



Nine Ways to Create a Culture of Mental Well-Being

Description

Part Six of a Six-Part Series

This column is the final installment of our six-part series on mental well-being. In the past weeks, we've covered a lot of territory on how leaders can [assess mental health](#) in the workplace and [reduce the stigma](#) associated with mental health issues. We've talked about the importance of being an [empathetic leader](#) and how (and why) to make [meaningful connections](#) with employees. And we've also addressed why a [well-run organization](#) is an antidote to issues like stress and burnout. I invite you to go back and review any and all of these columns if you'd like a refresher.

Today's topic, creating a culture of well-being, connects back to many of the previous columns in the series. There are many things we as leaders can do to improve the work environment and culture in ways that promote mental wellness. We'll take a look at some of them, including a few that I've written about before.

Here are just a few ways you can get intentional about creating a great place to work:

Promote collegiality and teamwork. [Dr. Stephen Beeson](#) recently did a presentation in which he talked about the fact that a sense of collegiality, community, and belonging is the most powerful countermeasure to burnout. He clearly explained how the best antidote to the exhaustion, cynicism, and disconnection that come with burnout is being part of a strong, collaborative team. Click [here](#) to learn more about the very specific behaviors that the best team members exhibit—behaviors that create a sense of belonging and ensure that even in the toughest circumstances, they will keep pressing forward.

Model healthy behavior. Take vacations. Don't work extreme hours. Get help if you need it (and don't try to hide it). Some or all of this advice may go against the grain for many leaders, but that only shows how deeply embedded these expectations are. We need to play a fundamental role in making the shift. Here, as in other areas, leadership is an inside job.

Make a practice of looking for what's right. We tend to look for what's wrong, almost by default. Balance out this tendency by training yourself to see what's going well. [Jay Kaplan](#), MD,

FACEP, medical director of care transformation at LCMC Health in New Orleans, talks about showcasing “legacy moments,” which are those times in which an employee made a difference in someone’s life. This is a great way to connect people back to the sense of meaning that helps prevent and heal burnout.

Say “thank you” sincerely and often. Gratitude is contagious. And even if it doesn’t change things for you, as the saying goes, it changes you for things.

Recognize small wins and daily progress. [Liz Jazwiec, RN](#), an authority on leadership, employee engagement, and service excellence, says we need to get in the habit of “finding the glimmers.” Basically, this means looking in the mirror and saying, “You were enough today.” Finding and celebrating small wins helps counteract that “hamster wheel” feeling that nothing you do matters. Studies show you don’t need big accomplishments to feel good about your work. What you really need is a sense of daily progress.

Reward and recognize people where they are. For example, when I was at Holy Cross, we held a hospital-wide celebration when we hit the 40th percentile in patient satisfaction. Then we raised the bar and said, “Now our next goal is to get to the 60th percentile, then 75th, then 90th, then 99th.” Eventually we were in the top one percentile in patient experience!

Behavior that gets rewarded and recognized gets repeated. Not only does it lead to great results, it replenishes emotional bank accounts, builds strong relationships between leaders and staff, and creates the kind of culture where talent wants to be.

Encourage a culture of gratitude. At times, we all want to change what’s happening around us. Most of the time, we can’t. What we *can* do is shift our perspective. We can see the world from a place of gratitude, and that leaves little room for focusing on the things that weigh us down and make us miserable. Click [here](#) for a *PNJ* column that explores why practicing gratitude can rewire our brain to make us happier.

Leverage the power of good communication (especially in times of crisis). Frequent, transparent, multi-pronged communication not only helps you manage change, it reduces anxiety, builds trust, and keeps people engaged (which is, of course, a major antidote for burnout). Communication is always important, but in a time of uncertainty and rapid change, it is absolutely vital. It actually helps build resiliency because it helps people manage change and apply what they learn in future times of hardship.

Click [here](#) to listen to an episode of my Busy Leader’s Podcast in which TriHealth CEO Mark Clement explains how great communication helped the \$2.1 billion healthcare system navigate those first few challenging months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, click [here](#) to read some of the insights I have learned from Mark Clement and other communication experts, as well as from my own observations over the years.

Use storytelling to connect with people on an emotional level. Stories connect to the heartstrings. By showing them that their work makes a real difference, stories help connect employees back to meaning/purpose/passion. This actually goes a long way toward helping people with burnout, since cynicism/disconnection from your work is a key component.

Stories are great teaching tools. When we connect a story to a behavior, we inspire employees to do more of that behavior. Stories also build community. They help employees see that, however deeply they are struggling, they're not alone. I feel one of the most important things leaders can do is give people space and time and attention to tell their COVID-19 stories. People want to be heard. Sharing their stories helps them process their anxiety, grief, and other strong emotions.

Thank you so much for reading this series on well-being in the workplace. I believe that, for leaders, this is truly the issue of our time. I would love to hear your thoughts on this issue. Please feel free to email me at Quint@quinstuder.com with your own insights as well as any stories on how you're promoting mental wellness inside your organization.

If you'd like to access a few relevant resources—The Well-Being Handbook (eBook), The Well-Being Tool Kit, and The Well-Being Video—please visit <https://thegratitudegroup.com/faculty/quinstuder/>.

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Author

quint-studer