- Mental health / Work environment

Five ways to establish mental wellness in the workplace

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Ninety thousand hours. "That's the amount of time an average person will spend at work over his lifetime," said industrialorganization psychologist and data scientist Andrew Naber.

With so much of our waking hours devoted to our job, isn't it only fair to expect our workplace to be a safe, comfortable, and toxic-free environment, one that supports employees' mental health and wellbeing?

"Yes" said Dr. Jon Edward B. Jurilla, chief of the Section of Psychiatry of Makati Medical Center (MakatiMed). "Companies that prioritize the mental health of their workers can expect inspired productivity, sound decision making, and harmonious interactions among colleagues. When employees feel at ease in the workplace, they perform better, are motivated to get up in the morning, and are less likely to be depressed or suffer from burnout. It's a win-win situation for all."

In the Philippines, employers in the private sector are mandated to implement mental health workplace policies and programs through the comprehensive and everevolving guidelines by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

What else can companies do to champion mental health and wellness at work? Little things make a huge difference, and MakatiMed suggests implementing these five small but significant changes:

Make counseling accessible. "Oftentimes, people want to express what's troubling them but are wary about confiding in a colleague or don't have the funds to see a specialist," shares Dr. Jurilla. "Get a life coach or organizational psychologist on board so staffers know there's a professional who can help them deal with their mental health concerns objectively and free from judgment."

Promote flexible work schedules. If possible, let them continue a workfrom-home setup with an option to work at the office. "Such arrangements have been known to lower stress and make employees more productive," suggests Dr. Jurilla. "You take away the tiring commute, giving them the freedom to work wherever best suits them. This allows for work-life balance. Injecting 'me' time in between banging out reports or meeting a client on Zoom can refresh the mind and spirit."

Create quiet spaces. "Convert an extra room in the office into a meditation or quiet corner. Hire a yoga or tai-chi instructor to hold onehour classes for the staff (a video session works, too!). The silence and slow, gentle movements will surely calm frayed nerves and clear an anxious mind," Dr. Jurilla said.

Stay away after office hours. "If you get the urge to text, call, or email an employee after she or he has gone home for the day, the weekend, or on leave — stop yourself," advised Dr. Jurilla. "These people already gave most of their hours and efforts to their jobs. Respect their personal time and let them enjoy their time away from work."

Be open. How do you know if your employees are truly happy with their jobs? Ask them. "Perhaps someone is saddled with too much work, or another feels underutilized," said Dr. Jurilla. "By consulting your team, addressing their concerns, and involving them in the decision-making process, you'll make them feel relevant. Heard. Like they matter. And that's the first step to promoting mental wellness at work."

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