

This is the Importance of Mental Health Awareness in the Workplace

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Introduction

Mental health has become an increasing topic of discussion as knowledge around its importance is being shared widely. If we look back about ten years ago, not many people talked about mental health and a few people understood what it meant. For example, in high school, the word “depressed” was loosely used as a way of describing how one felt like being happy or angry. As we learn more about mental health and what it is about, we understand that depression is “Depression is a common mental disorder that presents with depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, decreased energy, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, and poor concentration” (World Health Organisation, 2012).

This article will discuss the issues around mental health awareness and its importance in the workplace as it is Mental Health Awareness Month. Anyone can benefit from reading this as nobody is excluded from being affected either directly or indirectly.

What is mental health and why is it important?

Mental health forms part of the whole health of an individual. Previously, many people believed health to be the absence of diseases which only looked at the physical aspect of health. With more and more people being affected by the effects of mental health, it has been included in the definition of what health is by the World Health Organisation (WHO). It is now known as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

Mental health as a component of health has been defined as “as a state of well-being whereby individuals recognise their abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and make a contribution to their communities” (World Health Organisation, 2020). This definition shows us that anyone can be affected by it. This is why it is important to ensure that everyone is in good health.

Mental health problems have the potential to affect societies and large groups of people, meaning an organisation can be affected by it too. One of the toughest aspects of mental health is the fact that it is not visible, unlike other physical health problems that are easily identifiable. When this is not diagnosed in time, mental health disorders may disrupt the quality of an individual’s everyday life and may also affect their physical wellbeing. Just like how obesity, for example, can affect the ability for one to take part in physical activity. The World Health Organisation has confirmed that depression is a major risk factor to cancer and heart disease so, no, mental health does not “live in the head” as many people believe. As a result, this may put an added strain on the individual as medical bills may increase and the

stress of their physical health deteriorating may increase.

Raising awareness

The first step to combating mental health problems is by raising awareness, in this case at the workplace. This should become a growing topic of discussion to promote a healthy working environment. Without raising the knowledge of what mental health is, the organisation may run the risk of adversely affecting their employees. When there is no unity in promoting mental health, people suffer in silence and everyone begins to notice when it is too late to do something about it or when it has become too difficult for the issue to be resolved easily.

This month is the month of mental health awareness and it is crucial to ask oneself whether or not the organisation is taking this issue seriously. An assumption is that some organisations may deem these campaigns too costly to take part in but the well being of employees can not have a price tag attached to it.

The World Health Organisation has pressed the issue around the stigma against mental health. Many people and institutions look down on others who are suffering from these issues and do not realise that anyone can suffer from it. It does not choose someone over the other. Hence the importance of removing the stigma that is attached to it.

It is a good idea to provide mental health awareness campaigns or have people undergo a mental health awareness course. There are many benefits for the individual that will arise from taking part in these and they are included below:

- Provides a better understanding of how mental illness can affect a person's life
- It can help to reduce the stigma of mental illness
- Gives you confidence when helping those who are suffering
- Helps you to recognise early signs and risks of mental illness

Dealing with mental health in an organisation?

Looking at raising awareness around mental health can usually be thought of as a cost to the organisation but in the long run, it helps the organisation function better. Having a healthy human capital is a key driving factor to an organisation's success. Would it not be great to have every employee at their best when at work and dealing with work-related issues?

According to the EW Group (2020), a survey was done on some employees from various organisations and the results showed that about 67% of the population felt too scared or embarrassed to talk about the issues they were facing about mental health. As mentioned before, it is important for there to be an open discussion around this topic. This will save many people and allow them to work efficiently.

Below are some ways that managers can tell if their subordinates or colleagues are battling with mental health at work. They may notice that these individuals are:

- making more mistakes than normal or having trouble with decision-making and concentration.
- becoming more irritable and sensitive to criticism.
- becoming increasingly absent or start work excessively, staying late and bypassing lunch breaks.
- exhibiting physical symptoms, such as being constantly tired or suffering from a cold that won't go away.
- taking less care with their appearance or show signs of drinking alcohol to help them switch off in the evenings.

These are not the only signs that may help in identifying people who are struggling but maybe a step in the right direction. Managers should take care and be sensitive in how they communicate with the people they work with. When people are battling with mental health issues, they may not work the same way that they used. This disruption may be detrimental to the individual's health, as well as the organisation at large if many mistakes are being made.

This onus does not only lie with managers but as an individual working in a community of people, it is important to take it upon yourself to be supportive when you can. It is important not to ignore a change in behaviour when we see it and it is not someone being "difficult" at work.

Conclusion

The issues around mental health awareness are very crucial and organisations should not ignore them. Anyone is prone to battling with mental health issues. Get people talking about it and find ways in which everyone can be accommodated. No one must suffer in silence, if one suffers, it may spill over to the next.

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