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EDITORS' PICK

Managers Have Major Impact On Mental Health: How To Lead For Wellbeing

Tracy Brower, PhD Contributor 

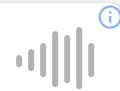
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Leaders have an outside impact on mental health. GETTY

New data suggests that for almost 70% of people, their manager has more [impact on their mental health](#) than their therapist or their doctor—and it's equal to the impact of their partner. If you're a leader, you're right to [find this data sobering](#).

The stakes for leadership have always been high, but knowing you're affecting people that much, is cause for leaders to take stock and ensure they're doing all they can to be their best and have their most positive impacts on people.

Mental Health Matters

According to 69% of people, their managers had the greatest impact on their mental health, on par with the impact of their partner. And this was more than the impact of their doctor (51%) or therapist (41%). This is according to a new study by [The Workforce Institute at UKG](#) which included 3,400 people across 10 countries.

A large number of people are affected by stress. In fact, according to the study, 43% of employees report they are exhausted, and 78% say stress negatively impacts their work performance. Other aspects of life are also affected as 71% say stress at work negatively impinges on their home life, 64% say it detracts from their wellbeing and 62% say it degrades their relationships.

In addition to the human reasons to pay attention to mental health, business also benefits. When people have positive mental health, 63% say they are committed to their work and 80% say they're energized.

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The Leadership Role

Leaders have a critical role to play in contributing to the conditions for positive mental health—their own and others’. Here are the most impactful approaches.

Manage Yourself

Many leaders try to shield team members from stress or challenge by taking on the toughest work—or the extra work—themselves. In addition, they can put in long hours and intrude on their own boundaries in the process. In fact, 35% of leaders in the Workforce Institute study reported they are stressed at work and 42% felt it was because of the stress they put on themselves.

As a leader, say no to too much work for yourself or your team, and resist the urge to take on the work yourself. People watch how you manage your own workload and they use your choices as a model—whether you mean them to or not. So avoid overloading yourself. Train others, delegate, empower and ensure teamwork and coordination with other groups so everything doesn’t fall on your shoulders.

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Recognize Your Impact

The research also found a third of people say their manager fails to recognize their own impact on others’ wellbeing. Be aware of the leadership laser. People are influenced by everyone around them, but leaders have an outsize impact—and people tend to put leader behavior under a microscope, paying especially close attention to what leaders say and do.

Emphasize empathy because it's the right thing to do, and because it has positive impacts on innovation, engagement and retention. Ask people how they're doing, tune in when you see they may be out of sorts or when they may need support because they're working on an especially challenging problem.

In addition, connect people to resources—whether it's an employee assistance program, the HR team or programs to support them. According to the Workforce Institute study, 70% of people would like their manager to do more to support mental health—and these are ways you can do just that.



Leaders must take care of themselves first. GETTY

Give People a Reason To Care

When people feel a connection to purpose and a bigger picture, they tend to feel better about their work as well. Remind people about the vision and mission of the organization, and be clear about how their work matters.

According to recent [Gallup](#) research, when people work in a hybrid manner (which is a large proportion of workers today), they may especially struggle with feeling connected to the purpose of the organization and its culture, and they may not be

clear about their expectations or the meaning of their work. You can help by inspiring purpose and giving them a clear sense of what success means for their job, and how it connects to the work of their colleagues and customers.

Connect People

You can also positively impact on people's wellbeing by making sure you're accessible and responsive. Be available, get back to people quickly and provide clarity about how and when people can reach you. When **leaders are more present and accessible**, it contributes to trust, positive culture and people's sense of their importance in the organization.

Also **connect team members with others in the organization**.

Connection is critical to wellbeing and happiness, whether people are introverts or extroverts. Help team members set up mentoring relationships, organize work so people are collaborating across departments and consider sponsoring volunteer efforts for team members to join together in serving the community.

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Provide Challenge

One of the misunderstandings about stress is that less is more. In reality, people need a just-right, Goldilocks amount of stress. With too little challenge, people will lose motivation and burnout, just as they will with too much.

Be sure you're giving people opportunities to learn and develop. Ask them what they want in their current roles and in their next role. Don't assume everyone wants promotions within the same

department. For some, growth may include roles in adjacent departments or involvement on a high-visibility project. For others, stretch opportunities could be classroom-oriented or could include working side-by-side with others on a special initiative.

Be curious about people and what uniquely motivates them—and then do your best to match their desires with work that will add value within the organization.

Give People Choice

When people have choice and autonomy, they are more likely to experience all kinds of wellbeing. And flexibility has positive outcomes for business as well, including innovation and retention, [according to a study by Atlassian](#).

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Empower people with as much choice as possible in where, when and how they work. Give them control over the projects they work on and the way they get things done. Of course [some jobs will lend themselves](#) to greater flexibility than others, but providing autonomy where it's possible is a significant contributor to employee wellbeing.

Staying Healthy

The best leaders take care of their own mental health, and they pay attention to their team members as well. It's no small thing to have so much impact on people, but it's also not rocket science. Leaders can make big impacts by tuning in, listening and demonstrating empathy and compassion. The stakes are high,

but the chances of success are also high, when leaders are intentional about doing their best.

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