5 Ways to Support Early Career Employees' Mental Health

The past few years have brought innumerable challenges and seismic shifts to the way businesses operate. But a new universal focus and perspective on the importance of *mental health* can, and should, stand as a lasting positive legacy.

No longer a taboo topic, companies now feel called to acknowledge and take actions to address the increasing mental health crisis. In fact, 92% of CEOs reported their company has focused more efforts on mental health as a result of the COVID pandemic.

This is particularly relevant for early career employees, since approximately [75% of young adults have left a job because of mental health reasons](#). As companies evaluate the motivations behind the Great Resignation and identify areas where they can take ownership and accountability, mental health should be top-of-mind.

So, what *can* companies do to better support and actively care for their early career employees when it comes to mental health?

1. Establish a Culture of Caring
Management can take responsibility for checking in with employees regularly to ask: "How are you doing?" This is personal, much more than "How is the project coming along?" or "How are things going with the client?" Leadership needs to show genuine interest in their employees' wellbeing, beyond their work responsibilities.

In a 2020 [Qualtrics study](#), 38% of employees said that no one at their company had checked in with them during the pandemic. Asking how someone is doing may seem basic, but it should be an

intentional component of any 1:1 or team meeting. And for employees to feel confident in truthfully sharing their feelings, managers should also be vulnerable about challenges of their own.

Employees who said their "manager is not good at communicating" were [23% more likely to experience mental health declines](#). Steady and consistent communication fosters a culture of *actively* caring.

2. Create an Environment of Trust and Safety
"Checking your personal life at the door" when you come to work is an antiquated practice. The lines between work and home can oftentimes be blurred, especially in remote and hybrid work environments. Actively caring about employees involves creating an atmosphere in which they feel comfortable sharing their vulnerabilities, worries, and shortcomings—even with their managers.

Honest and empathetic communication is key to building this environment of trust. Applying listening tools, such as mirroring and paraphrasing,

can help employees feel heard and understood. Simply framing a response with, "If I'm hearing you correctly, it sounds like . . . ," can help increase connection and demonstrate empathy.

Ultimately, if an employee doesn't feel free to talk openly about their challenges, the unexpressed stress will find other ways to manifest—such as poor performance, disengagement, or even choosing to leave the company.

3. Be Sure Employees Know About Available Resources and How to Access Them
Among US employers, 93% offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). However, only half of their employees are aware that they have access to one. Companies can invest as much as possible in improving and supporting employee mental health, but without communicating effectively about the available resources, those efforts are wasted.

Management teams need training, tools, and frameworks to navigate not just mental health crises, but everyday conversations that can arise about mental health challenges. This starts at the top, by destigmatizing reaching out for help if needed, and encouraging employees to take the necessary steps. Proactiveness in connecting employees to resources not only shows active care for employees, but also helps with employee retention.

4. Fight Burnout with Flexibility
Employee burnout has become a serious problem. Young professionals, even though in the early stages of their careers, are not immune to the effects of unrelenting stress. In fact, 59% of early career employees reported feeling burnout in 2021.

In an atmosphere of open communication and trust, employers can help spot the warning signs of burnout before it's too late. But to avoid burnout altogether, employers need to provide the flexibility necessary for employees to prioritize their mental

health. This means enabling individuals to create a work structure that reflects their needs, lifestyle, strengths, and habits.

It's also important for managers to provide, understand, and respect boundaries. Clear expectations can prevent miscommunication and unnecessary stress.

5. Create Opportunities for Meaningful Connection
A 2021 study by the Making Caring Common Project of Harvard's Graduate School of Education showed that 61% of millennial and Gen-Z employees talked about experiencing serious issue of loneliness. To combat the feelings of isolation, it is essential that organizations create opportunities for connection.

Whether it's offering chances to join an Employee Resource Group, or additional training and development opportunities alongside peers, or more virtual means of collaborating (Slack groups, etc.), facilitating valuable human interaction helps early career employees feel a sense of purpose and belonging.

Take Action!
Early career professionals appreciate when companies recognize the importance of mental health support. For individuals to be their best, professionally and personally, they need to be aware of their own mental health, and trust that their employer is invested in their success, both inside and outside of the workplace.

Thankfully, over the past few years, the world seems to have collectively realized that it's okay to "not be okay," and to ask for help. Companies need to normalize discussions about mental health and help individuals gain the communication skills and confidence needed to have those conversations.