Highlight social health at work

Our social health is a key element to our general health. As humans and social beings, we are dependent on relations with other humans to feel happy and healthy in our lives. Regardless of whether this is in our private life or at work, being part of a community, maintaining social connections and feeling valued by others contributes to our social well-being.

Why is focus on social health at work particularly important right now?

Surveys have shown that employees' general health and well-being can have a major impact on their productivity and commitment at work. So, it shouldn't come as a surprise that your employees' social well-being has a substantial impact on how they thrive on a daily basis. Research has shown that employees with 'excellent social health' are more productive.

At work, social health is typically measured by the extent to which an employee has a sense of belonging to their workplace. From relationships with colleagues to being able to adopt the company's values, social health is also about feeling valued as a person, colleague and employee. With the working reality we are currently facing with employees, where work has been performed at a distance or a variety of job roles have been taken on to help the company during 2020, it has never been more important to focus on social health at work. For the past 18 months, social distancing and working remotely have impacted our social relationships and people have been thrown into a working environment that could have been, and perhaps still is, lonely and isolating.

As a result, employees' general health is at risk and productivity may decrease. This can also impact their sense of belonging to the workplace, because we must find new ways of breaking down social barriers, promoting communication and rebuilding the connection between people at work.

A sense of belonging is essential to employee commitment at work and to the positive effect on productivity associated with this. Employees that feel supported by a company that values them, are far more flexible when it comes to working as best as they can.

It is generally accepted that employee commitment and productivity go hand-in-hand, in good times and in bad. Social health is a key element to creating a workplace where people feel included and are willing to go the extra mile.

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As a manager or HR employee, what can you do to support social health at work?

What should you as the manager consider when drafting a social well-being strategy or if you just want to make an extra effort to boost social health at your company? Creating an optimal environment for employee social health may seem like an enormous task. But you will discover that it is often based on existing activities, dynamics and behaviour at work.

1. **Show employees that you care**

   The most important thing is to show your employees you care. Creating a culture that prioritises social interactions and a sense of inclusion, is far more effective than implementing simple measures that lack long-term value.

2. **Know your employees' needs**

   It is also important that you look at the individual needs of your employees, what some may find important, others give a lower priority. For example, Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, is at the top of the list for some people, because they want to work for a company that actively does something good. This includes voluntary work in society or donations to charity. Other priorities include working for a company that is amiable about regular employee activities and the potential for flexibility.

3. **The role of wages and recognition**

   Everyone likes being acknowledged for doing a good job. Peer-to-peer recognition has proven to be highly effective in increasing commitment. When employees recognise each other's efforts and receive recognition themselves, their sense of purpose and commitment to their workplace is improved.

   A culture of recognition helps employees to develop strong social connections at work and makes them happier and heathier, which has a positive impact on their experiences at work. As many companies will work in a more hybrid way now and in future, it has never been more important to make employees feel that they belong, are recognised and consequently more connected to their colleagues and the workplace.

4. **Focus on employee collaboration**

   Because we are social creatures, any form of interaction in the workplace contributes to social health. As an employer, you can facilitate new events and activities that bring employees closer to each other. Most people enjoy collaborating on projects, participating in work-related events and socialising. It is human nature to build relationships and the workplace should not be any different.

   - For example, you can launch several teamwork-based projects. Remember that collaboration does not mean that the employees work on the same thing at the same time. This may mean that each employee handles different phases of the project. A marketing campaign, for instance, is made up of posts on social media, e-mails and newsletters, interpretation of data and analyses and responses to customer feedback. The entire team must communicate and work together on each step.

   - Other ways of bringing the team together may include work-related events, parties and excursions.

   - A positive working environment can also promote relationships outside the office. A good example of this is exercise and fitness groups being formed outside work, because employees have developed relationships at work.

   - Employees form strong bonds with each other when there is a healthy environment that encourages socialisation and support. At the end of the day, they will become much more attached to their workplace and create a support system for everyone.

5. **Encourage breaks**

   Some employees view breaks as a waste of time. To them, it is all about working through and eating lunch at their desk and is the best way to maintain their productivity. However, there is a positive correlation between productivity, mental health and breaks. Skipping breaks can be detrimental to the quality of an employee's work and their well-being.

Therefore, one way of improving their social health is to encourage employees to take their breaks. Breaks give us the opportunity to relax and when we are away from our desks every few hours, we can recharge the brain and get a new burst of energy for the next task or the next meeting.

Breaks also give employees a chance to connect with their colleagues. They can update each other on personal or professional topics and share stories. A typical chat around the coffee machine.

You can give breaks an added boost with dedicated break rooms, break areas and outdoor walk n' talk areas.

6. **Give employees the opportunity to do volunteer work or participate in activities that support a charitable cause**
Many companies have a social aspect to their core values or to their CR strategy. Regardless of whether there is focus on, e.g. the environment or social support, room for voluntary work or participation in activities that support a specific cause, these are all a path towards increased social well-being. Employees who sign up to do volunteer work or work with specific activities that prove their dedication to a beneficial cause, often want to give something back through volunteer work, which increases social health and creates a strong sense of responsibility and commitment. As a bonus, a sense of company loyalty develops among employees once they commit to their job both at work and in their spare time.

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