Improving Mental Health at Work
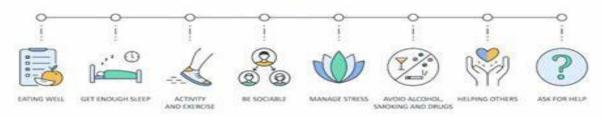

1. Talk about it openly, reduce the stigma, and show empathy. Discussions around mental health, anxiety, stress, uncertainty, fear, and other similar feelings has to come from the top of the organization. An unfortunate truth is that nearly 40% of people say their company has not even asked them how they're doing since the pandemic began.

Leaders that show they care about their employees and their teams can truly boost morale and raise spirits. Address the situation head-on, provide an open-door policy where possible, and speak directly to any resources that your company has that can help your team.

Managers can implement a regular wellbeing check-in with their teams, too. This can be done during a one-on-one meeting or you could leverage an overall 'temperature check' to see how your team is feeling on a scale of 1-10. Be sure to follow-up individually with anyone who noted a low score and be a listening ear for them.

2 Consider giving your teams a much-needed break. Companies are finding unique and creative ways to support their employees right now. Don't be afraid to give an employee the gift of a mental health day. Just to have the day off to focus on mental health, be with their friends & family, or just rest is invaluable.

If you have the means to lighten your team's load, do it. Even a single day off can mean the difference between thriving and surviving.

3 Harness your awareness and adjust expectations. In order to better support your employees and teams, you need to first be aware of the potential issues that exist inside of the current structure of your organization. Tackling conversations with your team around expectations, productivity and workload can go a long way to show that you're aware and interested in making adjustments.

Look for simple ways that you can help reduce your team's overall stress as it relates to their workload. For example: have flexible deadlines, bolster teams with external support, and readjust the expectations you have for the month, quarter or even the year.

4 Put a focus on psychological safety. If your employees feel fearful about failure and don't feel like they are working in an environment where they can fail, you may want to put some time and attention here and build up the psychological safety in your company.

Tobi Lutke, the CEO of Shopify, talks a lot about having a "trust battery" between yourself and your employees and how the trust battery might start at something lower, 50% for example, and will grow over time. The idea is that you can use the trust battery to gauge where you're at with your individual employees and adjust as needed.

Expanding on this idea, you could use the trust battery concept to gauge the level of psychological safety employees have with your company to see if you need to improve it. A simple feedback survey would get you started but the key to success here is in the follow-up.

5. Managers should Model healthy behaviors. Don't just say you support mental health. Model it so that your team members feel they can prioritize self-care and set boundaries. More often than not, managers are so focused on their team's well-being and on getting the work done that they forget to take care of themselves. Share that you're taking a walk in the middle of the day, having a therapy appointment, or prioritizing a staycation (and actually turning off email) so that you don't burn out.

6. Build a culture of connection through check-ins. Intentionally checking in with each of your direct reports on a regular basis is more critical than ever.

Go beyond a simple "How are you?" and ask specific questions about what supports would be helpful. Wait for the full answer. Really listen, and encourage questions and concerns. Of course, be careful not to be overbearing; that could signal a lack of trust or a desire to micromanage.

When someone shares that they're struggling, you won't always know what to say or do. What's most important is to make space to hear how your team members are truly doing and to be compassionate. They may not want to share much detail, which is completely fine. Knowing that they can is what matters.

7. Offer flexibility and be inclusive. Expect that the situation, your team's needs, and your own needs will continue to change. Check in regularly — particularly at transition points. You can help problem-solve any issues that come up only if you know what's happening. Those conversations will also give you an opportunity to reiterate norms and practices that support mental health. Inclusive flexibility is about proactive communication and norm-setting that helps people design and preserve the boundaries they need.

References: https://hbr.org/2020/08/8-ways-managers-can-support-employees-mental-health