Expert Talk

Cultivating Mental Resilience:
A prescription for workplace wellness

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We live in a world where friends have become statistics, and colleagues have been reduced to resources. With artificial intelligence and bots dominating the modern workplace, I can't help but wonder: have we started treating ourselves and those around us as mere bots too?

Decades ago, when I first forayed into psychiatry, writing about mental health in the workplace seemed unfathomable. Today, not addressing mental health at work would be irresponsible.

A staggering 15% of working-age adults grapple with mental conditions. Additionally, we cannot overlook its implications in the workplace. Mental health conditions are projected to impose an approximate cost of USD 6 trillion on the global economy by 2030. This cost encompasses lost economic productivity and the expenses associated with care. To provide context, this surpasses the projected costs of cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory illnesses combined.

A vast chasm exists between people suffering from mental health conditions and those seeking help. As tens, hundreds, perhaps thousands of individuals within our workplace continue to endure silently, company leaders can play a pivotal role in altering this narrative and providing necessary support.

Lack of awareness, access, and affordability stands as the triad of significant barriers to seeking help. The first step that organisations can take in promoting positive mental health at work is to initiate open conversations.

An open conversation goes beyond a mere tick-in-the-box during World Mental Health Day. It necessitates a consistent effort throughout the year, spanning multiple levels and channels. Mental health should be integrated into health policies and become a commonplace discussion, akin to any other physical health-related concern.

The second step, after raising awareness and encouraging help-seeking, is to connect people in need with the right resources. This includes scientific literature, information on mental health helplines, and referrals to mental health professionals. Access also entails providing people with the time and space to obtain necessary treatment – perhaps an hour away from work each week for a doctor's appointment or therapy session, or even establishing safe, confidential spaces at the workplace where individuals can seek virtual consultations.

The third step involves ensuring affordability. The costs associated with medicines, counselling, and along with the opportunity cost of visiting a treatment facility can be substantial barriers for many. This is where organisations need to intervene to bridge the financial gap. Telehealth emerges as a promising solution, making mental health treatment both accessible and cost-effective for organisations.

When we think about the workplace, we often associate it with stress, competition, and pressure. What we fail to realise is that work serves as a protective factor for mental health. Our workplace provides us with a sense of routine, purpose, and achievement. Above all, it instils in us a sense of connectedness and community. It's high time we perceive mental health outcomes as a key indicator of success. It's time we transcend the EBITAs and truly value the human experience.

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