4 Ways to Cultivate Inclusion and Compassion In the Workplace



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In the times we're living in, more and more people are experiencing stress, unhappiness, and anxiety in the workplace.

The combination of a health crisis, political elections, and pervasive racial inequities have put many people on edge at work. It turns out 53% of adults are experiencing higher levels of stress and worry because of current events. It's easy to blame the various global phenomena happening right now, but issues of stress and anxiety in the workplace are nothing new — especially among women, people of color and

other marginalized groups.

Racial minorities and women have been experiencing workplace stress, anxiety, and isolation for years. One study observed that black and hispanic workers felt lonelier and more emotionally distant than their white coworkers. Another study found that black women often don’t feel safe to express vulnerability and authenticity in the workplace out of fear of discrimination. The same can be said for women in the workplace, generally. This study showed that women are more than twice as likely to feel stress and anxiety in the workplace as men.

So take an already existing dose of anxiety, and then add a big helping of 2020. It’s easy to see how workers of color and minorities are struggling in their respective industries to show up, feel good and be productive at work.

The problem is: Unhappy staff translates to an unhappy bottom line.

Stressed staffers aren’t good for business owners

The more your staff feels supported, acknowledged and understood, the more they can positively contribute to your business. A lack of inclusion and compassion in the workplace may affect your company’s pride, productivity, and finances for years to come.

As the new year approaches, you may be engaging in strategic planning conversations on your leadership team. And that’s great. But think about how cultivating a more inclusive and compassionate workplace can positively impact your company’s success in the coming year.

Here are 4 steps you can take to cultivate a compassionate and inclusive workplace in 2021.

Related: Understanding Workplace Stress Is Key To Managing It Better

Add regular check-ins between managers and staff

One of the first places your employees go to feel heard, seen, and to express concerns is to their manager. The manager is a key link between your business' growth and employee productivity.

Consider instituting one-on-one meetings between managers and employees that encourage authentic communication. This is the time for the manager to grow a real, honest relationship with the employee and get a sense of their personal state of being.

Check-ins are not the time to talk about what the employee is doing wrong or how they've lagged in their obligations. One-on-one meetings should touch on personal topics of family, friends, health, and hobbies. These conversations communicate vested interest, build trust, and ultimately lead to feelings of support and compassion.

These meetings also give managers a sense of the struggles that are preventing your staff from showing up fully and authentically in the workplace.

You might uncover internal racism in the company, a lack of support for women, microaggressions or even subtle acts of exclusion that your staff of color have been experiencing.

Think of these check-ins as internal audits of your business' inclusivity practices and the well-being of your employees. The more you tune into the struggles of your staff, the more opportunities you have to intervene and institute better diversity, inclusion and equity practices that benefit your company culture in the future.

Revisit your Employee Assistance Program benefits

Does your company offer benefits that support diversity, better work-life balance or mental health services? If not, think about how offering an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) could benefit the well-being of your employees in the upcoming year.

Some businesses have had EAPs for years. Some EAPs include free mental health counseling, career coaching, diversity training, or substance-abuse support. If you haven’t looked at your EAP in a while, consider doing so in your upcoming strategic planning sessions.

2020 has offered new challenges in terms of financial stability, interpersonal relationships and mental health for your employees. Now is the time to show up and be progressive about supporting your team during this critical time with relevant and meaningful services.

If your company does not currently offer an EAP that specifically supports people of color, women and other minority groups in the workplace, providing one could be a significant step towards increasing productivity and compassion in the workplace.

Consider if your EAP program offers mental health services and examine how many people of color or queer-friendly therapists are available to your staff.

As of 2013, 83.6% of psychologists were white. Ask yourself, are your employees being fully represented with their therapist options? If not, think about adjusting your service providers to include more diverse therapists and other health professionals to meet the unique needs of your employees.

The times are stressful and your staff may be suffering from

anxiety that is affecting the growth and success of your business. Updating or creating an EAP that responds to modern issues in the workplace is a smart move towards creating a more inclusive and compassionate workspace.

Related: Offering an Employee Assistance Program

Be a more vulnerable leader with your staff

The best leaders are ones who can show a sense of humanity and strength at the same time. If you are brave enough to share your thoughts, feelings, and concerns in the workplace, your staff may feel brave enough to follow in your footsteps.

What happens when you're vulnerable about feeling stressed, anxious or uncertain is that you give permission for others to do the same.

Imagine the people of color, women and minorities in your company. They may already feel uncomfortable or unable to express themselves authentically in the workplace. Perhaps, they would benefit from seeing you model empathy and compassion in your company.

If you as the leader can crack open the doors to authentic communication, this could lead to more compassion, inclusion and potentially productivity in the workplace. Brave and vulnerable conversations are exactly what we should be having as we walk into 2021.

Related: 7 Inspiring Traits of Compassionate Leadership

Create more flexible workspaces and

schedules

It can be challenging to show up fully at work when stress, anxiety and other pressures are lingering in your employee's personal life. Some companies have caught onto the stresses their employees are facing and have updated their workspace and company schedules accordingly. Many companies are experimenting with fully remote workplaces while other companies are doing a mix.

One of my clients is experimenting with a mixed remote and in-person workspace. They started a new practice: fully remote fridays. Employees are still expected to come into work 4 days a week but on Fridays, they work remote. This is a policy and practice that can support employee mental health and inclusion in a significant way. Mixed remote and in-person workspaces can meet the needs of all employees by offering interpersonal benefits as well as mental health breaks. Those who experience anxiety and stress due to less inclusive workspaces can opt-in or out of in-person meetings to take care of their mental well-being, while employees who need more personal contact with coworkers have the opportunity to connect with other members of the team a few days a week.

As your company moves into the new year, consider keeping a more flexible space and work schedule to support a happier and more inclusive work environment.

Your work starts now

Your effort to cultivate compassion and inclusion in your business doesn't end after reading this article.

These are practical steps you can take to start the process of improving the inclusivity and compassion in your company. But, keep in mind, these steps will only work when the majority of your team has been brought into the transformation. From the

HR department to the Executive team, everyone should be working towards creating more space for authentic communication, flexibility and compassion. You can begin by planting the seed within the Executive team and allowing the planning and implementation process to continue into 2021.

These changes can bring forth new opportunities in your business for inclusion, diversity and equity to flourish like never before.

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