

EXECUTIVE VITALITY™ : MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE PANDEMIC

Protecting and caring for your mental health, and that of your employees, is extremely important today. Let's face it, the past 16 months have been incredibly challenging. At EXCN, we provide executive coaching for leaders all over the world—South Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Canada and, of course, the United States. Regardless of the geography, life and work have been (and are still) tough. A survey in *Harvard Business Review* of people from 46 countries found that 50% of those workers surveyed had seen a decline in their or someone else's mental health throughout the pandemic. [What Covid-19 Has Done to Our Well-Being, in 12 Charts;](#)

People struggling with mental health issues need to be able to discuss these struggles in order to get the help they need. Do you think your employees feel safe discussing their mental health challenges? Or are such discussions taboo in your organization? Would it be embarrassing for someone to bring up problems they might be having with depression, anxiety, alcohol, or with their marriage...? Or worse—are your people afraid that not hiding their personal problems could jeopardize their jobs? Is your corporate culture one that forces people to put their humanness away when they walk in the door?

Forbes refers to mental health concerns in the workplace as the “don't ask, don't tell” culture.” [Mental Health During The Pandemic And Its Impact On The Workplace.](#)

Here are 6 tips we at EXCN recommend:

1. Open up the environment for highly sensitive conversations. Give a “permission slip” for these discussions. [When Your Employee Discloses a Mental Health Condition \(hbr.org\)](#)
2. Recognize the signs of people being distressed. Such signs could include increased absences, decreased performance, disengagement, changes in patterns (e.g., someone who always met deadlines now is not), changes in physical appearance, crying, etc.
3. Know how to assist people to get the help they require. Have a ready list of internal and external resources.
4. Know what to say and what not to say, so that you are helpful without being intrusive. You might find this HBR article helpful: [Talking About Mental Health with Your Employees — Without Overstepping \(hbr.org\)](#).
5. Be authentic and self-aware so that you are emotionally available. Role model appropriate behaviors.
6. Communicate about your vision for the future of the organization. Anxiety will lessen if workers know the status or outlook of the organization, even if it is not rosy. Overcommunicate for now.

Has your organization adjusted policies and practices to address mental health concerns in the new normal workplace? What do you need to do to ensure your workforce is comfortable talking about mental health and other personal issues that are relevant to their job performance and attendance?

Further reading

- [8 Ways Managers Can Support Employees' Mental Health \(hbr.org\)](#)
- [ASU-Workplace-Commons-Phase-2-Report-4-28-21.pdf \(rockefellerfoundation.org\)](#)