

It's time to reflect on mental wellbeing in the workplace

It's hard to believe that we are two years on from the first Covid-19 lockdowns. Everything changed seemingly overnight. What once felt unusual now feels commonplace - it's easy to forget the turbulent change people have experienced.

The office is perhaps one of the places that has seen the most change. For many companies, gone are the days of commuting five days a week. And dragging yourself into the office despite feeling ill? A thing of the past! Teams, Zoom, and Slack are all everyday tools that many office employees use as though we'd known about them since birth.

Overall, it's great. With increased flexibility, many employees are enjoying autonomy like never before. However, it's not for everyone. And perhaps most importantly, remote and hybrid working models are not the answer to all challenges the workforce faces.

Since the pandemic, rates of anxiety and depression have *shot up*, and while flexible working may help some, it doesn't resolve it. Moreover, rates were on the rise before the pandemic, and they will continue to unless we change something.

The two-year milestone presents an opportunity for businesses to reflect. If you

told someone that working from home would become so widely accepted, they'd never believe you pre-pandemic. It's shown us how the workplace can change for the better, and now it's time to do more.

Why tackling mental health is key for the workplace

If businesses offer teams access to both preventative and interventive wellbeing services, organisations could support the mental health crisis.

Employees spend over half their waking day at work. Stress, high workloads, and long hours can contribute to mental health conditions such as burnout, anxiety, and depression.

Poor mental health not only disrupts the life of the employee outside of work but also their performance at work.

When mental health condition rates rise, so does absenteeism and poor productivity, in turn, affecting business performance.

Furthermore, employees today are more conscious of wellbeing – they value an employer that prioritises mental health and offers support, ultimately respecting them. As we continue to experience the 'great resignation' and hiring as well as retaining staff becomes increasingly competitive in 2022, mental wellbeing support could be the deciding factor between one job or the other.

So, while it is nice to care for your employee's mental wellbeing because you want them to be healthy and happy, it's a smart move for the health of your business too.

Preventative care in the workplace

There is a common misconception that mental wellbeing support is only therapy. But this isn't true. Therapy is typically used for someone already

experiencing the symptoms of a mental health condition – for example, low mood due to anxiety.

While therapy is a valuable tool for treating mental health conditions, it can also be used on a regular basis for maintenance, alongside other techniques, to help prevent mental health conditions from developing. Take physical health as an example: we exercise to prevent illnesses, yet cardio isn't a treatment for a heart attack, it's a preventative measure.

Wellbeing support encompasses a wide range of services, from personal coaching and guided meditations to breathing practices and therapy. If we incorporated mindfulness practices into our routines, just like daily vitamins, walks or hobbies, we would be better equipped to manage mental health conditions, possibly even preventing their onset – just like exercise.

For many, however, this isn't always possible. Lack of awareness and resources, such as cost, means that people are missing out on something that could transform their life. The question is, how do we change it?

Make supporting employees a number one priority

This is where the business world can step in. By providing teams access to both preventative and interventive wellbeing services, organisations can make daily mental health practices a reality.

A busy day might still cause stress, but once you are armed with the tools to help you maintain good mental health, something that may have once caused feelings of anxiety and unease might soon become a task that no longer bothers you.

Building resilience through practices such as meditation, regular breaks and breathing exercises will benefit the employee as much as the business. Over time, the number of employees reaching that crucial tipping point and needing time off work will reduce and alongside it, the levels of productivity should begin to rise.

Although providing mental wellbeing services might be a new type of investment for your business, the cost of waiting will ultimately be greater. As the second anniversary of the first lockdown passes, following years of turbulent change for employees, it's time to prioritise the most important part of a business: the people.

As more and more employees recognise the importance of caring for their

mental wellbeing and work-life balance, it will become an important factor for choosing a job – and staying in it. So don't wait. If you do, your people won't.

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