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Two Ten Shines a Spotlight on Employee Mental Health at FN CEO Summit 2021

 By [Tracey Meyers](#)


The COVID-19 pandemic was a very challenging time for the footwear industry – particularly for footwear employees and their families.

At the FN CEO Summit held on June 9 and 10, industry leaders discussed “The Employee Mental Health Crisis in Our Post-Covid Workplace,” led by Shawn Osborne, president and CEO of Two Ten Footwear Foundation. The conversation featured Kenneth Cole, chief creative officer and founder of Kenneth Cole Productions and Dan Potterton, chief operating officer of FEI.

In the one-year period of March 2020 to March 2021, Two Ten Footwear Foundation helped more than 6,500 footwear families in crisis (or families with one or more people in the household being laid off or furloughed), with \$4.3 million in financial relief, according to Osborne.

Osborne added that the Two Ten Footwear Foundation referred more employees to FEI, an employee assistance program, for mental health consulting than any other time in its history.

Mental health referrals to FEI by the foundation in the first quarter of 2021 were four times higher than the same reporting period in 2020 and 2019, and requests continue to rise year-over-year. Potterton said

“The primary driver for folks calling us has been for assistance with psychological and emotional problems, principally the issues of depression, feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, grief, and COVID-related distress. Most of them are telling us that they are emotionally overwhelmed and physically exhausted,” he said. Potterton added that for many of those who reached out, it was the first time they had ever sought the help of mental health professionals.

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Cole, the founder and chairman of the Mental Health Coalition — an alliance of leading organizations, brands, and individuals that have joined forces to end the stigma surrounding mental health — said that “COVID-19 didn’t create this problem, it was a so-called preexisting condition, and it was pervasive.”

According to the World Health Organization, one in four people live with mental health conditions, Cole said. For his own employees, Cole implemented a stigma-free workplace program and put protocols in place to help employees “learn how to respect each other.” The brand also offers services to its employees for wellbeing and support that operate 24/7, as well as mental health days, a behavioral health service offered through its insurance, and an employee affinity group for “understanding circumstances.”

Potterton said, “When I hear all these initiatives that you’ve put together, it almost sounds like you’re creating a model that other companies can follow – these are all interesting, proactive ways that [brands] can [use to] support their employees’ mental health.”

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