

# Workplace Management Solutions Winter 2016



## **What Happens When Major Companies Take Mental Health Seriously**

Approximately one in five American adults experience a mental health issue in a given year, but frank discussions about these illnesses are lacking in the workplace. Many employees stay quiet about their conditions out of fear that they'll only be further stigmatized or even held back professionally.

Studies have shown that (more accepting) workplaces have happier employees with better productivity according to Michelle Riba, a Professor of Psychiatry and the Associate Director of the University of Michigan Depression Center.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, depression can result in approximately five missed work days and 11.5 days of reduced productivity every three months for an individual. Overall, it costs 200 million lost workdays per year in the United States at a cost of \$17 to \$44 billion dollars in lost productivity. Simply put, company success relies on healthy employees.

## **Fixing the culture of work**

Organizations need to be strategically addressing psychological health in the workplace. All decisions regarding employees, work and projects should be looked at through a holistic lens and how it affects an employee's overall wellbeing.

Research shows that mental health treatment can help people live better lives. The more comfortable employees feel, the more likely they will seek help for managing psychological issues.

Mental health trainings for managers and senior leaders, internal campaigns to raise awareness about mental illness and regular employee workshops on sleep, mindfulness and exercise lead to better psychological wellbeing. The goal is to erase stigma around mental illness and encourage employees to seek support, should they ever need it.

The key is making help accessible to employees, and most importantly, creating a safe space for people to open up about their conditions. A good start would be for businesses to take advantage of Employee Assistance Programs. When it comes to mental health, EAPs can provide counselors or access to clinicians for employees who may be struggling. EAPs are one of the most effective ways to support employees with mental health conditions in the workplace.



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## Workplace Culture & Bullying

Workplace culture impacts all aspects of a business, from day to day functioning to the organization's bottom line. There are three types of workplace cultures:

- **Dictatorial Culture:** The dictatorial workplace relies on power and control. The boss is typically a bully, and bullying is encouraged as a means of advancement throughout the company. There are high levels of secrecy and jealousy, with little room for positive relationships among employees.
- **Disjointed Culture:** As its name suggests, the disjointed workplace is lacking in core values and checks and balances on power. While it may appear hierarchical and bureaucratic, there is little enforcement and emotional reactions are common when handling conflicts. These workplaces are often filled with cronyism and nepotism and may not provide clear feedback on employee performance.
- **Stable Culture:** The stable culture provides clear goals, rules, and values for employees. Communication is open and clear, and conflicts are dealt with effectively, absent fear of retaliation. Employees are supported, encouraged, and rewarded based on quality of work. Everyone understands the role they play in the company and works together to ensure success for all, not just certain individuals.

## Bullying at Work

Research shows that many people experience workplace bullying. Approximately two out of every five people have been bullied at work. Almost half of those targeted at work suffer stress related health problems. Bullying can be verbal, psychological, physical, or online. It can also include blacklisting from future employment opportunities. These high-stress situations can have serious effects on an individual's physical health, mental health and relationships. Fear of retaliation or loss of job prevent many people from reporting abusive behavior. Those who experience bullying lose work time worrying about and avoiding the offender as well as showing a decline in performance and commitment to the organization.

## What can I do as an employer?

- **Review available data and current policies.** Are your employees reporting high satisfaction? Do you have high rates of turnover? Does your organization have a clear goal with values that are enforced and upheld in the workplace? Examine the numbers, business plan, and policies to see where your organization currently stands and how much you are losing from not investing further in your employees and workplace culture. It is important to emphasize not only company values and beliefs but also definitions and policies for things like workplace bullying and violence. Examine where there is need for further clarification or even new policies altogether.
- **Open a dialogue with current employees.** Numbers can only tell you so much, and good policies are only helpful when they are put into practice. Create a safe, open space where employees can discuss their concerns and wants. This can be in the form of anonymous surveys, individual discussions, or both. Allow employees to tell you about dangerous or abusive behaviors, unhelpful

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practices for reporting abuse, and wherever they see room for improvement. Hearing directly from employees is the easiest way to get a glimpse into their daily lives. Be sure to listen to and seriously consider the information your employees share with you.

- **Take action.** After reviewing data, policies, and interviews, you may have conflicting or unclear information. You may receive complaints about individuals whom you considered your best employees or find that your mission and values as an organization are not being upheld in practice. Leaders within the organization must discuss these findings and determine what specifically needs to change, whether it is different hiring practices, improved policies for employee conflict, or a stronger adherence to the beliefs of the organization. This also means addressing any of the toxic behaviors that had been allowed or even encouraged up until this point. While this could require large changes, creating a healthy workplace culture and having policies in place to support all employees is a smart business decision. This investment on the front end can save losses in turnover, work productivity, and even lives.
- **Adjust and be flexible.** A healthy workplace culture allows employees to be heard. This means being open to ongoing feedback about company policies and practices. Maintaining a healthy workplace and addressing toxic behaviors must become a priority. Make it a habit to review what is and is not strengthening your workplace and respond accordingly.