WORK MATTERS
COLUMN

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The Workplace and Its Relationship with Mental Health

"A healthy workplace starts with a healthy mind." This quote encapsulates the reality of how an individual's mental health affects his/her daily operations, further affecting workplace duties. Personal factors that can influence a worker's mental health are household problems, financial constraints and health issues, whereas workplace problems that can affect the employee are excessive workloads or work pace, understaffing, long or inflexible hours and lack of control over job design or workload. An organization is obviously non-functional without its employees, and maintaining the happiness of its workers serves as a pivotal step that many businesses neglect, which results in high turnover, employee burnout and low productivity rates.

If the matter of mental health is not sincerely addressed by an organization, subsequently, high turnover is inevitable for this company. High turnover occurs when an increased number of employees resign over relatively small periods of time. The consequences being issues of understaffing, employee overload (for those remaining) and the use of time and resources to hire and train new workers. On the other hand, when the mental health of employees is considered and they are treated with respect, employees are more likely to give companies 'a second chance' as they feel a sense of loyalty and in some ways may consider the company like 'family'; especially when it performs/provides in their times of need.

The highest turnover rates are present in the leisure and hospitality industry with 79%, professional and business services with 57%, and the trade, transportation and utilities industry with 49%. Interestingly, government services had the lowest turnover rates at 18%, which may indicate a number of realities, inclusive of historical and cultural ties to long-term 'government work' as a means of security in old age, or that the government has a strategy in place to manage its employees and engender loyalty. Regardless, the best ways for a company to address this issue and enhance the mental health stability of its employees are encouraging work-life balance and helping employees find a purpose and balance in life. By engaging in these techniques, the employees feel a sense of worthiness and value and are more willing to be loyal to their company.

Studies show that 76% of employees experience burnout at least occasionally, and they are 63% more likely to take a sick day and 23% more likely to visit the emergency room. Employees who often experience burnout are 2.6 times more likely to be actively looking for a new job. Some techniques that can help to reduce employee burnout include fostering open communication, providing regular feedback and implementing employee wellness programs. However, one of the best ways to engage employees is through interactive exercises, and these can range from celebrating office birthdays, holiday functions, office game days and pot lucks. Active participation stimulates the brain, creating stronger neural connections that lead to enhanced retention. A survey by the American Psychological Association[5] found that 61% of employees who say their employer provides opportunities for stress reduction report being satisfied with their job, compared to just 38% of employees who say their employer does not provide such opportunities.

Mental health and productivity are closely linked. Poor mental health, manifesting most often as depression, anxiety, or burnout, can severely decrease motivation and production while increasing stress, leading to it can have serious consequences on a person. Research shows that projected over a 12-month period, workers with fair or poor mental health are estimated to have nearly 12 days of unplanned absences annually compared with 2.5 days for all other workers. Low productivity rates in employees can lead to numerous issues regarding a business' growth, which include, reduced profitability, employee disengagement and team morale, delays in project timelines and workplace toxicity. Some methods that can help lessen the strain on mental health and improve productivity are addressing workplace stressors, setting boundaries, offering men-

tal health resources and promoting a supportive culture. By utilizing these methods, the employees feel a greater sense of support whilst the company also reaps the benefit of high productivity, showing that addressing mental health can sometimes be the key for employee success.

To conclude, the relationship between mental health and the workplace is undeniable. Organizations that fail to address mental health challenges risk not only the well-being of their employees, but also their long-term success. By creating mentally healthy workplaces, companies can foster a culture of openness, resilience, and support. This benefits not only employees, who are able to thrive in both their personal and professional lives, but also the organization as a whole. The future looks promising for workplaces that prioritize the mental well-being of their teams, ensuring a healthier, more productive, and sustainable work environment.

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