

Promoting a Culture of Wellness

Supervisors play a critical role in encouraging and enabling a culture of wellness within their teams. As people leaders, supervisors have the opportunity to foster a workplace that encourages and promotes the wellbeing of their teams/colleagues. Supervisors can create the conditions in the work environment that promote healthy behaviours and encourage employees to create healthy habits in both their personal and professional lives. This information sheet highlights some simple things that supervisors can do to promote a culture of wellness within their teams. These practices are applicable to teams who work on campus as well as those working remotely. Please remember to follow the COVID-19 safety guidelines when having face-to-face interactions.

What People Leaders Can Do to Promote a Culture of Wellness?

Supervisors can make a difference in employee health and wellbeing by providing support, offering encouragement, asking questions and listening to their employees. Below are 8 examples of practices that you can implement to support and promote employee wellness.

1. Stay Connected – Make Regular Check-ins



Set aside time in your schedule to make yourself available to your team. Having regular check-ins with direct reports can help understand and address any issues that may be impacting their work. Regular check-ins are even more critical when employees are working remotely given the absence of casual/unplanned face-to-face interactions which could provide you with the opportunity to notice signs that someone may be struggling.

Practice empathetic leadership by taking the time to understand any issues that employees may be experiencing or any concerns that they may have. For example, ask about their experience working from home, how they are staying connected with others and if they are feeling lonely or isolated. Other questions that can start the conversation include: “How are you really doing?” “What can I do to better support you at this time?” “How can I help you address some of the stressors that you may be experiencing?”

2. Communicate Regularly



Keep your team informed about University-wide or department-specific upcoming changes, procedures, requirements, etc. Promote a culture of open dialogue and create the space for employees to ask questions and raise issues. This may help alleviate the stresses resulting from the information that was disseminated or address the anxiety resulting from information gaps.

Take the time to regularly remind employees of the workplace wellness resources available to them to support their overall wellbeing. Remember that shame and stigma prevent many employees from accessing these valuable resources and therefore regular communication helps to normalize the use of these services.

3. Encourage Self-Care



Encourage employees to make health and wellness a priority and to build self-care into their daily and weekly routine to help improve resilience and prevent burnout. The following are some work-related examples of self-care practices that you can encourage employees to follow:

- Take breaks from your desk to stand up, stretch or walk around. Taking a short 5-minute break to get a drink of water or stretch your legs is not only good for your physical health but also allows you to reset mentally.
- Do not skip breaks or lunch. Take the time to go outside, take a walk and disengage from work. A short walk can help you flex your joints, boost blood circulation, and at the same time promote mental recharging and reflection.
- Schedule meeting-free times in your calendar. Having focused work time can help reduce the stresses associated with an ever-growing to-do list or the inability to carve time to move important projects forward. For employees working remotely, this practice can also help combat the exhaustion associated with “Microsoft Teams meeting fatigue”.
- Set boundaries. For instance, make a conscious effort to not check e-mails after hours and turn off work e-mail alerts on the weekend and on vacation. When work “bleeds” into other aspects of one’s life, it can be a major source of stress.

Other self-care practices include getting restful sleep, eating regular meals, eating a balanced diet, practicing breathing exercises, drinking plenty of water, exercising regularly and engaging in positive self-talk.

4. Address the “Always On” Pressure



The use of technology (smartphones and/or other mobile devices) make it very easy for employees to stay connected to work at all times. Many employees feel the pressure to check and respond to e-mails regularly after work, particularly if the e-mail is from their supervisor. The issue is not about sending or responding to e-mails after work hours, given that each individual’s situation is different and therefore what may work for one person might not for another, but rather the lack of communication about after-hours e-mail expectations.

Take the time to discuss and clarify email expectations with your team so team members do not feel pressured to check/answer e-mails received after work, on weekends or during vacations. This will help address the stress and anxiety caused by this “always on” pressure. Encourage employees to take some down time to recharge, enjoy family/friends and address any personal matters.

5. Show Gratitude



Being thankful and expressing gratitude is one of the things supervisors can do to boost employee wellbeing. Thanking employees for a job well done sets the tone for positivity and morale to thrive which can lead to less stress in the work environment and more engaged employees. Expressing gratitude can make employees feel valued, appreciated and contributes to their sense of happiness. Sincere, timely, relevant and meaningful appreciation also fosters a more positive and motivating work environment.

6. Take a Break with Employees and Encourage Healthy and Supportive Relationships with Colleagues



Taking the time to have informal conversations with your team provides an opportunity to build rapport, strengthens the team and can provide valuable insights into stressors that employees may be feeling. Create engaging ways for team members to connect outside scheduled meetings such as virtual breaks and lunches, internal wellness competitions or going for a physically distanced walk with colleagues.

7. Engage Employees in the wellbeing conversation



Ask employees to contribute ideas to promote a culture of wellness within the department. Discuss the ideas that are brought forward and for those that cannot be implemented, be transparent in order to not discourage future input. Engaging employees in these discussions sends the message that you care about their wellbeing and that their opinions count.

Also, look for opportunities to engage in conversations about mental health and wellbeing through departmental meetings, professional development opportunities and create the space for employees to share their wellbeing challenges and successes.

8. Encourage Participation in Wellness Activities and Lead by Example



Connect employees to the workplace wellness initiatives offered at the University and strongly encourage them to take advantage of these opportunities. Highlight how taking the time out of their busy schedules to participate can help them gain the knowledge and tools needed to reduce stress, anxiety and increase resilience.

As a people leader it is not only important to say that you support wellness, it is also important to model healthy behaviours. Be authentic, share what you are doing to take care of your own wellbeing and the challenges that you have encountered in your wellness journey.

Resources Consulted

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Putting the COVID-19 Employee Pulse Check Survey into Action

This initiative has been designed to address the areas of focus and key actions emerging from the survey results.

Areas of Focus: Mental Health & Wellbeing, Communication, Engagement and Supports