

10 hallmarks of psychologically safe workplaces

With the average working adult spending about 1,900 hours per year on the job, it's no surprise that workplace conditions can deeply affect how employees feel.

Experts in workplace mental health have identified factors that can influence our psychological health and well-being while on the job. As a people leader, it's important to understand each of the factors to ensure you're contributing to a psychologically healthy workplace.

1. **Psychological support:** Organizations that are psychologically supportive take action to safeguard the mental well-being of employees and provide appropriate resources when employees need help. When employees feel they have psychological support at work, they are more loyal to the company, more satisfied with their job, more effective at what they do and happier to go to work.
2. **Organizational culture:** Trust, honesty and fairness are all trademarks of organizations with healthy corporate cultures. A positive culture can have a dramatic effect on the mental well-being of its employees and contributes significantly to workplace satisfaction.
3. **Clear leadership and expectations:** Effective leadership and clearly-defined expectations create an environment where employees know what it means to succeed. It also leads to high employee morale and organizational trust. Lack of leadership and unclear expectations can increase frustration and stress.
4. **Civility and respect:** Work cultures that are respectful and considerate foster good employee morale, low absenteeism, excellent teamwork and high levels of perceived fairness. The result? A culture marked by positivity and widespread job satisfaction.
5. **Growth and development:** Employees that are given opportunities to grow and develop their professional and interpersonal skills creates a more committed workforce that performs better in current and future roles.
6. **Recognition and reward:** Organizations that are good at recognition and reward know how to appropriately appreciate the efforts of its employees in a timely way. Workforces that are recognized and rewarded are more motivated, confident and tend to exceed expectations.
7. **Involvement and influence:** Employees want to feel that they have a voice at work. When employees are engaged and empowered effectively, the result is higher morale, job satisfaction and a healthier corporate culture. When employees feel like their opinion doesn't matter or they aren't permitted to make decisions in areas that should logically be within their authority, stress builds and job satisfaction suffers.
8. **Workload management:** Environments that consistently overburden staff with an unreasonable workload cause significant stress and reap emotional havoc. However, a challenging yet realistic workload creates job satisfaction and builds confidence.
9. **Balance:** Employers that recognize the importance of work-life balance and feature flexible policies that respect the demands of the individual's home life create a happier, less stressed and more productive employment culture.

Looking for additional support? Your Employee Assistance and Work/Life Program can help through a variety of resources. Call your Employee and Family Assistance and Work/Life Program at 1 866 468-9461. Visit shepellfgi.com.

10. **Psychological protection:** Employers that promote mental well-being at work and take proactive steps to prevent psychological harm create an environment of openness and trust – employees feel confident that they can speak up and voice their opinion or concern without fear of consequence.

A psychologically safe workplace benefits everyone – it reduces turnover, reduces cost and creates a productive, effective working environment that people enjoy.

For more information on how you can contribute to a psychologically safe workplace, contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider for professional support and confidential People Leader Consultations.

How to create a psychologically safe workplace

Today's employers feature physically safe environments because significant attention and priority have been given to ensuring the workplace will not put employees at risk.

As the emotional and financial burden associated with mental illness become an increasing focus for employers, it is important to create and contribute to a psychologically safe working environment.

Steps to creating a mentally healthy workplace

- **Pay attention.** Keep an eye on your team members' workload and signs of stress. Do they seem overburdened? Are you noticing a shift in their personality? Take the time to sit down with them, and adjust their workload if they seem unfairly burdened.
- **Be flexible.** Work commitments and home life challenges can collide to create the perfect storm for employees. However, flexible hours, telecommuting policies and compressed workweeks can be effective ways to boost employee job satisfaction and productivity while reducing stress.
- **Empower and challenge.** Give employees the appropriate authority to do their job and make decisions that are logically within their scope. Offer challenging and rewarding work that will allow them to grow and stretch professionally, while providing job satisfaction.
- **Recognize.** Take the time to acknowledge a job well done whenever possible. In other words, catch people doing things *right*. When employees feel acknowledged and appreciated, it can make a big difference to their state of mind at work.
- **Set team members up for success.** Ensure your team members have what they need to succeed – whether it is access to information, more training or personal direction, and/or coaching from you.
- **Be fair.** Remember that as a people leader you need to exercise fairness in all aspects of leadership. Preferential treatment, inequitable distribution of work and inconsistent expectations can cause resentment and stress within the team.

Looking for additional support? Your Employee Assistance and Work/Life Program can help through a variety of resources. Call your Employee and Family Assistance and Work/Life Program at 1 866 468-9461. Visit shepellfgi.com.

- **Promote respect in the workplace.** Implement a zero tolerance philosophy (or promote your organization's policy if you have one) for bullying, gossiping and sabotage. Every employee deserves the right to be respected in the workplace and should feel respected on the job.
- **Be supportive.** Has an employee come to you with issues they're experiencing on the job? Or are you aware of an employee who is experiencing a mental health concern? If so, be responsive and supportive. Additionally, make sure they are aware of the resources available to them – such as their Employee Assistance Program.
- **Evaluate.** Take a good, objective look at the culture of your organization and department – is it conducive to good mental health, or are there easily identified issues that need to be addressed? Be proactive and take the steps necessary to create a positive, healthy working environment that benefits everyone.

Protecting the mental well-being of employees on the job is a fundamental component of being a responsible employer – it's good for employees and it's good for business. To learn more about creating and fostering mentally healthy workplaces, contact your Employee Assistance Program.

References:

http://www.guardingmindsatwork.ca/info/risk_factors

http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/Pages/workforce_workplace_pathways.aspx

http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/mentalhealth_work.html

http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Workforce_2011/The_Road_to_Psychological_Safety.pdf

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/small-business/sb-tools/ten-ways-to-create-a-mentally-healthy-workplace/article4249099/>

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/wired-success/201209/the-silent-tsunami-mental-health-in-the-workplace>

http://www.psychologicallysafeworkplace.ca/mental_health.html

Looking for additional support? Your Employee Assistance and Work/Life Program can help through a variety of resources. Call your Employee and Family Assistance and Work/Life Program at 1 866 468-9461. Visit shepellfgi.com.