



Mental Health Issues

in the Workplace

MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



INDIVIDUALS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES MAY BENEFIT FROM EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Recently, news of the tragic deaths of two celebrities in one week led to increased dialogue regarding mental illness in America. The suicides of Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain, both of whom had achieved significant success in their respective careers, remind us that professional achievements and financial stability do not guarantee health and contentment. Although progress has been made in reducing the stigma of mental health conditions over the past few decades, the heightened public awareness regarding the rising rates of suicide in the U.S. will hopefully prompt increased attention on the treatment of mental illness.

Most of us have been touched by mental health issues either personally or know friends or family members who struggle with depression, anxiety, or other conditions. It's clear that mental health struggles are extremely prevalent and that more can be done to get people the help they need to improve their well-being and lives. Human resources professionals and department managers can often play a vital role in providing guidance to employees who may face these issues. Identification and intervention are key, and may help improve the lives of those with mental health issues.

Here are a few ways that HR or department heads can make a difference.



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EXPLAINING BENEFIT OPTIONS

Employees may not be aware of the various benefits that their employers provide which can help them with the mental health conditions facing them or their family members. HR should be able to explain how employees can access the menu of services offered by an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or take advantage of employer-provided health insurance options which might include counseling, in-patient programs, or prescription drugs

OFFERING LEAVE AND/OR REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Some conditions may require an employee to take some time away from work either episodically or for a longer period. HR can not only effectively outline the options, but also explain the required paperwork if FMLA, ADA, STD, LTD, or some combination thereof is part of the equation. (Please see the accompanying sidebar if any of the acronyms mentioned here are not familiar to you.) Managers may be reliant on HR to assist closely with this process, especially when it comes to determining

reasonable accommodations and handling return to work scenarios.

PROVIDING TRAINING

Whether HR delivers training or simply arranges for it, training managers and supervisors to handle sensitive health-related issues is increasingly important. Managers need to understand how to talk to employees in a professional way that does not violate discrimination laws or HIPAA. In addition, managers will always benefit from refreshers on the FMLA, ADA, and the organization's policies and procedures.

Aside from sharing how company benefits may come into play, you also need to handle the human side of a sensitive topic. No doubt you care about the well-being of your employees and want them to be the best versions of themselves possible. As a manager, you may be counseled by HR to choose your words and tone carefully when privately meeting with an affected staff member. Demonstrate compassion and empathy, while remaining professional. Avoid sounding judgmental, irritated, or condescending. How you handle the very delicate subject of mental

health may help determine whether your employee seeks the help they need, and then feels comfortable returning to work during or following treatment. As fellow humans, don't we want every person—employee or not—to be healthy mentally and physically?

MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY

HR should be a safe place for employees to come for advice and counsel. Based on the confidential nature of these discussions, it is imperative that HR deal with each employee in a respectful and positive manner when pointing them in the right direction for the support and services they need.

Although the suicides referenced earlier got active dialogue flowing on mental health issues, it's paramount that the private discussions between you, your employees, and your HR manager remain just that—private. If the employee chooses to disclose his or her mental health challenges to coworkers, that is their choice. But spreading the word to your team about why Sally seems so edgy or sullen lately is not up to you. It's a very personal issue. Some

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employees will feel liberated after sharing their plight with coworkers, while others would be mortified to reveal their personal struggles with others.

SEEKING HELP

There may need to be additional research conducted to determine the right course of action in any given situation. Given the current spotlight on mental health, there may be more requests for guidance on this topic in the coming months.

Let your HR manager be your first and primary resource for information and guidance. In addition to detailing the programs and benefits the employee has access to, they may point out online resources that might prove useful. Mental Health America (formerly the National Mental Health Association) is just one resource, providing facts, graphics, and national stats on mental health. Visit mentalhealthamerica.net

Other organizations and websites provide information and guidance on specific diagnoses. As always, if using online sources, make sure they're reputable and science-based.

Mental health is a daily struggle for an estimated one in five adults. You need to be prepared to help meet the needs of your staff members who may be suffering with depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or other issues. Be alert to the signs and symptoms, receptive to conversations, and utilize your HR manager or department as an invaluable resource for helping employees achieve optimal mental health. **E**



LET YOUR HR MANAGER be your first and primary resource for information and guidance.

Understand HR Acronyms

ADA—Americans with Disabilities Act

EAP—Employee Assistance Program

—Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993

HIPAA—Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act

HR—Human Resources

LTD—Long-term Disability

STD—Short-term Disability

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This Level 1 article assumes that the reader has entry level knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to ensure a foundation of basic concepts of the subject matter.

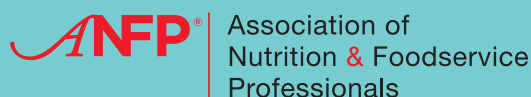
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1. The acronym EAP stands for
 - A. Education Assistance Program
 - B. Employee Assistance Program
 - C. Employee Acceptance Plan
2. HR or department managers can make a difference in the lives of employees with mental health issues by
 - A. Offering leave and/or reasonable accommodations
 - B. Maintaining confidentiality
 - C. Both of the above
3. Employer-provided health insurance options may provide
 - A. Counseling or in-patient programs
 - B. Prescription drugs
 - C. All of the above
4. If an employee discloses a mental health diagnosis, a manager should
 - A. Keep the matter confidential
 - B. Explain to fellow staff members why their coworker has been acting up
 - C. Send flowers or candy to their home
5. FMLA is an abbreviation for
 - A. Families Must Live Aware
 - B. Family and Medical Leave Act
 - C. Favor Mental Leave Acceptance
6. Mental health issues are always best handled by
 - A. A leave of absence
 - B. Prescription medication
 - C. An individual approach under a doctor's care
7. Mental health is a struggle for an estimated
 - A. One in five adults
 - B. One in 10 adults
 - C. One in 50 adults

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