

Why supporting employees' mental wellbeing is still important

Opinions

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As we acknowledge World Mental Health Day on 10 October, we're revisiting an article written last year about [supporting employee's mental wellbeing](#).

Mental health impacts everybody, whether they are unwell themselves, or they are the friend, family, or colleague of someone who is unwell. It is important to consider that for some, their illness remains well hidden and almost undetectable.

Although it is more of a description of a person's lived experience as opposed to a medically accepted term, 'high functioning mental illness' would refer to those whose mental illness does not 'obviously' impact their day to day living and interactions.

Looking back at last year's article, we noted that, on average, an individual spends 40 hours a week dedicated to their job - 200 hours a month. For those who suffer any mental health issues, whether long term and pervasive or sudden and intermittent, working in an environment that is not supportive can exacerbate any issues.

Those who experience sudden and intermittent mental illness are typically supported by wellbeing initiatives in the workplace. With access to medical professionals, mental health first aiders in the workplace, and developing a culture of support, companies can assist their employees as and when needed.

But for those who are 'high functioning', that may not be enough. Medical professionals don't typically accommodate those they deem as not needing 'urgent' attention, meaning referrals to them are not particularly helpful. Additionally, as the role suggests, a mental health 'first aider' is equipped to deal with providing immediate assistance at the first level, and therefore unlikely to train in the skill that is required to support someone dealing with pervasive mental health issues.

TAB's open door policy, as mentioned in the article, encourages all employees to voice any issues, either personally or professionally. Providing a platform to be heard is incredibly important, especially for those who may be accidentally overlooked to accommodate those who are presenting in crisis.

However, not all who suffer from mental illness, whether high functioning or not, are able to be vocal about their experiences. For those who aren't high functioning, their mental health issues are quite

easily detectable and will most likely be obvious to family, friends and colleagues, but for those who are undetectably unwell, what can be done to support them in the workplace?

Something that has been utilised by TAB is the Officevibe weekly survey, an anonymous questionnaire that invites employees to provide feedback on any topic. As described in the previous article, TAB has been able to make several positive changes to the working environment thanks to the feedback from staff, including free healthy food and fruit available in the staff kitchen, healthier additions to the staff canteen that also cater to those with different dietary requirements, and shorter and flexible working hours. By seeing their feedback valued and implemented, TAB can demonstrate its culture of support and caring for its employees. This can help to encourage those who are not as vocal about their experiences to feel more supported in opening up about their illnesses.

TAB also organises and encourages regular social gatherings, which is a great benefit to our environment of trust and transparency. By providing opportunities for their employees to socialise outside of working together, employees can share their experiences, thoughts and feelings with their colleagues, resulting in more empathy for each other and a better shared understanding. Another example of developing TAB's culture comes with our Thursday training sessions, where we hear from different departments and learn about elements of their roles within TAB. In one of our sessions we took the opportunity to pair with someone we wouldn't normally work with and take the time to learn about each other and our experiences both in and out of the office. Activities like this go a long way to boosting how comfortable each employee feels.

Obviously there is still a long way to go for companies to provide support to their workforce to help them with any issue or illness they are experiencing, but companies like TAB who demonstrate a desire to understand and support all their employees by listening to feedback and nurturing a culture of trust and transparency are going in the right direction.

It continues to be important to acknowledge everyone's individual experience, and to be proactive about employee wellbeing, especially on World Mental Health Day.

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