

Blog Post

Promoting Employee Mental Health Well-Being Pays Off

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May is Mental Health Awareness Month and the perfect time for employers to check on the mental well-being of their employees and examine their current policies, because doing so will ultimately improve their bottom line. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, workers have reported experiencing stress at work due to compensation not keeping up with inflation, longer hours, increased workplace monitoring, and lack of involvement in their organization's decisions. Workers who are highly stressed are more likely to be less engaged and committed to achieving organization goals and may commonly suffer anxiety and depression. That could translate to higher costs to the employer and lower productivity. Employers who promote and support mental health initiatives are more likely to avoid the common financial pitfalls of a highly stressed work environment. Employees who feel supported at work are more likely to stay at a job which reduces turnover costs. Employers who foster a positive work environment and provide mental health resources and benefits to their employees are able to attract and recruit top talent in a competitive labor market. That investment could pay off in the long run.

There are many options available for employers to promote and encourage mental health well-being, including the creation of "zen" office spaces, team building activities, and wellness stipends, to name a

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few. Yet, to realize the full benefit of the employers' investment in these and other resources, it is essential to have a strong commitment to supporting the mental health well-being of their employees overall. Here are three things employers can start to do today to help build that much-needed foundation:

1. Revisit Mental Health Policies and Benefits and Modify as Needed

Begin by evaluating current policies, including time off, accommodations, disability, and other leave policies to determine if they are comprehensive and fully address the needs of the workforce in the specific industry. Employers should also revisit relevant employee resources, including Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), to determine how often they are used; and if underutilized, consider how to promote, improve and supplement EAPs as needed. Employers should review their benefits packages and determine whether the organization is able to provide comprehensive health care coverage that includes access to mental health and substance use care and treatment. Employers should also assess how easy mental health care is accessible to their workforce that maintains employee confidentiality and encourages time off for mental health care and supports access to affordable off-site, after-hours care such as telehealth. When employers take a closer look at existing policies and benefits, invest in additional resources, and provide and promote these benefits to their workforce, they are in a better position to support employees with mental health issues and promote a healthy work environment culture.

2. Educate and Train Managers on the Importance of Promoting Mental Health Well-Being

Managers can be a problem or a solution to promoting a healthy workplace environment. Existing policies and benefits that promote and support mental health cannot be fully

utilized by employees if managers are not educated on the relevant policies and benefits and do not receive training on how to identify employee stress and mental health issues. Managers are the gatekeepers for fostering a work environment that allows employees to better manage their work and life responsibilities and goals which directly correlates with improved employee job performance and satisfaction. Research by the American Psychological Association (APA) has shown that leaders who received just three hours of mental health awareness training reported an improvement in attitudes towards mental health; higher motivation to promote mental health among their work teams; and improved employees' personal and job well-being. This could translate to fewer days off for absences related to mental health issues and greater productivity. Training managers not only improves leadership but has a direct positive impact on employees' mental health—a significant cost-saving measure for organizations and a “win” for employees.

3. Solicit and Use Feedback from Employees and Sincerely Support Diversity and Inclusiveness

An employee's lack of involvement in decisions in their organization often contributes to their workplace stress. To address this issue, employers should evaluate how to engage their workforce more in their decisions and actions. Employers that actively and routinely solicit and consider feedback from their employees are more likely to have higher retention. Common methods of soliciting feedback from employees used by employers today include anonymous surveys and town hall suggestion boxes. In addition to these methods, employers may consider creating opportunities to share their goals and results with their teams in a transparent way, welcome feedback from employees, develop plans with employees to take action, and aim to follow through with those actions. These rules of engagement foster a sense of commitment and

investment in organizational goals among all employees of all levels.

Additionally, employers should ensure that they are supporting and promoting an inclusive and equitable work environment free of discrimination and harassment. Workers from marginalized groups have reported experiencing more discrimination on the job in comparison to their non-marginalized counterparts. In a recent APA survey, [[Workers appreciate and seek mental health support in the workplace \(apa.org\)](https://www.apa.org)] 30% of workers reported that they have experienced harassment, verbal abuse, or physical violence either by someone within their organization or outside their organization within the last 12 months. Additionally, 29% of Black and 31% of Latino adults reported they felt scared at work, and 22% of LGBTQ+ adults reported they were the target of discrimination on the job. Experiencing discrimination and harassment on the job and a concern for safety increases stress for employees in marginalized groups. Employers should ensure they have comprehensive anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies and have procedures in place to monitor, encourage reporting, and promptly investigate discrimination and harassment complaints. Consistent enforcement of these policies and procedures will signal to employees that the organization values them as individuals and sincerely supports an environment where all employees feel safe reporting workplace issues. These measures not only improve a workforce's overall mental health but also help employers to thrive financially.

Promotion of mental health well-being can really pay off in the long run, for both employers and employees, and is a worthy investment. For assistance evaluating and improving workplace mental health well-being policies and procedures, contact your Akerman Labor & Employment attorney.

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