

How Organisations Can Help Employees Fight Burnout

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After a year of navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, it's not uncommon for employees to face stress and a feeling of hitting the wall. The current pandemic is adding further pressure on employees as many companies have implemented work-from-home strategies to help curb the spread of Covid-19 and put employee safety first. However, while this offers several benefits for employees, it also can lead to burnout as employees struggle to break away from workplace stress while they juggle personal commitments with office stress all from the comfort of their homes.

While burnout is a syndrome that typically results from chronic workplace stress that has not been managed and is often separate from other areas of a person's life, the impact of the pandemic is contributing to burnout due to several factors. According to the South African Depression and Anxiety Group¹ online survey on the impact of the lockdown on mental health, the Covid-19 lockdown has increased stress levels from 59% before Covid-19 to 65% during the Covid-19 lockdown.

At this stage in the pandemic, employers need to have a comprehensive strategy for identifying signs of burnout and supporting employees that may be facing difficulties. Here are ways that organisations can mitigate employee burnout and foster resiliency in the workplace.

Provide self-care and health options

When the Covid-19 crisis began, all focus shifted on keeping people physically safe. But as the months continued on it became clear that the workforce also needed mental and emotional support, especially as employees are often working in isolation. This is supported by Mental Health America², which states that loneliness and isolation are great contributing factors to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

To help employees overcome this, HR needs to focus attention on the care and leadership needed to help its workforce during this time. For example, many companies are offering support through HR and partnerships with outside services, including online mental health counselling. It is also important that managers across the organisation are well versed in these offerings and provide them proactively and regularly to employees, especially before employee wellbeing declines.

Plan ahead for flexible arrangements

One source of stress for employees could be how their work arrangements will change as a result of amendments to lockdown regulations, the rollout of vaccinations and how this will impact the possibility of returning to the office. At this time it is important to continue to communicate with teams about their preferences and how the company may be able to accommodate their needs in the future, whether that's working from home, adopting a hybrid model or a return to a physical location to reduce isolation and increase collaboration. As each employee is an individual, they are likely to have different preferences which need to be considered in planning for the future.

¹ https://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3094:covid-19-infograph&catid=11:general&Itemid=101

² <https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/Coronavirus%20Mental%20Health%20Presentation%207-1-2020.pdf>

Discuss training and education

Anyone can feel stuck in a rut when they've been in their home for a year, and that can extend to a sense of sameness in a work routine. Even if promotions aren't available right now, it's still helpful to initiate career conversations, discuss training and upskilling with employees, and look to future opportunities. Knowing that growth can come through on the other side of the crisis can keep employees motivated and help to build resiliency.

Remind employees to take breaks

One of the simplest interventions can also be one of the most effective — regularly reminding and encouraging employees to take breaks, disconnect and take their leave. The digital always-on culture of working where you live can easily lead to burnout if there aren't boundaries put in place - and a supportive management system to encourage them.

Working toward combating burnout is going to take regular practice over the coming months, as the world economy isn't out of the woods on the battle against Covid-19. Organisations should stay vigilant in protecting not just their employee's physical health, but also their mental and emotional health as well. This is particularly true as workers want more from their employers, including security, sustainability of skills, work-life blend and wellness. For this reason, employers that show they are committed to both their workforce along with their customers and shareholders will be able to attract, retain and support the best talent.

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