental health issue at some point, there's little wonder it's become such a prominent part of discussion. Because of the widespread nature of mental health illnesses, it is important that you take action to support staff who are suffering from ailments like depression, anxiety, and at the more acute end of the scale — bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

Mental health doesn't just mean being sad or upset. It incorporates your social, psychological and emotional wellbeing — affecting the way you handle stress, decision making, and interaction with other members of staff. Promoting wellbeing at work can help make being in the office more productive, more valuable and ultimately more enjoyable. For employers, it can make for a happier more productive workforce — so vital to business success.

Whilst it is true that on the whole workplace policy has improved over recent years — with a recent CIPD study revealing that between 2011 and 2016 staff stating that their employer is supportive of mental health issues increased from 37% to 46% — there are still steps that employers can make to promote wellbeing at work.

## Why you should care about mental health at work

The CIPD study into mental health at work also suggested that from 2011 to 2016 the number of employees who say that they have experienced mental health problems at work increased from 26% to 31%. Whilst this could be down to increased awareness, it is still worrying that we are seeing an increase.

This is particularly important for an employer. Staff suffering from mental health issues are less happy, and work less productively. 57% of staff with mental health issues find it harder to juggle multiple tasks, 80% find it difficult to concentrate, and 62% take longer to complete tasks. In addition, 50% are less patient with customers and clients.

Having a workplace that doesn't consider staff wellbeing could potentially be losing you business, slowing down projects, and producing less focused, less innovative work. It is vital not just for the happiness and wellbeing of your staff, but also for business success.

## How to promote mental health in the workplace

We all know that the workplace can often be a high-pressure, stressful environment. Managers are also aware that healthy employees produce better results. With business income and creative output on the line, companies should create a mental-health friendly working atmosphere and implement productive mental health-focused strategies. Here are five that you can quickly implement to promote mental health in the workplace:

### REMOVE THE MENTAL HEALTH TABOO

One step employers should make is to promote awareness of mental health at work. Despite the increased social awareness around mental health issues, for some people there is still a taboo around diseases like depression and anxiety. Keeping everyone in your workplace informed about mental health will break through taboos and create more inclusive support networks across your company.

### CREATE A RELAXING WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Work can be stressful at times. We have all experienced some form of work-related stress in our careers. With most mental health issues caused by stress, creating a more relaxing working environment can help prevent major problems before they arise.

Providing sufficient break-out areas where staff can go to unwind and decompress is one way to do this, another is to encourage staff to take regular breaks when working on difficult projects, or working through challenging workloads. Not only will this create a better working environment, it could help you retain and attract your best staff.

### TRAIN MANAGERS

Educating managers about mental health will allow them to spot the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions and diseases, and allow them to better react when problems occur. Not only will it make for a happier workforce, it can foster closer manager/employee relationships. With most staff leaving their jobs due to bad management, educating your managers about mental health could help you retain your star employees too.

## BE AWARE OF NON-WORK RELATED FACTORS

A mental health aware workplace isn't just about improving knowledge and creating a better environment, it is also about being aware of your staff's personal lives. Mental health is not just work-related. It is also about physical wellbeing, work-life balance, relationships, and financial security. Speaking to your staff about these aspects of their lives in one-to-one meetings and providing positive support can help you nip problems in the bud before they escalate.

## PROMOTE MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a practice that has been trending recently. And for good reason. Not only does it help to alleviate mental health issues, research from the INSEAD Business School found that doing just 15 minutes of mindfulness-based meditation such as concentrating on breathing can lead to more rational thinking when making business decisions.

For this reason, it is important for a company to promote the advantages of mindfulness in the workplace. Whether it be group mindful yoga sessions during the work day, or providing relaxing break out areas, promoting mindfulness at work can help improve good business decisions. Even something as basic as encouraging the use of the pomodoro technique can have significant real world effects.

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