

Leading a Healthy Workplace

Most people don't usually associate their workplace with good health. In fact, many would probably say their job is *the source* of many unhealthy habits including a lack of exercise and weight gain—especially as work hours increase and free time becomes more and more of a luxury. If this sounds like you, you're not alone.

This doesn't, however, have to be the case with you and your employees. Do you want healthy employees who are more productive, happy and full of energy? As a manager or people leader, you not only set an example for your employees, but can also have a great impact on their behaviour. Creating a healthy work environment starts from the top down. Learn how to inspire your employees to get healthy and avoid common workplace health hinderers, by following the tips below.

Start With a Healthy Workspace

A poorly laid-out, disorganized and cluttered work environment can lead to a lot of unnecessary aggravation. Mental frustration can become physically exhausting and can wreck havoc on productivity. Create a more attractive, enticing and healthy workspace by:

Creating a “work-free” oasis. There should be at least one designated space in the workplace where employees can go to escape, sit in peace and take their mind off of work for a while. If you already have a designated lunch room for workers, ask yourself if it is truly inviting: *Is it bright and well-lit? Calm, quiet and comfortable?* These are all things that are necessary for the room to truly be a “work-free” zone.

If you don't have a whole room to spare, just creating a quiet corner with some chairs, books and magazines. These can do wonders for your employees to help them re-group and stay refreshed.

Encouraging ergonomics. Repetitive movements such as typing, improperly using equipment and awkward work positions are the top causes of workplace injuries. Without a preventative plan, you run the risk of losing valuable staff for what could be an extended period of time.

If someone in the workplace is knowledgeable about ergonomics, have him/her examine the workspaces of employees to ensure they are ergonomically sound. If not, it may be worth it to bring in a consultant who can make the necessary adjustments.

Another strategy is to teach your employees simple tips that may prevent injury, such as stretching and taking regular breaks to get up and move away from their workstation for a few minutes. Encouraging workers to take short breaks actively demonstrates your interest in employee well-being, and can improve your overall work environment—physically and emotionally.

Holding a department or company-wide de-cluttering. Encourage employees to clean up and organize their workstations by scheduling it into their workday. Most people have trouble squeezing this into their day, so set aside time for this regularly. Helping workers make a clean sweep of things can help free up workspace, leave them feeling 'lighter,' and help everyone stay more organized. And who knows...someone may come across an important document or item that had previously gone missing in action.

Create a Healthy Social Environment

Studies suggest you can increase the overall productivity of your employees by creating loyalty; loyalty to each other and loyalty to you as a manager. If employees feel loyal to co-workers and managers, they are less likely to look for other jobs and will be willing to go the extra mile to ensure things are running smoothly. Encouraging social interaction both inside and outside of work can help build this loyalty and creates an environment where people want to work and remain. Start by:

Giving workers a break. A manager who understands and appreciates employees' desire to do well at work and home will have loyal employees. Make sure the hours you expect your employees to work are reasonable and that they are recognized in some way for extra hours they work (whether it's lieu time, a bonus or even just bringing in lunch to thank them for their hard work). Simple gestures can go a long way in showing appreciation.

Trade the watering hole for a workout. Instead of going out for drinks with the team every week, why not try a group jog or joining a sports league together as a team? Not only is this great for everyone's overall fitness, it can also promote team-building and help you get to know your staff better in a more comfortable, less formal setting.

Encourage open communication. Let your employees know you have an open-door policy when it comes to discussing their concerns or issues. Doing so can help you stay in the loop and create a sense of connectedness amongst team members.

Make Healthy Lifestyle Choices

The benefits of having a staff that is fit and healthy are tremendous. Supporting healthy choices encourages healthier behaviours: e.g., better stress coping strategies, less time off on sick leave, improved work-life balance and (hopefully) increased productivity while at work. Lead by example and encourage your staff to follow this lead by:

Stopping the temptation. Instead of bringing in donuts or high-fat muffins to a morning meeting and encouraging everyone to "eat up," serve up a fruit tray or some whole grain bagels. Also, encourage your staff to bring in healthy lunches by hosting a regularly-scheduled "healthy recipe" potluck. Have everyone bring in a meal and a copy of the recipe to share with the team. This promotes healthy eating at work and at home by giving everyone the chance to add new and healthy recipes to their repertoire.

Make wellness meetings a part of your monthly schedule. Show your staff you care about their health and well-being by including a health and wellness topic—either for presentation or discussion—as part of your meeting agenda. Choose a different topic every month such as maintaining a healthy weight, or stress management and brainstorm with staff about ways to encourage these within the organization. Or, if time and budget allow, enlist a professional's help to present on the topic—whether it's an exercise instructor who comes in to demonstrate stretching techniques or a nutritionist to discuss healthy eating tips. Anything you can do to encourage health and wellness and make it fun will make it easier for your employees to adopt these healthy lifestyle choices.

Actions truly do speak louder than words. The best way to lead a healthy workplace is to live it yourself. If you're encouraging your staff to get healthy but are overworking yourself, eating take-out all the time and seem perpetually tired and stressed, it's unlikely they'll heed your advice. Take this opportunity to look at the way you're living your life and decide what simple changes you can make now to be the boss who practices what you preach!

If you require support to deal with a sensitive employee situation, contact Shepell-fgi to find out more about the consultation and training services your Employee Assistance Program provides.

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