

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness promotes better health, better peace of mind and improved work performance.

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The recent findings of the annual Gallup Global Emotions Report* showed that in 2018 American respondents reported feeling stress, anger and worry at the highest levels in a decade. Of course these emotional challenges can't be compartmentalized and left at the entrance of a workplace each day.

So what is an employer to do? While employers of all sizes understand the importance of mental health activations, engagement is key to addressing concerns related to productivity, absenteeism and health care costs.

But a well-being survey** conducted by Cigna, a global health service company, discovered that only 25% of Americans report any assistance or support from their employer in managing stress – a 17% decline from 2018. For those with workplace wellness programs in place, more than a third of the survey respondents said that they fail to address mental health well-being. One reason for this could be that employers don't have the tools, resources or trusted partnerships to address mental health well-being. As a result, they could experience pressure on their organizational bottom line and the culture of well-being they strive to achieve.

The good news is that mindfulness is a technique that can easily be incorporated into an overall workplace wellness program that advocates for whole-person health. Mindfulness is a skill of being "in the now" while having a nonjudgmental and openhearted attitude. During a mindful practice, you purposefully pay attention to surroundings, emotions, thoughts and how the body feels. You let go of thoughts and accept things as they are in the present moment.

Here are some examples of stressful situations you and your teams may experience while serving your communities.

- ▶ Residents flooding the office with calls about the disruptive road construction project

- ▶ A key grant proposal is not submitted on time
- ▶ Contentious contract negotiations that garner media attention
- ▶ A team member is frequently not showing up to work, putting the goals and priorities of the organization at risk

In response, turn to mindfulness. It can be practiced anytime, anywhere, through any channel and align with individual lifestyle preferences. Employers can offer regularly scheduled mindfulness sessions by phone during work hours, and recommend resources, such as podcasts, available through multiple channels. And they can partner with their health service company and other stakeholders to encourage more personalized engagement among the employee population. These practices might include breathing exercises, walking and listening to calming sounds or music.

The benefit of bringing the practice of these skills into the workplace is that employees can then deploy them in other areas, such as when they need to focus on an important task, be present and tuned in at a meeting, and even at home, hence helping to boost productivity, outcomes and reduce subjective stress levels.

In conjunction with an employer-driven or personal mindfulness program, or any mental or physical lifestyle change, it is important to include an annual check-up with a health care provider. This provides an opportunity to be open about how you are feeling – both physically and mentally. Individually and collectively, if we make the important connections between physical and mental health we support help improve outcomes, peace of mind and work performance.

Together, all the way.®



*Gallup 2019 Global Emotions Report.
**Cigna 360 Well-Being Survey, March 2019.

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