




Decrease Burnout: Adapt a Wellness Culture in the Workplace

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I hate to be the bearer of bad news but its official...we are unhappy. Although, I think for everyone who declares depression and anxiety are normal, this comes as no surprise. If there is any doubt in your mind whether this is statement is true, the 2019 World Happiness Report backs me up. It ranked the U.S. at 19 out of 156 countries, which is our worst ranking since the report started in 2012. Sadly, over the last three years our ranking has dropped lower and lower instead of rising.

So, why in a country where we rank high on the prosperity index is our ranking falling? The World Happiness Report calculates a countries' rank by tracking the following: GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy at birth, social support from friends and family, freedom to make life choices, generosity in the form of donations to charity and perceptions of government corruption. Therefore, unless you have been living under a rock for the past three years, you can understand why we probably aren't the happiest right now.

I know there are a vast amount of people who would equate our unhappiness to the government category (wink, wink) however, researchers pin the blame on declines in social capital and social support as well as increases in obesity and substance abuse. Co-author of the report, Jeffrey Sachs, calls the United States a "mass-addiction society." He wrote that the prevalence of addictions – including gambling, social media use, video gaming, shopping, consuming unhealthy foods, exercising and engaging in extreme sports or risky sexual behaviors – in American society seems to be on the rise, perhaps dramatically.

His conclusion isn't off base. Abetted by the influence of marketing and putting profits over people, our American society has created a false narrative of what success should be. Burnout and struggling are put on a pedestal as a "prerequisite" to having it all. And by having it all we equate success to how abundant our material items are, not necessarily if we are truly happy or in good health. The false conviction of this narrative is woven so tight into our thoughts. On the outside we look like we have it together, yet deep inside we are falling apart at the seams.

Burnout, exhaustion and hormonal disharmony are the new normal. Addiction is on the rise because we just don't crave an outlet to numb the pain and decrease the stress, we desperately need it. Just think of how many people you know (maybe even you) that throughout the day state, "I'm so stressed, I can't wait to get home to have a drink" or "If I just make it to the weekend I can relax."

This way of life isn't normal and it's a huge problem. So much so, that, burnout has become an official medical diagnosis. Yes, you heard me correct. The World Health Organization, in the ICD-11, classifies burnout as "a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed."

With all this gloom and doom, is there something that can be done? Is there a solution? Yes, American employers can adapt a wellness culture into the workplace. Changing a company's culture to create a supportive foundation will increase overall health, happiness and success of its employees. This will lead to a decrease in employee dissatisfaction, turnover, absenteeism, insurance costs and overall overhead leading to an increased profit revenue.

Continuing the unsupportive culture that is only concerned about employee's performance hurts companies as a whole. The unwillingness to put the time and resources together to help an employee become the best version of his or herself only decreases overall performance. Employees become dissatisfied and turnover becomes a huge setback. In the US, for high-turnover, low-paying jobs, it costs employers 16 percent of a worker's annual salary. For example the cost to replace a \$10/hour retail employee would \$3,328.

When a company adopts a wellness culture they consider the whole employee and shift to a person centered approach to business. I do want to make it clear that adopting a wellness culture is not the same as implementing an employee wellness program. In fact, current research has revealed that corporate wellness programs, especially those run through insurance companies, alone do not boost worker health and productivity – it's whether employees identify that they company genuinely cares.

Therefore, we have to encourage companies to take a holistic approach to employee wellness by going beyond corporate wellness programs, annual biometric screenings and corporate flu shots. What most companies have in place, is most likely not working due to only one aspect of health being addressed. Programs that are successful are developed from a committee within the corporation that include a contracted wellness or health coach as a guide. The committee creates a wellness program that offers activities, resources and education to cover all aspects of health including: stress management, trauma awareness, effective communication, financial wellness, social well-being, mental health, physical health, preventative care, physical activity, nutrition and professional development.

In every presentation I give regarding adopting a wellness culture as a lifestyle or in the workplace, I always ask attendees, "Contemplate how work effects your mood and relates to your health. Are you working for a purpose or for a paycheck?" Those that willingly express to me that they work for a paycheck, 95% of the time have at least one

chronic health issue. Imagine how much happier, healthier and successful our communities would be if we provided a supportive culture in our workplaces.

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