How Leaders Can Help Their Teams Manage Stress in the New Year

Start with putting the right policies in place.

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The workplace can be a relatively high-stress environment even in the best of times. Between fast-approaching deadlines, miscommunication, and other on-the-job quagmires, stress management has long been a key part of every workplace. Covid has made the need even greater than ever before.

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According to Pathways, a mental and behavioral health provider, more than three-quarters of workers have reported anxiety as a cause for concern in their work recently. Employee anxiety is bad news for both productivity and morale, meaning that business leaders cannot afford to ignore the stress epidemic any longer. And change needs to start from up top.

De-stressing the office is no small task, and doing so in the middle of a pandemic is another task entirely. Here’s where to start:

1. Encourage transparency

A recent survey conducted by Slack found that 55% of business leaders thought their organizations were transparent, while a mere 18% of their employees agreed. This disconnect is at the heart of a number of the problems facing modern businesses: employees want a deeper look into how things work, and managers aren't willing or able to comply.

Your teams need to know what's in the pipeline, when it's coming to them, and what their deadlines are going to be as soon as possible. Operating your company from the shadows will wear on your workers, making it more difficult for them to trust leadership over time. Take all of the cards out of your sleeve and hear your teams breathe a sigh of relief.

2. Establish delegation workflows

As Covid has forced teams to move online, key workflows risk becoming disrupted. The consequences of this are numerous, but the biggest stress inducer among them is a potential uptick in multitasking. Employees are less likely to delegate if they need to hop on a Zoom call or send half a dozen emails to do so.

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Zapier reports that after a mere 20 minutes of multitasking, employees report significantly higher frustration, workload, effort, pressure, and, most importantly, stress. Make sure there's an infrastructure in place for getting overworked employees to send some of their tasks onto someone else. A multitasker with a too-full plate is on a one-way course to burnout, and it's your responsibility to divert them.

3. Mandate time off

Employees need to take vacations to reset and get their minds off of their work, but modern work policies don't encourage time off the way they should. Plenty of companies offer generous or even unlimited amounts of vacation time, but workers are reticent to indulge lest they fall behind.

The easiest solution to this issue is to simply mandate that workers take the time off they need. To combat the high-stress levels endemic to companies in their industry, game developer Supergiant Games instituted a policy stating that workers must take a minimum of 20 days off annually while still allowing for unlimited time away. A similar policy for your workplace will help employees cool off right when they need to the most.

4. Learn to manage it yourself

Your workers will never be able to achieve stress equilibrium if their boss can't do it first. Being a great business leader isn't just about telling people what they need to do; it's about modeling those behaviors yourself. If you're preaching stress reduction to your team while clocking in 11 hours a day, no one is going to be able to take your messaging seriously. Stress management starts with you, whether you like it or not.

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Find out what your biggest sources of stress are and start by tempering them. Too many late nights? Mandate a "screens off" policy after a certain hour. Too many incoming clients? Hand a few off to someone else. Beyond that, try adopting stress-relief activities such as yoga or meditation. If your teams see you engaging in this kind of behavior, they'll know that you really take stress management seriously – and they're

liable to start doing so themselves.

Just because stress seems unavoidable in the modern office doesn’t mean that it has to be. The right mitigation policies can go a long way in making your office a calmer, healthier, and more productive environment. And it begins with you.

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