

Combating The Great Resignation And Addressing America's Mental Health Crisis

Creating a culture of awareness and acceptance is crucial

 By Connor Patros, Mindyra

For more than a year and a half, American workers have lived in the throes of a pandemic that has upset almost every aspect of their lives. Yet a second, quieter crisis has been brewing for many years, impacting worker productivity, availability and general wellness: the mental health crisis. It was here before Covid and it's only compounded by that current, overarching crisis.

Perhaps you've heard of the Great Resignation, the phenomenon of millions of Americans saying, "I quit," and leaving their jobs. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, a whopping 4 million people quit their jobs in April alone. If you're a human resource professional or an executive tasked with attracting and retaining good people, this trend should scare you alive. But there

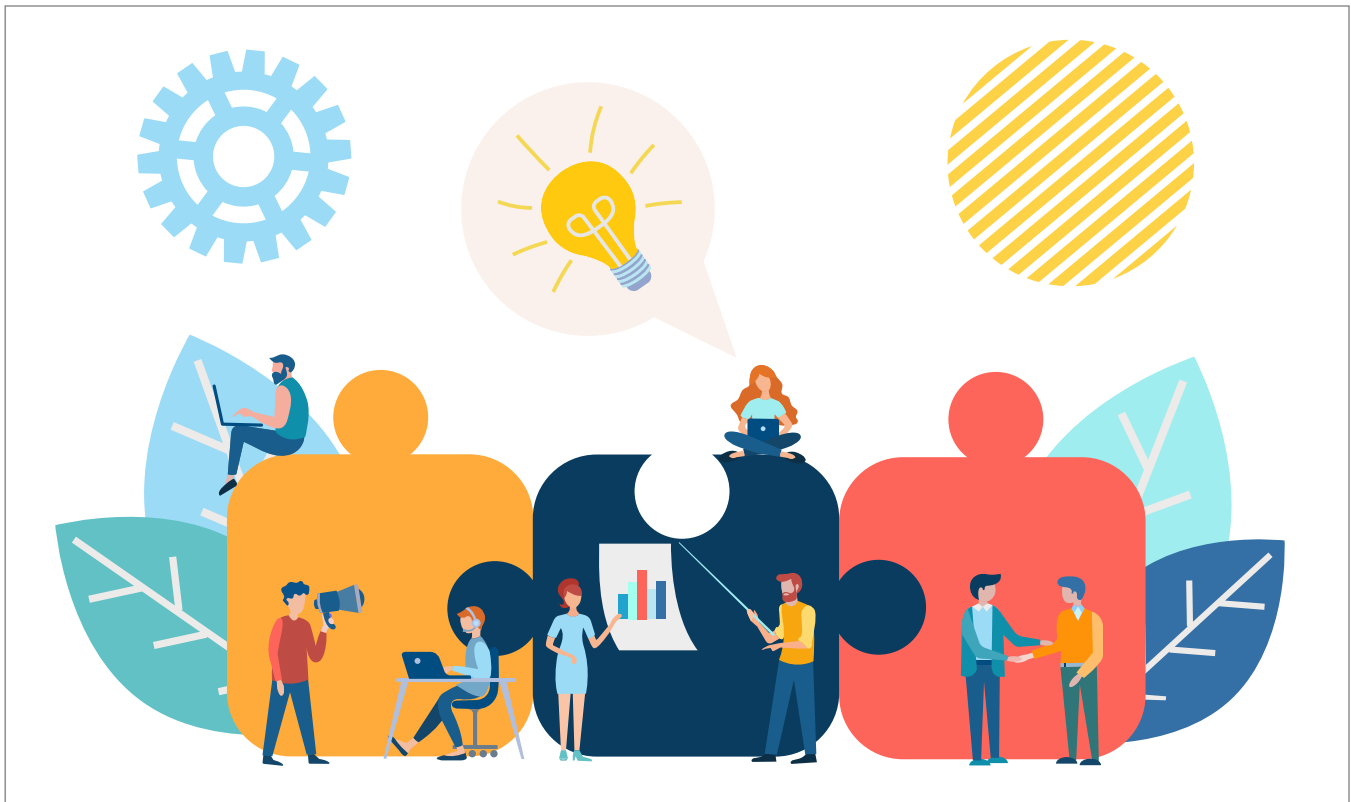
is hope: it doesn't have to be this way.

Employers that recognize and prioritize employee mental health and implement robust health and wellness programs as part of their health benefits are setting up their workforce not just for improved long-term stability and productivity, but improved workforce wellness too, not to mention general, overall health. The future of employee engagement will be based on identifying and helping to address these mental health struggles.

We know the pandemic has increased mental health difficulties for millions across the country. Research indicates more than 60% of employees report increased stress relative to pre-pandemic levels. More

than 40% of employees report significant sleep problems and about the same percentage of U.S. adults reported struggling with mental health or substance abuse, according to CDC data from June 2020.

While prior generations of U.S. employees are less likely to prioritize their mental health, younger generations are far more likely to, and they expect their employers to provide resources to help them. The research is striking: about two-thirds of Gen Z'ers cite mental health as a priority, while only a third of Baby Boomers do. According to a McKinsey study from earlier this year, more than half of Gen Z employees say they consider mental health benefits when selecting a new employer or staying with an existing one.



We're also seeing a growing disconnect between how employers *think* they are doing when it comes to mental health resources and what their employees think. Almost three-quarters of employers believe they support employee mental health well, yet only 27% of employees agree.

My own analysis has found disengagement is high and productivity is low among younger workers, who do not feel their mental health is being supported at work. I've spent a lot of my professional life thinking about how to provide employers with tools to help support employee mental health, knowing that doing so will be crucial to optimizing employee engagement,

but also to help people live more productive and happier lives.

The first thing employers should be doing is working with mental health experts who can help employees identify what issues they are actually facing, rather than tunneling them into the one or two specific areas that the mental health profession is generally focused on (namely: depression and anxiety). Depression and anxiety are not the only mental health problems that people face, which have become increasingly apparent in the wake of Covid.

The second important thing employers should be doing is providing employees with navigation to trusted tools that

address the problems identified. About 90% of people struggling with health problems will Google their symptoms prior to seeking some sort of care. The issue with that is, if you Google something like "treatment for depression" you could get literally billions of search results. That makes it extremely hard to find trusted resources in all the clutter.

Smart employers are partnering with vetted mental health organizations that can pair down that enormous minefield of offerings, while still providing employees with a menu of viable options (apps, therapists, etc.). Helping people navigate the complex landscape of mental health treatment is a critical ingredient in helping people get better.



At Mindyra, we recently partnered with the digital peer-to-peer support company HeyPeers, to provide peer counseling to employees. Peer support has long been found to be a valuable way to address mental health problems that are not at the severity to require a therapist.

While most employee mental health programs focus on the needs of high-severity employees (who often need resources such as a therapist, nurse or clinical counselor), the needs of low-to-moderate severity employees (such as those who could benefit from peer-to-peer support) are often overlooked, although they make up the majority of people with mental health difficulties.

We must remember, the majority of people with mental health

difficulties actually do not need a therapist and are likely to benefit from lower-level, lower-cost, and more accessible intervention approaches.

I recently had a conversation with a friend who is the CEO of a company in the northeast. He mentioned to me that one of the things he is most focused on is attracting and keeping good workers. This led to a conversation about the current “Great Resignation” and the obvious link between burnout, declining employee mental health, and people leaving their jobs.

While he made it clear that creating a culture of awareness and acceptance is crucial, it was also evident that we need to continue helping equip employees with the tools to battle burnout

and improve their overall mental wellbeing. We do not need to “resign” ourselves to the status quo when it comes to employee mental health. The companies that address this now will ultimately set themselves up for long-term success.



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