

Responding to employees' mental health in a pandemic-rocked world

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Presented by TriNet

In an evolving pandemic, the scale of mental health support that HR and business leaders should provide has escalated rapidly. Learn about the impact that COVID is having on the health of both your employees and your company, plus resources to help, in this VB Live event.

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The pandemic is having an outsized impact on mental health and happiness across the board, and employers are inevitably seeing and feeling the impact in the workplace. [It's essential for HR and business leaders to recognize this struggle](#), and develop resources to help support and sustain their workforce in empathetic, thoughtful ways that can also help protect the health of the company.

“We’ve seen massive increases in terms of reported depression, rates of anxiety, and significant increases in alcohol and other substance abuse,” says Michael McCafferty, consultant at FEI Behavioral Health. “People are isolating, and in some cases self-medicating. It’s understandable of course, and at the same time it’s a bit concerning. Sometimes those things can take on a life of their own.”

Simply checking in can be a major help to employees who may be struggling.

“It helps to just ask if they’re okay, how are you dealing with this, are you all right?” says Christy Yaccarino, executive director, benefit strategy and wellness at TriNet. “A lot of the time we don’t ask those simple questions. People appreciate it when you do.”

You’re there to listen, simply holding space for those employees to express what they’re feeling. And then take it one step at a time,” adds McCafferty. “Try to help them identify resources, including HR or employee assistance or other internal resources that might have been identified. Individual relationships, that front line relationship is the best place to start, and that makes it a priority.”

An EAP or your HR professionals can give you more guidance about helping your team members process any concerns.

But above all, these kinds of conversations need to happen in an environment where mental health and wellness is prioritized, and where the discussion around mental and emotional well-being is normalized. Employees should be encouraged to acknowledge their mental health without shame or stigma.

“It helps people to hear others acknowledge their own struggles out loud,” says McCafferty, “simply normalizing it, much in the way we do with other aspects of health and fitness.”

Employers also can be more proactive in adapting, finding ways to address work-life balance up front, redefining priorities and goals, developing expectations and an internal culture that acknowledge how the world has changed, and how it continues to be in flux.

“The organizations I see doing well are being much more proactive at identifying how their priorities needed to change, specifically around what they’re asking their employees to achieve and accomplish, and even deprioritizing some old goals,” McCafferty says. “[They’re the] companies that have acknowledged that we need to do something different now.”

But, both McCafferty and Yaccarino stress, these are uncertain times, and it’s clear that the conversation is ongoing. Companies are finding new and innovative ways to support and take care of their teams and their work forces, stressing basic self-care and learning to pivot when necessary, in a very real global crisis.

“You have to balance the needs of the business with the very real concerns and needs of humans who are performing that business, understanding that there is some balancing, some give and take in those equations, and revisiting that,” McCafferty says. “It’s not a one-and-done answer. Use the best safety practices that you can put in place. Listen to your employees’ concerns and address those concerns as best you can.”

For a deep dive into resources for companies of every size, a look at how startups and SMBs are adapting in a difficult business climate, and essential strategies you can implement now, don’t miss this VB Live event.

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You’ll learn:

- What employers need to know about COVID’s impact on the mental health of their employees
- How the mental strain of COVID may negatively impact the health of a company and employee productivity

- Best steps and practices companies are taking to help their employees get through this difficult time

Speakers:

- **Christy Yaccarino**, Executive Director, Benefit Strategy and Wellness, TriNet
- **Michael McCafferty**, Consultant, FEI Behavioral Health
- **Stewart Rogers**, Moderator, VentureBeat