
LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: HOW TO OBSERVE NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

May is National Mental Health Month. You may be impacted personally, or there may be people in your workplace who are experiencing depression, anxiety, or some other mental health concern. And you would not be alone. People around the globe have been affected by the pandemic, the war(s), the Great Resignation, and that is on top of whatever (stressful situation) was going on in people's lives in "the old normal." All of this spills into the workplace and is having a profound effect.

"Mental health problems have an impact on employers and businesses directly through increased absenteeism, negative impact on productivity and profits, as well as an increase in costs to deal with the issue." That statement is from a [National Library of Medicine](#) article about mental well-being in the workplace. Another article ties attrition to mental health issues, from *Forbes*: [Mental Health is a leading cause for why people are quitting their jobs](#).

Mental health issues have long carried a stigma that has made it hard for employees to discuss their struggles in the workplace. As a result, morale, productivity, and innovation all suffer. All leaders and their organizations would benefit from making it safe for people to admit they are struggling, that there is more stress now than ever, that they need a different kind of leadership than they are used to from their boss. Make it safe to talk about feelings, not just the work. Ask people "How are you doing?" Ask them what they need. Not just: "Will those boxes go out next week?"

Lead with empathy. Treat your employees as if they were literally human resources, because that is exactly what they are. Here are four ways to reverse your employees' fears about discussing (also known as telling the truth about) personal issues that might be affecting their job performance:

1. Communicate that it is OK to discuss mental health issues. Be sure your employees know they are encouraged to surface such issues and that these conversations will be kept confidential. It is imperative that leaders create a safe space for team members, peers, or direct reports to be able to talk safely and confidentially if they are struggling with mental health issues.
2. Provide training for your HR staff and for leaders. Include how to engage in dialogue about mental health and where, when, and how to refer.
3. Lead by example – the old model of everybody keeping their struggles to themselves is outdated. Executives can humanize themselves without losing respect. Here is an article on this very topic, also from *Forbes*: [Destigmatizing Mental Health In The Workplace Starts At The Top](#)
4. Make sure that you create policies that support these initiatives. Ensure there is no retaliation or any negative consequence to raising these issues.

We found this list of [21 Mental Health Awareness Month Activities for the Workplace](#), some are as simple as creating an engaging bulletin board to honor Mental Health Awareness Month and follow through with posting information and resources for anyone who is struggling.

Is your company possibly experiencing absenteeism and attrition of high performers connected to mental health concerns? What steps are you taking to reverse this trend?

LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: HOW TO OBSERVE NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH MONTH (CONT.)

Further reading

- [May is Mental Health Awareness Month | harvard.edu](#)
- [8 Simple Ways to Create a Mentally Healthier Workplace | inc.com](#)
- [2022 Workforce Mental Health Trends Forecast WHITE PAPER | lyrahealth.com](#)