

SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

Cultivate Supportive People Managers

What is a single important action an employer can take to improve employee satisfaction and well-being at work? Invest in developing supportive and emotionally intelligent people managers. Research shows a consistent and strong relationship between managerial styles and employee stress and well-being. However, only 36% of employees feel they can rely on manager support.¹ Employees who do not feel supported by their manager experience increased stress levels and feelings of isolation and job dissatisfaction. Employees also report high rates of absenteeism (33%) and increased mental health concerns (63%).² Employers can help promote positive relationships between managers and workers through the following means.

Encourage fair and effective management practices.

As a first step, employers should establish expectations for how managers check in with employees and foster positive working relationships. Mentally healthy management practices can be integrated into an overall people management strategy, listed in the employee handbook, discussed during management training, and practiced or modeled at all levels of the organization. Managers should consider incorporating the following practices:

- Check in with direct reports regularly on a recurring schedule that works for both parties;
- Evaluate the direct report's workload regularly and assist where possible;
- Set clear and realistic expectations about work responsibilities;
- Be approachable with open-door and flexible policies;
- Understand how employees express signs of acute stress or burnout;
- Provide emotional support to employees;
- Provide employees with autonomy over their work;

- Build trust, respect, and collaboration as part of a manager-employee relationship;
- Ensure that the manager is checking in with themselves and their direct supervisor regularly.

Provide management training.

Employees who excel in one position may not excel in a managerial position without the proper training and guidance. Effective and supportive people management is a skill set that can be taught through training. Workplaces should invest in management training to ensure employees perform well in their new roles. See the "Mental Health Training Resources" section in the toolkit for suggested training.

Include shared decision-making in performance evaluations.

Instead of standard performance evaluations, employers can leverage the relationship between a manager and a direct report through shared decision-making or a 360-review process in which multiple stakeholders are providing feedback for improvement. Both the manager and direct report should have the opportunity to give bidirectional feedback and discuss professional goals collaboratively.

Encourage mentorship.

A mentor should serve as a trusted counselor or guide, provide expertise to less experienced individuals, and build a relationship based on communication. Treating a management position as a mentorship opportunity can help the manager focus on an employee's strengths, build a strong relationship, and help the employee grow professionally. In addition to people managers, board members, members from an alumni association, or peers can also serve as mentors.

Educate managers about emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the ability to manage your own emotions and understand the emotions of people around you. EQ has five key elements: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. People with high EQ can identify how they are feeling, what those feelings mean, and how those emotions impact their behavior and, in turn, other people. In the workplace, leaders must be self-aware, view things objectively, understand their strengths and weaknesses, be culturally competent and responsive, and act with humility.

HR, managers, and employees can download the following materials to assist in practicing supportive people management skills:

- 11 Tips for Talking to an Employee with a Mental Health Concern (Printable Postcard – Side 1)
- Understanding Stress and Burnout (Printable Postcard – Side 2)
- Emotionally Intelligent Manager Do's and Don'ts (Infographic)

Employer Spotlight: 2021-22 Bell Seal Recipients

EMPLOYER	INDUSTRY	PROGRAM
Faith Technologies Incorporated (FTI)	Construction	FTI's Culture of Care Champions are mental health-trained team members who help communicate and promote FTI's Culture of Care benefits to peers, serve as role models in the workplace, and devote their full attention to peers in need of support.
Health Federation of Philadelphia (HFP)	Public and community health	HFP's Supervisors Learning Collaborative is a peer network of middle managers that provides a forum for self-directed shared learning, peer support, and a "safe space" to share concerns and ideas.
Kearney	Consulting and professional services	Kearney's Mental Health Ambassadors are Mental Health First Aid-certified employees who peers can turn to if they need practical and emotional support at work. Ambassadors also help raise awareness, tackle stigma, encourage more open conversations, and create a sense of community to support mental health.
Kroger	Food Retail	Kroger's Leader Well-being "meeting-in-a-box" experience includes short videos, discussion guides, and probing questions to open up a dialogue on well-being and what actions leaders could take to better foster an environment of support.
Union Bank & Trust	Financial Services	Union Bank & Trust's Emotional Wellness 101 program grew organically from the belief that mental health exists on a spectrum and daily wellness routines benefit from incorporating emotional well-being. The program focuses on setting boundaries, how to be the support instead of the solution for others, and building positive coping mechanisms in daily life.

1. Hellebuyck, Michelle, et al. "Mind the Workplace 2018 Report." Mental Health America, <https://www.mhanational.org/sites/default/files/Mind%20the%20Workplace%20-%20MHA%20Workplace%20Health%20Survey%202017%20FINAL.pdf>.

2. Ibid.