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Julie has many years of experience in counseling, working with adult and adolescent clients. She believes that every person has the power to make meaningful changes in their lives if they are given the right tools and opportunities. It is her job as a counselor to provide the tools and strategies to implement change. Her specialties include depression, anxiety, self–esteem, relationships, and stress.

In her spare time, Julie enjoys spending time with her husband, Geoff, and their two dogs, Oliver and Wilbur, as well as trying out new recipes in the kitchen, reading, and doing crossword puzzles. She and Geoff are big University of North Dakota hockey fans and love going to games every chance they get.

How To Promote Mental Health in the Workplace

By Julie Vandrovec | The Village Business Institute

An employee comes to you and says, "I'm not feeling well today, I need to go home," or he calls in sick for the day. Most of you will assume that it is because of a physical illness, like a cold or the flu. You tell the employee to take care and feel better, make sure the work is covered for the day, and don't give it much thought afterward. Now imagine the same employee comes to you and says, "My anxiety is very high, and I've had a panic attack. I need to go home," or calls in saying he can't get out of bed because of his depression. Would you treat the employee in the same way and take his concerns seriously?

Far too often, the culture in the workplace is more forgiving for those with a physical ailment than for those who suffer with mental health problems.

Mental health in the workplace is not just something that affects the individual; it affects the company as a whole. According to recent findings by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, "Mental illness is the single greatest cause of worker disability in the US." Unfortunately, most employees never seek the help they need due to the stigma surrounding mental health and seeking treatment.

As supervisors, you may be the front line for your employee to help guide them to resources available.

Start by having an "open door" policy with employees. Let them know you are available to talk if employees have concerns or need to reach out to someone. This does not mean you have to have all the answers or give advice. It means simply letting your employees know that you are a source of support that they can utilize.

If employees do come to you, take their concerns seriously. It is crucial that employees

see the workplace and their supervisor as a source of support. Change the perception that mental health is something to be ashamed about or needs to be kept a secret.

Have regular supervision or meetings with employees, checking in to see how they are doing. Be aware of changes in your employees that are out of the norm for them. Don't be afraid to ask questions or to ask if they are doing OK. Let them know this is coming from a source of support and concern, rather than as a punishment or in a punitive manner.

Lead by example and start the conversation about mental illness and mental health. Offer education or trainings for supervisors and staff about what mental illness is and is not. Set the tone that mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of and asking for help is not wrong or bad. If you notice others using derogatory or hurtful language about mental illness, correct them. Let them know that hateful comments will not be tolerated in the workplace.
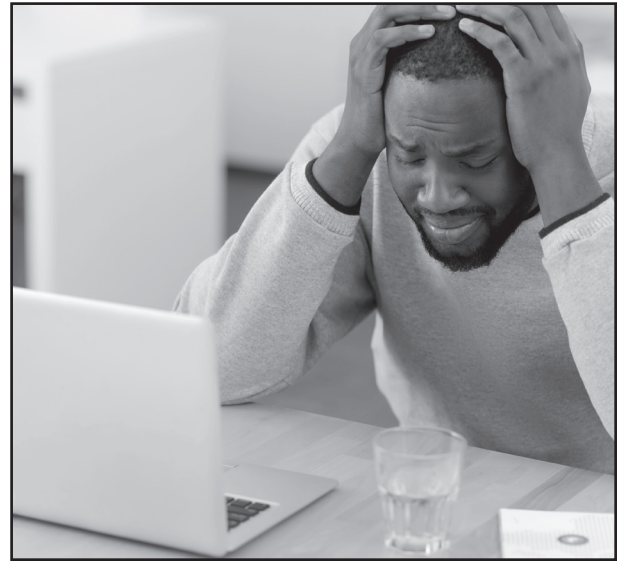
Promote an overall healthy workplace, one that encourages both physical and mental health. Encourage employees to do things that not only take care of themselves physically, but mentally as well.

As your EAP provider, we provide free counseling services to employees and their families. Make sure your employees are aware of the benefit available and encourage them to use it if they are struggling. If your organization offers other health benefits, such as paying for a gym membership, make sure your employees are aware of and utilizing those as well.

It is important to be aware of your own personal biases towards mental illness and those who are affected. Everyone has their own beliefs and attitudes towards mental illness, and what you believe will influence how you interact and treat employees.

Remember, at the end of the day, a person with a mental illness or who is struggling is still a person. Learn to look beyond the label or diagnosis, and see the whole person. Keep in mind The Golden Rule: Do unto others what you want them to do to you. Everyone wants to be treated with dignity and respect, and being diagnosed with a mental illness or struggling doesn't change anything.

As we are working more and more hours with longer days, spending more of our lives in the workplace, it is crucial that supervisors and management be leaders in the discussion regarding mental health. Take steps to make your workplace a supportive place for all employees. Be open to changing the perceptions toward mental illness and mental health in general.

CREATING A STIGMA-FREE WORKPLACE

Supervisors play a critical role in helping support employee mental health. They can directly support their employees by noticing when someone's behavior has changed, reaching out to them in a caring and supportive way, and connecting them with resources.

Benefits of prioritizing mental health on your team:

- Increased productivity
- Decreased disability cost
- Increased retention and engagement of valued employees

Here are steps you can take as a supervisor:

- Emphasize social connectedness.
- Provide mentors for new hires or new roles.
- Enhance team communication through ongoing supervisory training and continued performance support for employees.
- Offer flexible work practices (flex hours, work-from-home, etc.).
- Foster a culture where getting help for a mental health challenge is as routine as getting help for any other challenge.

- Help employees understand what resources the organization offers for mental health.
- Create a culture of trust and communication to support an emotionally healthy environment.
- Communicate organizational values that include respect, civility and a general culture of well-being to encourage empathetic behaviors by employees.
- Promote the use of non-stigmatizing language when talking about mental health.
  - Avoid labels such as the following: challenged, crazy, demented, lunatic, normal/not normal, psycho/psychopath, schizo, special, sufferer/victim, wacko.
  - Use language that does not define someone by an illness. Instead of, "She's bipolar," try "She has bipolar disorder" / "She's living with bipolar disorder."

Information from www.NAMI.org/StigmaFree

nami
National Alliance on Mental Illness

HOW TO CHANGE AND TRANSFORM YOUR COMPANY CULTURE

BY SUSAN M. HEATHFIELD | THE BALANCE

Changing your organizational culture is the toughest task you will ever take on. Your organizational culture was formed over years of interaction among the participants in the organization. Changing the accepted organizational culture can feel like rolling rocks uphill.

Organizational cultures form for a reason. Perhaps the current culture matches the style and comfort zone of the company founder and the senior team.

Culture frequently echoes the prevailing management style. Since managers tend to hire people just like themselves, the established organizational culture is reinforced by new hires as well as the actions and behavior of longer-term staff members.

For people to consider culture change, usually a significant event must occur. An event that rocks their world such as flirting with bankruptcy, a significant loss of sales and customers, a new CEO with a different outlook and agenda or losing a million dollars, might get peoples' attention.

You discover in the process, that even if your current culture is not dysfunctional or bad, it may not effectively support the accomplishment of your most significant goals. You may need to tweak the culture to better support the current values and goals or you may need a complete culture overhaul.

Even then, to recognize that the organizational culture is the culprit and to take the necessary steps to change it is a tough journey. It takes prioritization and consistent, constant attention.

STEPS IN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE CHANGE

There are three major steps involved in changing an organization's culture.

1. Understand your current culture. Before an organization can change its culture, it must first understand the current culture or the way that things in the organization are now. Do take the time to pursue the activities recommended here before moving on to the next steps.

2. Once you understand your current organizational culture, your organization must then decide where it wants to go, define its strategic direction, and decide what the organizational culture should look like to support this success. What vision does the organization have for its future and how must the culture change to support the accomplishment of that vision?

3. Finally, the individuals in the organization must decide to change their behavior to create the desired organizational culture. This is the hardest step in culture change.

PLAN THE DESIRED ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The organization must plan where it wants to go before trying to make any changes in the organizational culture. With a clear picture of where the organization is currently, the organization can plan where it wants to be next.

To provide a framework for the assessment and evaluation of the current organizational culture, your organization needs to develop a picture of its desired future. What does the organization want to create for the future? How will this benefit your employees and the organization's other stakeholders?

You need to examine your mission, vision, and values for both the strategic and the value-based components of the organization.

Your management team needs to answer questions such as:

• What are the five most important values you would like to see represented in your organizational culture?

• Are these values compatible with your current organizational culture? Do they exist now? If not, why not? If they are so important, why are you not attaining these values?

• Are your mission and vision clearly articulated and disseminated so that employees can attain a clear understanding of the organization's direction and where they fit within it?

Next, you ask:

• What needs to happen to create the culture desired by the organization? You cannot change the organizational culture without knowing where your organization wants to be or what elements of the current organizational culture need to change. What cultural elements support the success of your organization, or not? You need to consciously identify the cultural implements and decide to change them.

However, knowing what the desired organizational culture looks like is not enough. Organizations must create plans to ensure that the desired organizational culture becomes a reality.

CHANGE THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

It is more difficult to change the culture of an existing organization than to create a culture in a brand new organization or team. When an organizational culture is already established, people must unlearn the old values, assumptions, and behaviors before they can learn the new ones.

The two most important elements for creating organizational cultural change are executive support and training.

- Executive support: Executives in the organization must support the cultural change, and in ways beyond verbal support. They must show behavioral support for the cultural change. Executives must lead the change by changing their own behaviors. It is extremely important for executives to consistently support the change.

- Training, Communication, and Mentoring: Culture change depends on behavior change. Members of the organization must clearly understand what is expected of them and must know how to actually do the new behaviors, once they have been defined. Training can be very useful in both communicating expectations and in teaching new behaviors. Mentoring and effective communication will also help employees learn and change.

ADDITIONAL WAYS TO CHANGE THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Other components important in changing the culture of an organization are:

- Create value and belief statements: Use employee focus groups by department, to put the mission, vision, and values into words that state their impact on each employee's job. For one job, the employee stated: "I live the value of quality patient care by listening attentively whenever a patient speaks." This exercise gives all employees a common understanding of the desired culture that actually reflects the actions they must commit to on their jobs.

- Practice effective communication: Keeping all employees informed about the organizational culture change process ensures commitment and success. Telling employees what is expected of them is critical for effective organizational culture change.

- Review organizational structure: Changing the physical structure of the company to align it with the desired organizational culture may be necessary. As an example, in a small company, four distinct business units competing for a product, customers, and internal support resources, may not support the creation of an effective organizational culture. These units are unlikely to align to support the overall success of the business.

- Consider moving employees and teams: You want to create the sense of cohesion and camaraderie needed among groups that must work together to serve customers.

- Redesign your approach to rewards and recognition: You will likely need to change the reward system to encourage the behaviors vital to the desired organizational culture.

- Review all work systems such as employee promotions, pay practices, performance management, and employee selection to make sure they are aligned with the desired culture.

For example, you cannot just reward individual performance if the requirements of your new organizational culture specify teamwork. A senior leader's total bonus cannot reward the accomplishment of his department's goals without recognizing the importance of him playing well with others on the leadership team to accomplish your organizational goals.

You can change your organizational culture to support the accomplishment of your business goals. Changing the organizational culture requires time, commitment, planning and proper execution – but you can do it. Yes, you can.

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