

Leaving your Baggage at the Door is no Longer Available

Creating psychologically safe spaces in the workplace.



I am sure we have all heard the professional advice to leave work at work and home at home, however as the lines between work and the rest of life have blurred, it no longer seems like an option. Emotional well-being and mental health are now fundamental considerations in the workplace, but many employers don't know where to begin when creating safe spaces for employees to process feelings. Here are a few things employers should consider from the point of view of a mass shooting survivor.

According to the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, 70% of adults in the United States experience some form of trauma in their lifetime. Add social issues and domestic disputes, and you can assume that there are many employees in your workplace who experience mental health challenges on a regular basis.

Companies are understanding that there is a need for a shift in the "leave your baggage at home" culture. With hybrid workplaces, there is no physical separation between the home and the office, which makes mental health separation virtually impossible (no pun intended). There is a need and responsibility for workplaces to assist in creating psychological safety, and for addressing mental health concerns. Many workplaces struggle with where to start when addressing these concerns.

Mental health disorders such as PTSD, Bipolar Disorder, Anxiety and Depression are classified as silent disabilities and require accommodation. Many employees refuse to identify as disabled in this way, which makes it challenging for employers to offer services. Here are a couple of suggestions when creating psychologically safe workspaces.



1. Mental Health Employee Resource Groups (ERG's): ERGs are voluntary employee led groups that support employees through networking and peer connection. A Mental Health ERG allows space for employees to address their concerns with their peers. These groups create a structure and do not act as therapy, but rather, create space for others to feel connected with others who need to process emotion.

2. Create Space to Discuss Social Concerns: Social concerns such as international and domestic conflict, violence, homelessness, etc.... can impact overall mental health for employees, even if they are not directly experiencing these challenges. Creating spaces such as lunch and learns around specific topics, town hall discussions and structured lectures, allow employees to stay informed and all the company to show employees that social awareness is valuable for the organization.

3. Empathetic Leadership: A safe leader can increase trust in the organization and can increase the productivity of the employee the team they work with. When leaders provide space for employees to process their humanity, they tell the employee that they matter as a whole person, not just as a worker. This increases the employees' trust and loyalty to the organization.

4. Encourage Self Advocacy: Mental health issues are not visible, and employers are not mind readers. Employees need to feel safe enough to vocalize their needs regarding mental health support. This may include providing therapy consultations as a part of the benefits package, providing educational workshops (see SurvivorsPath.com). Or providing anonymous reporting to allow employees to advocate for their mental well-being and safety.

Pivoting your culture to include Psychological Safety as a priority will benefit both the organization and the employee base. It allows employees to work effectively and productively without the fear of punishment for divulging mental health struggles. It allows creativity, innovation and inclusion as employees feel they can be themselves at work. Psychologically safe organizations reap the benefits of retaining employees and creating a culture and reputation as a safe and healthy workplace.

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