

How startups can support employees' mental health without "wellbeing washing"

In recent years, workers have been demanding more meaningful mental health and wellbeing support from their employers. Startups desperate to attract top talent have answered with a whole host of 'workplace wellness' initiatives and benefits. But 'happiness officers' and branded water bottles which aren't backed up by the robust and professional mental health support (which teams so often really need) are signs of an increasing trend for "wellbeing washing" - where support is offered in public but not in practice.

Temps de lecture : minute

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This is hugely damaging for both sides. It's clear that proper mental health support is key to attracting and nurturing happy and healthy teams, whereby both individuals and businesses are able to thrive. So, here are 5 ways startups can truly protect employees' mental health and create supportive workplace cultures without "wellbeing washing".

1. Swap team yoga for real support

Offering team yoga and mindfulness apps alone no longer cuts it. 1 in 4 people struggle with mental health problems each year, and scores are being forced out of work as a result. Plus, rising costs and NHS waits are compounding issues for those unable to access treatment. For startups

who want to change this picture, providing access to professional mental health care - rather than simply papering over the cracks with wishy-washy wellbeing 'perks' - is a must.

Providing therapy and tailored mental health care through platforms like *Oliva* means that each employee is able to proactively protect and receive support for their individual mental health needs. For example, one member of staff might need bereavement counselling, the next might choose to take part in breathwork sessions to help tackle feelings of anxiety. It can also help employees to navigate tough life experiences like having a baby, moving countries, coming out or divorce.

2. Enable work-life balance

It's no good offering wellbeing benefits if company cultures don't enable staff to prioritise their mental health in reality. Those who feel pressure to be 'available' at all hours - an issue which is particularly acute for remote workers and small teams at fast-growing startups - risk burnout. Whereas company cultures that promote a healthy work-life balance avoid many of the issues which can compromise employees' mental health in the first place. Start by encouraging staff to take their full annual leave allowance, discourage teams from sending emails outside working hours, and ensure that those at the top are leading by example.

3. Tool up managers

Line managers are well-placed to spot when staff are struggling with their mental health and step in - if they know how. So investing in training that will teach managers the skills they need to foster open conversations and

support their teams' mental health is invaluable. And platforms like *Tough Conversations* give staff the tools to sensitively discuss tricky topics like layoffs, salary conversations and menstruation.

Plus, since increased responsibilities are more likely to come with increased pressures for managers themselves, mental health training will empower senior staff to protect their own mental health whilst also enabling their teams to thrive. Even so, dedicated support should be made available for managers who need it so that they too have someone else to lean on.

4. Embrace flexibility

Flexible work offers startups an accessible and *attractive* way of making a big difference to employees' *wellbeing* in reality. For example, local, co-working spaces could help one employee to avoid a long and stressful commute, whilst flexible hours might enable another team member to get the sleep they need to look after their mental health. Many people with additional physical health needs also rely on working from home.

There are plenty of different ways of working out there. So explore which options best meet the needs of both your business and your staff.

5. Ask staff what they need

Needs and preferences vary hugely from one person to the next. So taking a one-size fits all approach to employee wellbeing won't benefit individuals any more than sending everyone a one-size t-shirt would.

The solution is to ask individuals what would make the biggest difference

to their wellbeing. Encourage open conversations with teams around mental health and different needs, and give staff the option to fill out an anonymous survey if they'd prefer. Use their feedback to inform bespoke policies so that all staff members feel seen, heard and genuinely supported.

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