How to support your team through mental health challenges



According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health disorders are the leading cause of disability worldwide. For North American businesses, mental health issues (particularly depression and anxiety) are costing billions of dollars annually in lost productivity and those costs are rising rapidly. Supporting the psychological health of employees has become a business priority for organizations in every sector.

Supporting workplace mental health

Every workplace is different, but a psychologically healthy workplace has the following features:

- Encouraging and expecting respectful behaviours and having clear guidelines regarding harassment and bullying
- Clearly defining employees' duties and responsibilities
- Allowing people to voice their opinions on subjects that concern them
- Recognizing good work and service
- Social programs
- Professional development and learning opportunities
- Resources for those who need help and programs to reduce the stigma of mental health issues

Supporting employees

As a manager, you play a significant role in creating and maintaining a psychologically safe workplace. Here are few strategies to keep in mind:

- Have regular one-to-one conversations with team members to ask them how they're doing. This will help build trust and give people opportunities to talk about both professional and personal issues.
- Know your team. This way you'll notice early signs of struggle. These might include:
    - Changes in behaviour, mood or interactions with others
    - Drop in productivity, engagement and focus
    - Appearing tired, anxious or withdrawn
    - Difficulty making decisions, solving problems or getting organized
    - Increased absence from work
- Encourage people to take breaks and vacations.
- Find ways to have fun as a team.
- Lead by example. Be seen as honest, fair and respectful. Praise good work, be a coach and mentor, support people's professional development and take care of your own mental health.

Having a conversation about mental health

Discussing performance or behavioural issues with employees is never easy. Here are some tips to get a conversation started:

- Choose a comfortable, private space where you won't be interrupted.
- Ask open and non-judgmental questions and let the individual explain what they're experiencing and what support they need. Ensure the employee that your conversation will remain private and confidential.
- If you suspect a mental health issue, refer the employee to their family physician or their Employee Assistance Program. Don't make assumptions.
- Work to find ways to support the employee. For example, moving him or her to a quieter location or adjusting responsibilities.

It’s a good idea to take notes about the conversation and seek advice or guidance from Human Resources as needed. Contact us for more resources to help you better support the mental health of your team.