

The role leadership plays in relieving employee stress

Workplace stress in the U.K. is prevailing. According to Champion Health's Workplace Health Report, "76% of employees report moderate-to-high or high levels of stress." 73% say their workload is the top reason for their stress.

Temps de lecture : minute

2 May 2023

To top off the list of alarming employee stress statistics, this report also revealed that a third of employees said their stress impacts them negatively, with 28% citing their productivity being affected.

When employee productivity lacks, the quality of products, customer service, and operational efficiency does too. In addition, the way your employees feel about themselves and their roles in the workplace will diminish.

If leaders want high-performing, happy employees, actively relieving employee stress is the key. Keep reading for advice on how to do just that.

Get an idea of the stress level in your workplace

You can't mitigate employee stress effectively if you don't understand how stress is really affecting them. When you know what's stressing them out and how intense that stress is, you can develop solutions that actually help, rather than offering general solutions that may or may not be

effective.

Start with a survey asking employees how stressed they are on a scale from 1-10. Also, ask what's causing that stress. Provide potential reasons and an "other" option on the survey. After you receive responses to the survey, schedule an in-depth conversation with each employee.

Bring up their responses to the survey and ask them to give you more detail. Combining a survey with one-on-one meetings will give you a good idea of how stressed your employees are and what in and out of the workplace is causing that stress.

Lead with empathy

An adaptive leadership style is incredibly effective in relieving employee stress. This is because adaptive leaders are adept at defining vague problems, like employee stress, and empowering their employees to come up with potential solutions and pursue them.

To *be an adaptive leader*, you must adopt the principles of such a style. One of the most important is empathy. An empathetic person can put themselves in another person's shoes, absorbing how they feel and what they're going through.

This is especially important in relieving employee stress because if you can genuinely understand and feel what a person is going through, you can build trust with them. You can also tailor solutions to their stress to their unique circumstances.

The genuine conversations you have with your employees about their stress levels and triggers are a good start to growing your level of empathy.

It's also a good idea to take on each employee's role for the day. You'll be

able to experience their day-to-day and gauge just how manageable or unmanageable their workload is. You'll be able to feel exactly how they feel, which hopefully inspires you to develop solutions for stress quickly.

Practicing active listening is also important for leading with empathy and relieving employee stress.

Be an active listener

It's one thing to hear what your employees are saying. It's another to be thoroughly engaged in the conversation and absorb what they're saying intending to develop a mutual understanding and plan for moving forward.

The latter is active listening and you need to adopt it to relieve employee stress effectively. Active listening best practices include:

- Don't interrupt
- Maintain eye contact
- Listen without judgment
- Eliminate distractions
- Be aware of non-verbal cues
- Ask thoughtful follow-up questions
- Summarise your understanding of what was said before proceeding with your response

Go into every conversation with your employees to understand what they're going through a bit more than you did the day before. Set a goal to write down something you didn't know about the stressors your employees are facing.

You'll eventually grow a deep understanding of how stress is affecting your workplace and your employees that you can use to turn things

around efficiently.

Encourage taking care of their holistic health

A high level of stress is harmful to your employees, not just because it affects their performance and how they feel about themselves, but also because it can worsen certain health conditions.

For example, stress can cause strong emotional reactions that cause changes in one's breathing which can be especially dangerous for those with asthma. Anxiety and depression symptoms can become unmanageable with persistent stress. Stress can also trigger headaches and gastrointestinal issues like nausea.

Taking care of their physical health and well-being provides a two-pronged solution. Employees can keep their stress in check with healthier habits and better manage any existing health issues to promote strong holistic health.

You can encourage your employees to take care of themselves by:

- Being flexible with scheduling
- Ensuring they take all breaks and lunches
- Offering healthy snacks and food options
- Giving them mental health days in addition to sick days
- Offering wellness perks like discounted gym memberships, health weeks, and free counselling

When your employees take good care of themselves, their stress levels go down and their holistic health improves. Both of which are beneficial in the workplace.

Stress can bring a lot of negativity, underperforming, and unhappiness in the workplace. To ensure these things don't plague your workplace, you

must assume your role in relieving employee stress. Start with conversations about the level of stress in your workplace, lead with empathy, actively listen, and encourage your employees to take care of themselves.

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