



Permission to Pause: Why It Can Be a Game Changer

Description

A lot has been said and written lately about resilience in the workplace. And I think when most employers talk about this subject, we have good intentions. We want our employees to be resilient, not just so they can perform at work, but so they can be strong and healthy, both mentally and physically.

Yet I think sometimes people misinterpret what resilience really means. They think it means to keep their head down and keep plowing through. They think they must keep going until they push themselves to the breaking point. But true resilience means knowing when to step back.

We all need to pause from time to time—leaders, employees, everybody. This is especially true these days. In many places, hours are longer and workdays are denser. Many people are still dealing with virtual schooling. Childcare may be more complicated. All of these factors mean that people are pulled in so many different directions, and it can get overwhelming.

Sometimes people just need a brief break to get some perspective and figure some things out. They may be reluctant to ask because of the longstanding stigma around mental health issues. But the good news is that more and more leaders are realizing that sometimes a pause can give good employees a chance to get back on their feet.

Recently I heard a story about an employee who was really struggling with some family issues. Even though she was nervous and a bit embarrassed, she went to her boss and said, “I have a lot of stuff going on at home and I need a little time off.” The boss didn’t hesitate, but immediately said, “Go ahead and take two weeks to figure this out.”

The employee was ecstatic. She couldn’t believe her manager reacted this way. In reality, she probably shouldn’t have been so surprised. These days, I believe employers are much more inclined to react with this kind of understanding than perhaps they would have been in the past.

We have a new normal, and we’re seeing an evolution in many aspects of the workplace. Part of this evolution has been a shift in how we think about mental well-being. The scope and the rapid pace of change probably started the shift. COVID-19 definitely accelerated it. Whatever the reason, a subject that for a long time has been shrouded in silence is now being openly discussed. The stigma is fading

away. This is a very good thing.

My advice for this column is very simple.

1. Employees, take a pause if you need it. We are really all accountable for our own performance, and we honestly owe it to our employer (not to mention ourselves and our family) to advocate for ourselves when we're struggling.
2. Managers, if someone in your company needs a pause, give them permission. Imagine how loyal you would feel toward a company that gave you the time you needed to deal with personal issues.
3. Don't wait for employees to approach you. Get proactive about figuring out who may need a pause. You can do this through assessments, through holding very intentional conversations with them, and so forth. (I offer a suite of [well-being resources](#) that provide some practical tips and tactics.)
4. Set the example. Pause when you need to and be open about the fact that you're doing so. This will help create a sense of psychological safety around the subject. It also goes a long way toward destigmatizing the subject.

Giving people permission to pause can be a game changer. It is how we show them that we truly care about them, not just as an employee but as a whole person. It is how we create more empathic, caring, and human organizations—places where people truly *want* to work, to stay for the long term, and to contribute their time and talent in meaningful ways.

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://thegratitudigroup.com/faculty/quint-studer/>.

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