Business Research and Insights

06 September 2016

Prevention is better than cure with workplace mental health

Business topics

By Health View

Share f t G+ in G+1

With untreated mental health conditions costing Australian employers an estimated $11 billion a year through absenteeism, reduced productivity and compensation claims, helping your staff stay mental healthy has never been more important. Evy Gomo, Clinical Manager at Davidson Trahaire Corpsych, shares her top tips for SME owners looking to create psychologically healthy workplaces.

Some form of mental illness affects around 20 per cent of the adult population every year, according to SANE Australia, a national charity helping all Australians affected by mental illness. And untreated mental health conditions cost Australian employers almost $11 billion a year through absenteeism, reduced productivity and compensation claims, according to Beyondblue's Heads Up, which gives individuals and businesses the tools to create more mentally healthy workplaces.

The good news is your workplace can be made significantly more mentally healthy. Even better, this can be achieved through straightforward and affordable measures.

Evy Gomo is Clinical Manager at Davidson Trahaire Corpsych (DTC). It's a business that's been providing corporate psychology services since 1988.

Here she provides her top tips for SME owners looking to create psychologically healthy workplaces.

- **Pick the low-hanging fruit**

"There's no one right approach to creating a mentally healthy workplace," Gomo says. "What's appropriate will vary depending on what industry the business is operating within, the age range and gender make-up of its workforce, and what policies are already in place around mental health issues. That noted, the first thing I'd be advising SME owners to do is to make use of free online resources such as Heads Up website. Even the smallest businesses can develop highly effective strategies for prevention, early intervention and raising awareness by using the advice and techniques offered on those websites."

- **Lead from the front**

"If staff are going to take workplace mental health seriously they need to see that those at the top of the organisation – the owner and any managers – are serious about it. Those in positions of authority need to drive home the message that good workplace mental health is everyone's responsibility," Gomo says. "SME owners can print out handouts from sites such as Heads Up or The Black Dog Institute. They can go over that material with managers, then have team meetings with all the staff to discuss matters such as identifying and dealing with depression, anxiety and stress. There should already be well-publicised policies in place around bullying, harassment and discrimination. Nonetheless, it's useful to remind everyone about these, as well as any other OH&S policies relevant to mental health."

Additional Content & Resources

Australian Business Insights

Analysis from NAB economics, the expertise of business commentators and experiences of business owners.

LinkedIn ›

Business Tips

Tools, tips, guides and resources to help you improve your business.

businesstips.nab.com.au ›

NAB Think – ipad app

Get Business View magazine with additional content and features plus thought leadership content.

App Store ›

Show me research and insights for:

Filter by **Category:**

Business topics
Economic commentary
Federal Budget
Financial Markets
Industry insights   Investment
Women in Business
Fashion and Design

Tags

- **Call in the professionals**

"A [2014] PwC study found there was an average return of $2.30 for every $1 invested in creating a mentally healthy workplace," Gomo says. "Most people are now aware of EAPs – Employee Assistance Programs. These involve an employer meeting the cost of an employee accessing short-term counselling/coaching to deal with personal or work related issues. EAPs are a core part of DTC's offering but business owners should be aware there are other options. For example, DTC has a managerAssist™ service that coaches managers on how to deal with issues that often have mental health impacts on staff. Issues such as conflict, communication breakdowns and inappropriate individual or team behaviour."

- **Embrace technology**

"Our prospective clients sometimes don't realise the impact technology has had on the mental health industry," says Gomo. "People no longer have to travel to our offices for face-to-face counselling sessions, these can be done on the phone or Skype. Plus, our website is interactive. There's a whole lot of questionnaires on there that people can fill in if they think they – or a colleague – might have a mental health issue. They can also email a counsellor via the website to ask questions. We've even got a free app called GreatLife that provides holistic employee assistance and mental health support."

- **Work to find a win-win solution**

"Employers are entitled to expect a staff member to be fit for work, both physically and mentally," Gomo says. "That said, employers also have a duty of care to employees. Sometimes the employment relationship does have to be terminated, but in most cases employers can liaise with a staff member's doctor or psychologist and develop flexible working arrangements that meet the needs of both the individual and the business."

- **Look after yourself**

Gomo has one final tip for business owners, who are typically not getting enough downtime, sleep or exercise and having to deal with a host of financial, time and competitive pressures. "Part of setting an example for staff is prioritising your mental health. Don't allow cumulative stress to build up to dangerous levels," she says. "A lot of high achievers – including plenty from the business world – have now come forward to share their stories about having a mental health issue and learning to manage it. Thankfully, the stigma around both employers and employees admitting they're finding it difficult to cope is dissipating."

More from NAB:

- How Nous Group tackles workplace flexibility
- Improving Community Connections – August 2016
- Partnerships with consumers – good practice, good business, good policy

---

Tags: **Business stories**, **Health**, **Human resources**, **Management**, **Wellbeing**, **Women in Business**

Tweet   G+1 0

About the Author: **Health View**

Health View:

Health View is NAB's dedicated online source of economic updates, business trends and case studies specific to the healthcare industry. Designed to help our customers reach both their business and personal wealth goals, we provide regular features from industry experts on finance, property, marketing and legislation. To receive free updates **subscribe now**. Contact us at **health.view@nab.com.au**

> Read Health View's profile

Most recent article by Health View:

20 September 2016
Pharmacy and football go hand in hand for elite sportswoman

90 Other Articles

Related Articles

Help and Guidance