

Mental wellness awareness in the workplace



With October being mental wellness awareness month; we will be taking a closer look at our most valued assets in business and our role as Business leaders and People Practitioners in this article.

According to the Department of Health (2022) the month of October has been declared Mental Health Awareness Month with the objective of not only educating the public about mental health but also to reduce the stigma and discrimination that people with mental disorders are often subjected to.

Mental health difficulties, such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse and job stress are common, affecting individuals, their families and co-workers, and the broader community. In addition, they have a direct impact on workplaces through increased absenteeism, reduced productivity, and increased costs. Very few South Africans seek treatment for their mental disorders. Mental disorders can be treated at your nearest clinic, hospital or healthcare provider.

Mental health problems are the result of a complex interplay between biological, psychological, social and environmental factors. There is increasing evidence that both the content and context of work can play a role in the development of mental health problems in the workplace. Key factors include:

- workload (both excessive and insufficient work)
- lack of participation and control in the workplace
- monotonous or unpleasant tasks
- role ambiguity or conflict
- lack of recognition at work
- inequity
- poor interpersonal relationships
- poor working conditions

poor leadership and communication
conflicting home and work demands.

Whilst the workplace can contribute positively to a person's mental health, it may also exacerbate an existing problem, or may contribute to the development of a mental health problem. Employers should put in place programmes to promote the mental health of workers, and to ensure that mental health problems are recognised early and treated effectively.

With this in mind one may ask "what then is the role of the Leader"? and also what is the role of the IOP and HRP. As People Practitioners it is imperative that we need to view our staff as more than just an employee, or as our human capital. but as a human-being. We as HR personnel need to play dual role supporting the business as well as guiding the Leadership.

We can support by understanding the individual, group and organisation's wellbeing needs and overall wellness dimensions. A good place to start is assessing using the wellness wheel of wellbeing with a focus on balance. What does balance mean to our body? This speaks to our need for regular exercise; eating right and getting enough sleep; whereas mental balance includes one's mindsets; emotional maturity, as well as our need for purpose, recognition and value underpinned by our belief systems.

With this understanding we will begin as leaders, and start to recognize that when our staff flourish, it directly translates to our business flourishing; as Richard Branson said: "Clients do not come first.

Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients."

Therefore, as Leaders and People Practitioners we need to place our employees at the center of our decision-making, notwithstanding the environmental influence (both internal and external) that drives our organisation's success, and at the same time consider and appreciate the well-being of our staff.

Mental wellness and overall employee well-being is not something we need to manage, but something we need to embrace and celebrate.