

Psychological Safety at Work

As the world adjusts to new norms, stress and anxiety are increasing in the workplace. Managing psychological safety and employee wellbeing is an important responsibility that employers have, and developing an established set of procedures and investing in resources can make everyone's life easier. There are four key pillars to explore in meeting this challenge.



CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE WORKPLACE CULTURE

- Foster an environment where your staff feel comfortable and confident in talking about their concerns, without fear of retribution
- Lead by example: be willing to talk about your own challenges and how you're addressing them
- Make space for your employees to look after their own wellbeing
- Celebrate the diversity of your workforce
- Model taking breaks and time off, and making space for physical and mental wellness activities



ELEVATING THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

- Get to know your staff as more than employees — knowing a bit about their ambitions, plans, and challenges will help you anticipate the support they may need
- Explain how decisions are made, and invite feedback — involve staff in making decisions as much as possible
- Have multiple means of communication open (including anonymous ones) so that everyone feels safe speaking up
- Do regular check-ins and follow up consistently



BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE NETWORK

- Think carefully about your own boundaries and don't overextend yourself
- Don't take on responsibilities outside of your own training and qualifications — you are not a counsellor
- Connect with organizations in your community that offer mental health support (e.g., for depression, stress, substance use, trauma, violence)
- Build a library of external resources with input from your team
- Use staff training opportunities to bring in community organizations who support mental health
- Expand mental and physical health benefits in your group plan



TRACKING YOUR PROGRESS

- Focusing on employee wellbeing pays enormous dividends in productivity, collaboration, and motivation — designate a leader or team to track and measure the impact
- Keep an eye on monthly and annual turnover costs, before and after investing in psychological safety
- Where possible, increase your spending on staff training around mental wellbeing — research has shown that being proactive in addressing workplace mental health has a better return on investment than being reactive to distress¹

Looking After the Whole Team



Starting workplace conversations about mental health is hard, but worth it: addressing the elephant in the room is much more productive than pretending it isn't there. **Not 9 to 5** has many resources available to support you as you take on this work.

Feeling unsafe at work leads to a toxic work culture, and accelerates attrition. Talk to your staff about what they would like to see. Having a plan in place will help stop background stress escalating to a crisis, and help handle crises if they happen. Your role is to listen, support, and

direct your staff to expert help, so make sure that you know who to connect them with. Thinking about your own business and community, how can you create a psychologically safe workplace?

Questions

Examples

What can I do?

How can I open up communication with my staff?

- Monthly 1:1 catch-up
- Accept anonymous comments
- Team leaders to collect and share feedback

What are some of the pressure points that exist in my workplace?

- Handling customer complaints
- Anxieties about work-life balance
- Cultural differences, especially for new Canadians

What organizations in my community should I reach out to?

- Crisis phone/chat lines
- Refugee and asylum seeker supports
- LGBTQ+ organizations

How can I track the impact of any changes that I make?

- Regularly survey staff on engagement and wellbeing needs
- Document costs related to disability claims (long/short-term) and look for trends over time
- Try a new shift scheduling system, and document the impact it has on attendance

¹ See e.g. *Mental health and employers: The case for investment-pandemic and beyond*. Deloitte LLP / Elizabeth Hampson, et al. 2022. *The ROI in workplace mental health programs: Good for people, good for business*, Deloitte LLP / Ariel Kangasniemi, et al., 2019.