HOW TO SUPPORT
WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH
AT YOUR COMPANY

CLAYTON RECRUITMENT

WHERE BUSINESSES COME
TO RECRUIT TALENT

Mental health has always had an impact on the workplace.

An employee with a mental health issue can't focus fully on their work, which risks productivity and efficiency. Poor conditions for mental health in the workplace also places additional pressure on staff, prompting turnover and lost talent.

Unfortunately, employers haven't always responded to mental health concerns the right way in the past.

However, this is now beginning to change.

The pandemic has prompted a massive shift in the way they support, guide, and empower their staff members. Businesses have rediscovered the benefits of an engaged, emotionally healthy team – particularly in a hybrid or remote work environment.

What's more, team members have become increasingly unwilling to continue their employment with companies that fail to acknowledge their well-being and good health. Indeed, following the pandemic, businesses have had to deal with employees that have decided to speak with their feet as numerous talented employees seek opportunities to work with employers that share their values, especially when it comes to added support, resources, and proactive benefits that focus on their wellbeing. Here's our guide on how to handle the increasing focus on mental health as an employer.

The Impact of Poor Mental Health on the Modern Workplace

According to mental health charity, Mind, mental health issues affect around <u>one in four people</u> each year in the UK. One in six people report experiencing a common mental health problem (like anxiety or depression) in any given week in England. Crucially, these issues don't just influence our personal lives but also our professional lives. Mental health issues are commonly considered one of the most significant causes of long-term absences from work. They can also prompt problems from productivity levels to employee satisfaction, increasing turnover and talent churn.

Many companies assumed mental health issues were problems facing only a handful of businesses in the past. However, we're now discovering the problem is much more significant than many realised. A 2021 CIPD report revealed that <u>around 80% of organisations</u> were concerned about their employees' mental health.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, concerns about mental health have increased drastically during, and since the pandemic.

Uncertainty breeds stress and anxiety – issues that directly impact productivity.

In the early months of the pandemic, a study showed around <u>42% of respondents</u> said their mental health had declined within a month of the pandemic beginning. While businesses and their employees are once again beginning to find their footing in a post-pandemic environment, most teams are now hyper-aware of how fragile good mental health can be.

As we navigate transitions into new modes of work in the coming years, the companies that thrive will be the ones that understand how to manage employees with anxiety, depression, burnout, and even trauma. Mental health issues can range from common conditions like anxiety and depression to severe problems like bipolar disorder. To succeed in the years ahead, businesses will need to ensure they have the right strategy in place to handle all kinds of concerns.

Why Companies Need Mental Health Programmes

In the past, mental health issues in all environments, have been widely ignored and overlooked. As a result, businesses have suffered from poor employee engagement, issues with talent retention, and even legal concerns. In many parts of the world, employers have a duty of care to their employees, which requires them (by law) to adjust the workplace to help staff members cope in any environment. However, the legal expectations of employers shouldn't be the only thing guiding a focus on good mental health practices.

Actively promoting wellbeing in the workplace leads to better productivity, confirmed by the CIPD in the UK, alongside improved staff morale, better retention, and reduced sickness absence. According to the World Health Organization, the estimated cost of anxiety and depression in the workplace is around $1 trillion per year in lost productivity. Implementing mental health strategies in the workplace can reduce these losses for businesses.

By prioritising mental health, business leaders can:

- Reduce sickness and absenteeism: Employees who get more support dealing with their mental health issues at work don't need to take as much time off.

- Improve productivity: Employees who feel their best can work at their best, with greater levels of focus, efficiency, and engagement.

- Retain current employees: One of the main reasons many employees are leaving businesses is to search for better work experiences. A good mental health environment will make employees feel more connected to their management team.

Perhaps most importantly, employers will need to show they understand the value of good mental health and how to cultivate it if they want to attract new employees. As generations continue to shift and more of Gen Z enter the workforce, experts predict we may need to be prepared for a wider number of mental health issues among younger staff members.

Generation Z report feeling more stressed than their older counterparts due to constant exposure to social media, climate change, and other external factors across the political and economic landscape. According to recent studies by McKinsey& Company, there is already a stark difference among generations, with Gen Z reporting the least positive life outlook and lower levels of emotional and social well-being than older generations.

Without a robust approach to mental health, your company simply won't attract, retain or support the next generation of talent.

How Employers Can Start Addressing Mental Health in the Workplace

The rising focus on mental health conditions and their influence on how we work is prompting a larger number of companies to act, but there's still a lot of work to be done.

A survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) in 2020 found that 56% of employers had seen an increase in mental health problems among employees due to the pandemic. However, only 30% of employers had increased their mental health support for employees during this time.

These statistics suggest that while some progress has been made in raising awareness of mental health issues in the workplace, there is still a significant need for employers to do more to support their employees' mental health, especially in light of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To attract a new generation of talent and retain existing employees, you will need to build a culture around good mental health.

For most companies, this process starts with:

Open Communication

One of the things employers can learn from Gen Z as they build a strategy for better mental health is the value of open communication. In the past, employees have often been too nervous to tell their manager about mental health problems, which usually means problems worsen or spiral out of control. Organisations need to send a clear signal to staff that they value their wellbeing.

Start by:

- Explaining your policy on mental health: Tell your team members mental health will be treated with the same compassion as physical health. Avoid allowing stigma to build around the concept of mental health. People should feel free and comfortable discussing their anxiety, depression, stress, and other concerns.

- Leading by example: Business leaders can often feel they're obligated to have a specific image they need to convey in the workplace. However, while it's important to show strength and conviction, this doesn't mean keeping quiet about mental health conditions. If your employees hear you being honest about mental health issues, they're more likely to feel comfortable talking about their challenges.

- Host regular discussions: Have regular video meetings and conversations to opt-in to discussions about mental health. These conversations can be as simple as talking about how people have felt during the week and whether they've encountered any particularly stressful experiences.

Regular Check-ins

While Gen Z and younger generations are more used to talking openly about their mental health in the modern world, it isn't true for every employee.

Some of your staff members might not need additional help opening up about their mental health concerns. Others will need multiple ways to make their voice heard. A good way to support those who struggle to discuss their concerns in person is to allow them to share their thoughts through an app on your team collaboration tool.

Automated bots can run regular check-ins with team members, asking them to rate their mood on a scale each day. Supervisors and managers can then be made aware of employees constantly placing themselves in "low" moods.

Consider how each of your employees might want to approach discussions about mental health too. While some of your team members will want to chat with the entire group in a comfortable and neutral space, others prefer more one-on-one conversations.

Being flexible and open to the individual needs of each team member will ensure everyone in your team feels properly supported.

Gathering Feedback From the Team

Mental health is a complex topic because everyone deals with their issues differently. Some people need more time to themselves when they're feeling low, which could make the option to work remotely more compelling to certain staff members. Others might find they need extra support from their teams if they are struggling with their mental health.

Gathering feedback from your employees about how you can improve their well-being can help you develop new ideas on how to strengthen and transform the company culture. It also ensures you're not making (often inaccurate) assumptions about what symptoms each employee might have and how they affect their ability to do their job.

Provide anonymous and direct options for feedback to your team to decide whether they want to share their suggestions silently or as part of a group discussion.

For those who want to keep their mental health issues private, ensure confidentiality comes first. People need to be reassured that sensitive information will remain confidential and not affect their career.

It is crucial to give your staff plenty of reassurance that any feedback they give or information they share about their mental health will be safe.

How to Make Adjustments for Mental Health

Truly listening and responding to the feedback provided by your team will often involve making adjustments to your workplace processes. While these changes can seem complex and time-consuming at first, it's worth remembering that mental illness costs UK employers £56 billion per year according to a report from Deloitte – a 25% increase in just 3 years.

The changes you make to the work environment from a mental health perspective will come in two different forms. First are the changes you make for individual team members.

Since every employee in your team will have their symptoms and individual responses to mental health conditions, you can't make assumptions about what kind of adjustments they'll need. Instead, managers and supervisors need to have supportive conversations with employees about what they need to thrive.

This should be a two-way discussion about the nature of any changes required. During this conversation, it's worth reminding your employee that the medical reasoning behind any changes to their schedule won't be revealed to their colleagues.

In these conversations, managers should:

- Encourage employees to seek additional support: Remind your employees that while you'll do everything you can to assist them, they should still seek support. If your organisation has certain programs to help with arranging counselling or therapy, share this information with your employee and advise them on how they can use the resources.

- Ask what they personally can do: Some employees need understanding from their manager about the nature of a mental health condition so they can make requests for time off in the future without having to explain their condition repeatedly. Others will need their managers to help them adjust to working hours or patterns. Ask what you can do to support your staff members individually.

- Ask what the company can do: Discuss what the wider business can do to address the unique needs of each individual. This might include providing them with extra training, coaching, or mentoring, to help them improve their confidence in their job. It could also mean delegating more tasks to a wider range of employees to reduce the pressure on a team member and lower the risk of burnout.

- Make changes slowly: Sometimes, it isn't easy to know exactly which actions will have the biggest impact on an employee's wellbeing and mental health. Making changes slowly can make it easier to track the influence of each adjustment. For instance, you might start by temporarily reducing an employee's hours while dealing with an acute mental health problem or allowing them to spend more time working from home.

- Arrange future conversations: Make a commitment to follow up with your employee or setting a buddy or mentor aside for them to have someone to "check in" regularly about their progress. Don't treat any methodology as a 'one-and-done' process – rather invest in processes that monitor ongoing wellbeing.

Making Good Mental Health a Part of Company Culture

Now more than ever, companies need to understand how mental wellness influences their employees. Workplace wellbeing initiatives in the past have frequently focused too heavily on concepts like nutrition and exercise and not enough on the holistic health of staff. For decades, chronic stress-related issues in the workplace have been on the rise. In the post-pandemic era, these problems will only continue to grow.

Fortunately, building a company culture around a foundation of good mental health can start to drive businesses in the right direction. Crucially, not only will implementing the following strategies for good mental health improve the performance of productivity of your existing employees, but it could increase your chances of attracting future employees. In the years to come, your employer brand is likely to hinge heavily on the way people see you handling mental health today.
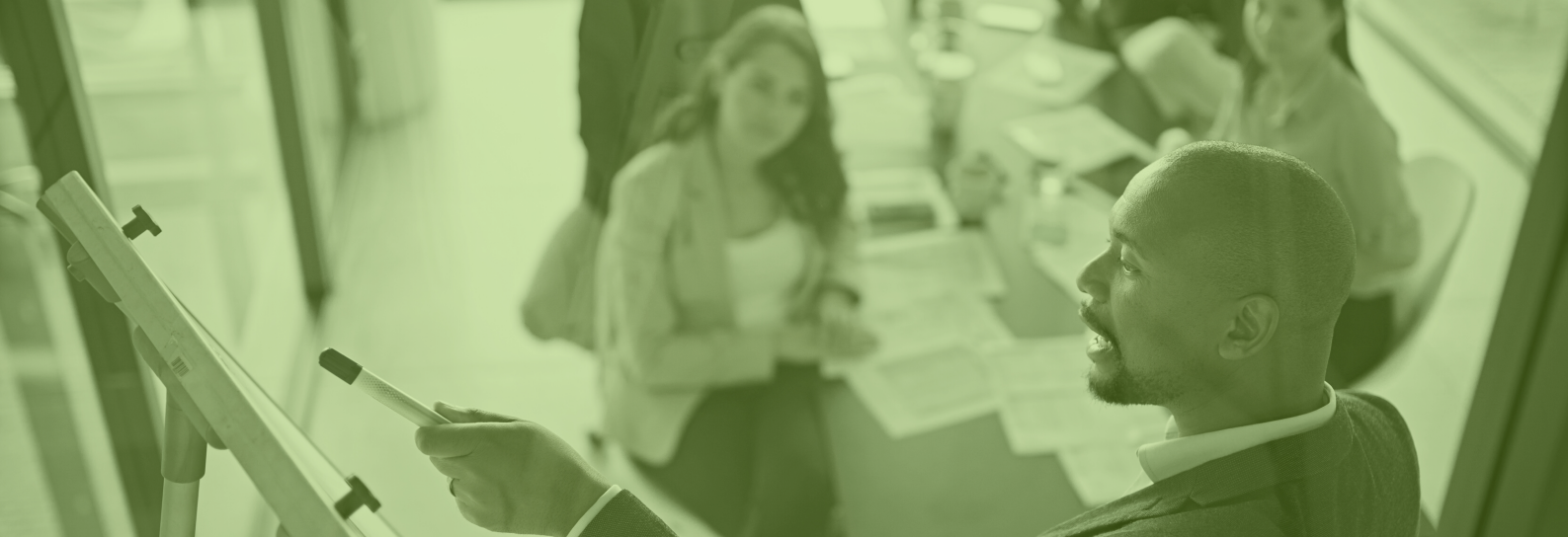
1) Create a Wellbeing Policy for your Company

A wellbeing policy is a good way to get everyone in your company on the same page about mental health. Similar to a remote or hybrid work policy, this document will describe the kind of environment you're trying to build and how your employees can contribute.

Look at both physical and emotional wellbeing in your policy. The document should include:

- Insights into who your employees can speak to in their team if they need to discuss a health issue and how they can submit information anonymously if necessary.

- A clear statement sharing your commitment to developing the working environment your employees need for good physical and mental health.

- Information about wellbeing initiatives you already have in place for your employees to take advantage of. This can include data about your available mental health resources, as well as any tools you have on offer for physical wellbeing.

Your policy should also outline what you expect from your employees about respecting their colleagues' wellbeing. Let your team members know discrimination based on health issues will not be tolerated, and ensure your employees know how to report such behaviour.

2) Model Good Behaviours & Provide Training

A good leader should be a model of valuable behaviour in any work environment. Increasingly, in modern workplaces, this means business managers and supervisors need to demonstrate good practices for looking after their physical and mental health.

Encourage leaders in the business to highlight the importance of workplace balance by making sure they don't work excessive hours or put themselves under unnecessary stress. Managers and supervisors should also talk about their experiences with mental health whenever possible and try to get other people involved in healthy conversations.

It can often be helpful to provide training and guidance in this environment. Companies can provide their employees with information about the stigma surrounding mental health and give them extra advice on what they can do to make their colleagues feel more comfortable in the office. Increasing awareness and ensuring employees know how to support their peers properly can make every team member feel more valued. Some employees may also find it helpful to receive training on mental resiliency and how to deal with stress in the workplace. Group or individual training sessions on everything from mediation to avoiding burnout are extremely useful.

3) Prioritise Flexibility & Inclusion

Creating a more inclusive workplace where everyone can feel comfortable, supported, and productive at work is the best possible outcome of a successful wellbeing initiative. Listen to each of your employees individually and develop an action plan based on what you learn. You may need to create individual strategies for your staff members to identify the signs of their mental health concerns, stress triggers, and whom they can contact in a crisis. It may also be helpful to provide your staff members with more flexibility in general.

As the world moves rapidly towards a future of more hybrid and remote working practices, giving your team members the freedom to work from home or avoid coming into the office on certain days may be helpful. This could allow staff to take control of their own mental health needs without requiring them to ask for help.

Crucially, you'll need to expect the situation, the needs of your team, and the demands of the business to change frequently in the years ahead. Check in regularly, particularly at transitional points in your business growth (when something significant happens for your business). You can only stay on top of mental health concerns in your business if you're aware of what's happening.

Consider Creating a Mental Health First Aider Role in your Company

Enlisting a mental health first aider at work can provide numerous benefits for both employers and employees. Mental health first aiders are trained individuals who can provide initial support to employees experiencing mental health issues or crises in the workplace.

These individuals can also:

- Help to promote mental health awareness and reduces stigma: By having a mental health first aider at work, employees may feel more comfortable discussing their mental health concerns and seeking support when needed. This can help to reduce the stigma around mental health in the workplace, and promote a culture of openness and support.

- Improve employee well-being and productivity: Mental health issues can have a significant impact on employee well-being and productivity. Having a mental health first aider available can help employees to manage their mental health concerns and prevent issues from escalating, which can lead to reduced absenteeism and increased productivity.

- Enhance workplace culture: Enlisting a mental health first aider sends a message to employees that their mental health is valued and supported in the workplace. This can help to create a positive workplace culture that prioritises employee well-being and can lead to increased job satisfaction and employee retention.

Adjusting Recruitment with a Focus on Mental Health

Crucially, supporting and cultivating good mental health in the workplace will also impact the way you recruit and appeal to new employees.

First, it's important to ensure you're working with a [reputable specialist recruitment team](#) with experience dealing with talent in your area. These professionals know how to present your company in the best possible light to candidates who may want to know more about your approach to mental health. It's also worth thinking about how you can make your company seem more inclusive.

Start by drawing attention to the mental health initiatives you're running on your business website or encouraging staff members to talk about their experiences on review forums.

When writing job descriptions, draw attention to your flexible and inclusive environment when highlighting the benefits candidates can access if they work for you. Talking about things like "paid mental health days" and access to therapy on your job posts can help to attract a wider range of employees (particularly among younger generations).

Remember to consider the interview and onboarding process carefully too. A video interview might be more comfortable for anxiety than attending an office in person.

Getting a little extra help with everything from recruitment to job description writing and onboarding could be crucial for companies trying to stay competitive in a skills-short environment. As a specialist recruitment team experienced in working with businesses across a variety of sectors, we can help guide you through the complexities of making your employer brand stand out in this new world. We'll also give you the top tips you need for interviewing and onboarding your new team members.

Get in touch here if you're ready to attract some new talent for your team.

CLAYTON RECRUITMENT

We understand that while talent is your greatest asset – it can also be your scarcest resource - which is why you need a recruitment partner with the market expertise, insight and network to deliver the right people at the right time.

Clayton Recruitment has been partnering with organisations across the local, regional and national market for over three decades and during that time has built up an enviable reputation for trust and reliability. We provide an experienced and credible voice in the market by being able to demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the talent agenda.

Talent is all about people, and just like you, our consultants are true experts in their field with a real drive for excellence which informs everything they do.

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