How to Create a Mentally Healthy Organization

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Humans in the professional industry exist in two worlds: the professional and the personal. The problems in our personal lives do not cease to exist the moment we get to the office, they may continue plaguing us, affecting our day to day lives. The societal stigma that surrounds discussions on mental health both in and out of the office has resulted in mental health issues being ignored, leaving many silent sufferers within organizations. Organizations are however being encouraged to adopt a culture that is more open to discussions surrounding mental health. This not only fosters a more productive workforce but a happier one as well.

The implications of Ignoring Mental Health Issues

- According to the American Psychology Association, chronic stress can lead to depression, a mental condition characterized by feelings of despondency and dejection, typically accompanied by feelings of inadequacy and guilt. This may lead to a lack of energy and disturbance of appetite or sleep, thereby affecting a person's health and quality of output.

- In some statistics released by Mental Health America, stress-related issues have been on the rise, and substance abuse and mental illness have cost employers about $80 to $100 billion in direct costs.

- American companies lose $44 billion in lost productivity due to depression – National Institute of Mental Health

Creating a workplace culture that values mental health

The facts on the table point to just a few of the statistics regarding mental health issues in the workplace. A more strategic approach should be taken in issues relating to mental health. Some employers are taking strides in improving mental health and de-stigmatizing issues surrounding it. Employers should effectively communicate services available to employees in dealing with mental health, and this is how organizations can approach these issues effectively:

1. **Conduct a survey**

For you to be aware of the problems, your employees could be facing, take out a survey. A survey is a helpful way to collect a sizeable amount of information that can be analyzed to show trends within the organization. You could conduct Employee Engagement Surveys, for example, to find out just how much your employees are engaged, not engaged or actively disengaged in their work, and what challenges they may be facing. This may help in detecting the early onset of mental health issues within employees and coming up with ways of effectively dealing with them.

2. Offer free screening tools

The reason why there ends up being an influx of mental health issues, and people are left wondering why they weren't detected early, is that people are unable to detect the signs and symptoms. Actual issues may be passed off as the usual stress that may come from missing deadlines of performance targets for example when in fact they are real mental issues. Free screening tools are a good way for individuals to conduct self-assessments on themselves and possibly diagnose a health problem in its early stages. These assessments are anonymous, meaning one can be free to fully assess themselves without worrying about how they will appear to their co-workers. Early detection may go a long way in preventing a potentially harmful condition.

3. Talk about mental health in the workplace

No two individuals are the same. One individual may be adept at coping with stress much more effectively than another. In this regard, bring up issues concerning stress, anxiety, depression or any other mental issues, and assure your employees that anyone can be affected by these conditions. Educate your employees on what could cause these conditions and how they can be avoided. Managers within your organization should also be trained in early detection of the signs of mental health problems and how to respond appropriately. The person you choose to manage your subordinates could be the difference between a healthy workforce and a mentally unhealthy workforce.

4. Promote a Work/Life Balance

Employees who arrive early for work and leave later than usual may seem ideal for your organization but these are some unhealthy practices. These practices accompanied by expecting employees to put in extra hours by working from home in the evenings may hurt your organization in the long run. A disproportionate work/life balance will likely lead to low productivity and employee burnout. As an employer, look out for the mental well-being of your employees by encouraging them to take some time off work to rest and unwind. Your employees must also know that taking time away from work will not affect them negatively in any way for example being dismissed from work. Individuals who take time out to take care of themselves are more likely to make much better employees than those who do not.

Low output of work, health care costs and truancy from work are some of the ways in which mental health issues potentially cost employers money. A healthy workplace may not reduce all mental health problems as some are influenced by genetics, life experiences and traumatic events, however, they can help employees to build their mental strength and stay healthy.

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