



How HR Can Promote *Mental Health* at Work

**ACTIONABLE ADVICE TO
HELP YOUR PEOPLE THRIVE**





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There's a *mental health crisis* in America and HR leaders are on the frontlines.

Mental health in the workplace has always been one concern among many, but now we're reaching an inflection point. **One in five American adults will have a diagnosable mental health condition** in any given year (Centers for Disease Control), and **67% of US workers say they're burned out** (Gallup). And of course, the pandemic, and everything that goes with it, from school closures to awkward Zoom meetings, isn't helping matters.



Paycor found that 86% of business leaders are concerned about mental health in the workplace.

(Paycor's State of American Business Survey)

HR leaders are on the frontlines, but mental health can still be taboo, or at least something that's only talked about reluctantly.

What can HR do to help? *let's find out.*



STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Part 1: Embrace Empathetic Leadership

A culture of self-care starts from the top.

Part 2: Engage Employees—Wherever They Are

Help employees fight burnout and stress.

Part 3: End the Stigma of Mental Illness

Create an open and stigma-free workplace.

Part 4: Leverage Benefits to Make a Difference

Benefits aren't one size fits all, and traditional offerings may not address today's reality.





PART 1:

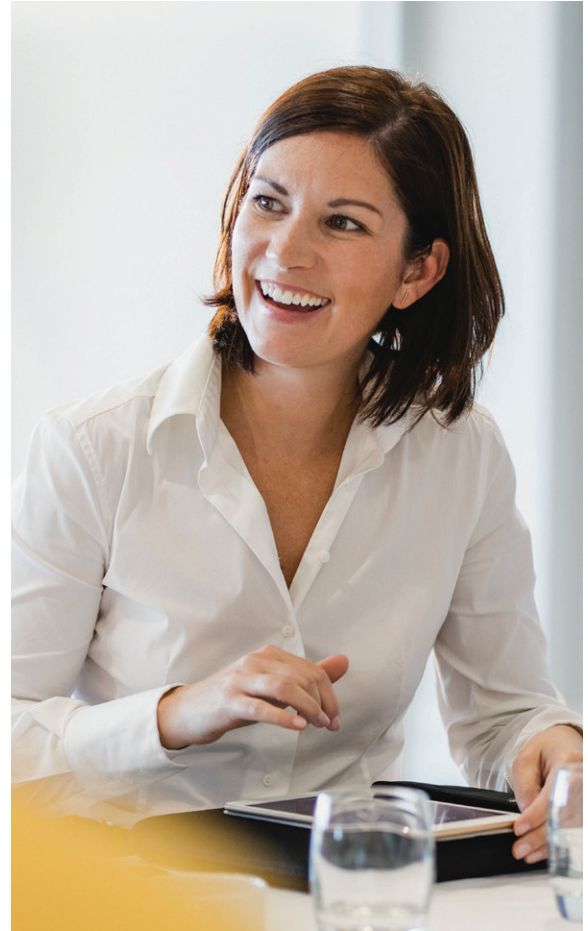
Embrace *Empathetic* Leadership


A CULTURE OF SELF-CARE STARTS FROM THE TOP

HR leaders can't just respond to mental health issues. **Effective HR teams *proactively* create a company culture that encourages psychological wellbeing.**

This is one of those cultural norms that really begins at the top. **Leaders need *to show, not tell.*** When company leaders take time off, their direct reports will, too. When leaders admit mistakes or simply feel comfortable saying "I don't know, let me get back to you," the entire organization gets the message that it's okay to show vulnerability.





 **Key Takeaway:**

Great leaders model the behavior they want to encourage.

Much of this guide will talk about specific, tactical things you as an HR leader can do to promote mental and emotional wellbeing at work. But the first thing to do, and the most important, is to set a good example.

About **47%** of Black and Latino survey respondents had left a job at least partly because of mental health.

(MindShare Partners)

48% of Gen Z and **44%** of Millennials say they feel stressed or anxious all or most of the time.

(Deloitte)



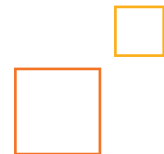
WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Create a Culture Where It's Okay Not to be Okay

Start changing attitudes today by supporting the creation of an [Employee Resource Group](#) dedicated to mental health. This gives affected employees a place to connect, share experiences and collaborate on awareness-raising projects. Most important, though, is the message it sends to other employees: it's okay to talk about sensitive issues.

2. Build an Inclusive Workplace

Mental health problems can affect anybody, but **vulnerable minorities and the young are most likely to suffer in silence.** Devote additional resources to anyone who might struggle to find their voice even at the best of times, especially if they are at the bottom of the career ladder.





3. Over-Communicate Through Uncertainty

Stability is an important building block of mental wellbeing, but in unpredictable times, how can businesses offer a sense of security? A great first step is to establish a regular communication cadence, weekly or monthly, when your C-suite can address concerns and give relevant updates to the whole organization. Whether in person or on video, it will offer a chance to show much-needed reassurance and leadership.

4. Give Listening Your Full Focus

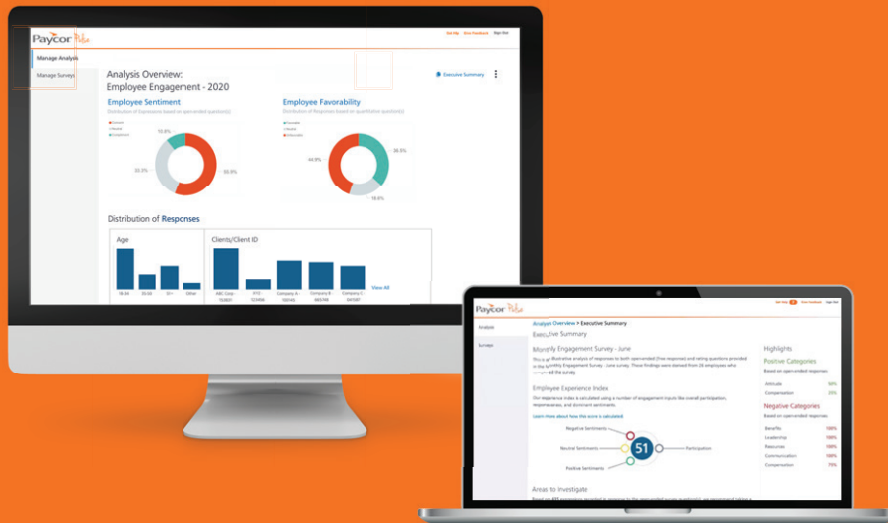
You can't offer the right support without knowing how your people are really feeling. Be intentional and systematic about gathering feedback so you can really "read the room." The goal is to spot the warning signs of low morale or team dysfunction and take action before they become an issue.





How Paycor Helps

Occasional employee satisfaction surveys are lagging indicators of persistent concerns. **Paycor Pulse** lets managers regularly gauge what employees are feeling at any given moment. It's the only way to gather current signals from your workforce.





PART 2:

Engage Employees— Wherever They Are

HELP EMPLOYEES FIGHT BURNOUT AND STRESS

You can't have a conversation about mental health in the workplace without talking about work. Most people spend more than half their waking hours at work. If something's not right, it's going to affect their health—physical and psychological.

Often, the problem isn't too much work, it's a lack of control. Employees need engaging work to give purpose and fulfillment. Colleagues are also important—tight bonds can offer an important sense of community in tough times.





It's true that engaged employees can take on too much work. But problems really start when employees feel like they have no say in what they are doing, and when.

The where matters, too. The pandemic showed us that **remote work isn't just distant, it's different**. Making it a success—preventing burnout and isolation among remote employees—will require creativity and innovation.



Stanford found that 10 common workplace stressors contribute to 120,000 deaths per year.

(Stanford)

Over 60%

of employees working remotely during the pandemic experienced symptoms of burnout.

(Monster)



Key Takeaway:

To support employees, give them real control over their time.



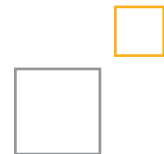
WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Be Outcome Focused

By now, everyone should know that [micromanagement](#) is a bad habit that alienates employees. Yet, as soon as an employee starts working remotely, the temptation to know exactly how they are spending their time returns. Remember: productivity isn't (usually) about the hours an employee works. Judge by results.

2. Don't Let Remote Mean Isolated

It doesn't matter where you work, connections with colleagues are key to engagement and, ultimately, wellbeing. The challenge for HR leaders is finding ways to keep remote employees an integral part of the team. Host in-person meetups when you can—even if it's only weekly, monthly or annually. If that's just not possible, don't give up: try these [remote team building activities](#).





3. Set Expectations on Out-of-Hours Emails

When all it takes to be “at work” is a smartphone and an email account, switching off (and escaping stress) is harder than ever. Mental wellbeing requires proper rest—and that requires the ability to unplug. Consider creating an official policy that discourages sending (and replying to) non-urgent emails on weeknights and weekends.

4. Empower Employees with Scheduling Control

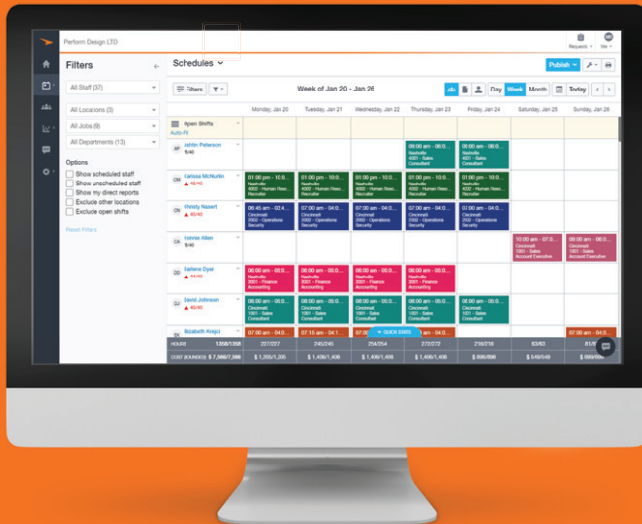
Remote workers may naturally gravitate towards unconventional schedules, but everyone deserves more control over when they work. Work-life balance is a cornerstone of employees’ mental health, but it’s hard to attain when having to work unpredictable shift patterns, received with short notice. Offer more control, or—at a minimum—predictability. (In some cities, this is now a [legal requirement](#).)





How Paycor Helps

Paycor Scheduling is designed to offer maximum efficiency for schedulers and freedom for employees. Save time by automating schedule creation and give employees more control over their time by letting them select from open shifts or swap shifts (with a manager's approval).





PART 3:

End the *Stigma* of Mental Illness

EVERY HR LEADER HAS A PART TO PLAY

Lots of people feel down on a rainy, cold Monday. Many people fall in and out of mild depression. But more people than you may realize suffer from a diagnosable mental illness. It goes without saying but let's say it anyway: mental illness exists on a spectrum, and in many cases, it's just something people learn to live with. It's an invisible challenge, but one lots of people confront and successfully manage. Companies, that are truly great places to work, know this and don't shy away from it.

Still, talking about mental health in the workplace can be uncomfortable—for everybody. Employees think twice about disclosing a condition. Will it bring unwanted attention? Could it “go into my record” and help tilt the scales against me if there are layoffs? **On the other side, management wants to be supportive, but may hesitate: if I mishandle this conversation, are there legal or compliance ramifications?**

Taking mental illness seriously means knowing that you—as an HR leader—can't magically solve any problem, much less a mental illness. But you do have the power to end the stigma by creating an open, inclusive and safe work environment and hosting conversations that don't cross boundaries.

Only 69%

of US adults with mental illness receive treatment.

(National Alliance on Mental Illness)

Almost 60%

of employees have never spoken about their mental health to anyone.

(Harvard Business Review)



Key Takeaway:

It's in everyone's best interest to end the taboo but, ultimately, it's an employer's responsibility to create an open and stigma-free workplace environment.



What You Can Do as an HR Leader

THE FIRST STEP IS UNDERSTANDING

1. Train Managers to Spot Warning Signs

When an employee is burned out, anxious or depressed, it can be easy to jump to the conclusion that they're having a performance issue. That's why it's important to train managers and help them spot the warning signs of mental health concerns—which may include:

- Reduced ability to concentrate
- Excessive fears or worries
- Extreme mood changes of highs and lows
- Withdrawal from colleagues

Managers don't need to be experts, but they should know the basics.



2. Encourage Disclosure

According to the Harvard Business Review, **less than 50% of employees feel that mental health is prioritized at their company**, and even fewer view their company leaders as advocates. Changing the culture is a top-down process. Encourage executive teams, managers and senior employees to share their experiences (or those of close family members and friends) with their teams. Showcasing disclosure and vulnerability as strengths—not weaknesses—goes a long way toward reducing the stigma and setting the tone for transparency.

3. Be Adaptable with Returning Employees

When employees return from mental health leave, employers should give them the tools and accommodations they need to thrive.

- Create a flexible work schedule and assist them with managing their workload
- Give them access to quiet rooms
- Pair them with a trusted co-worker, coach or mentor who can advocate for and help them transition back to work
- Let them use accrued paid leave or additional unpaid leave for treatment and recovery

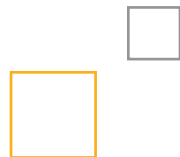
These small accommodations can go a long way for employees struggling with their mental health.



4. Don't Discriminate (+ Know the Law)

The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) increased legal protections to employees with conditions—like depression, bipolar disorder and PTSD—where symptoms are not necessarily continuously present. This means that legally, most mental health conditions are treated as disabilities, and so it's illegal for employers to discriminate based on mental health.

It's not permitted to ask about mental health during the hiring process and—importantly—employees are not legally required to disclose mental health conditions.





How Paycor Helps

Paycor's Learning Management System offers learning modules you can customize to help train leaders on how to promote a culture of wellbeing and how to have sensitive conversations.





PART 4:

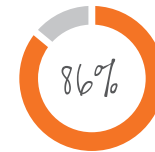
Leverage *Benefits* to Make a Difference

TRADITIONAL OFFERINGS

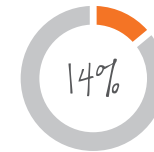
DON'T ADDRESS TODAY'S REALITY

At the beginning of this guide, we shared the surprising stat that 86% of employers are concerned about mental health. Here's an even more surprising insight: nearly half (45%) aren't sure what, if any, benefits they could offer that might help.

How concerned are you about mental health and wellbeing in the workplace? [HR]

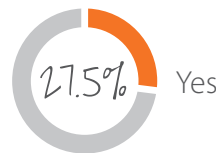


Concerned

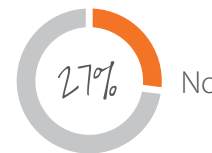


Not concerned

Will you consider changing your company's benefits plan as a response to mental health issues?



Yes



No



Not Sure



The good news is there's been a revolution of sorts in the employee benefits landscape. What started as lunchtime meditation classes and smoking cessation programs has matured into a more imaginative, holistic and wide-ranging approach to mental health at work.

If you need help understanding the benefits landscape, [talk to the right health insurance broker](#). A good broker can help you explore programs tailored to the needs of your multigenerational workforce. And a good broker can help you think about wellbeing more holistically, including physical, emotional and financial health.



Key Takeaway:

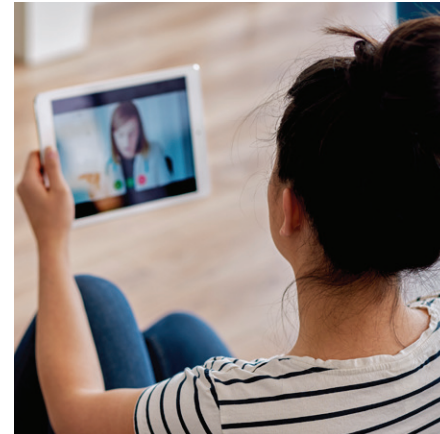
Health isn't just physical. Medical benefits shouldn't be either.

What You *Can* Do

TALK TO YOUR BROKER
ABOUT BENEFITS LIKE THESE

1. Telemedicine: Easy Access to Care

Make accessing care easier. Not only does telemedicine save time (no more driving, parking, leafing through magazines in the waiting room), employees don't have to take time off work. It's a win/win.



2. Childcare

For working parents, childcare options can be a lifesaver. Granted, that's a big lift and it's not cheap, but it's worth talking to your broker about childcare tax credits.

3. Traditional Employee Assistant Programs (EAPs)

EAPs are essentially a benefit, offering various kinds of free, confidential counseling, in person or over the phone, for common problems, such as depression and anxiety. PwC reports that 98% of employers offer EAPs, but a SHRM study found that less than 10% of employees actually use them. Most likely, employees just don't know EAPs are an option. A good broker can help you educate employees and promote your company's benefits with robust open enrollment and quarterly reminders. Now, if you do offer EAPs, keep in mind if employees get direct counseling (rather than just supplying referrals), these are treated as a medical benefit and are covered by ERISA and COBRA. Talk to your broker to learn more about EAP offerings.





4. Modern EAPs

Talk to your broker about going beyond traditional EAPs. Stress management and financial wellness programs are a great place to start.

Stress Management Programs

Addressing and learning stress management skills are vital to helping individuals eliminate self-defeating beliefs, thought patterns and emotional dependencies that drive stress, anxiety and unhealthy behaviors.

Financial Wellness Programs

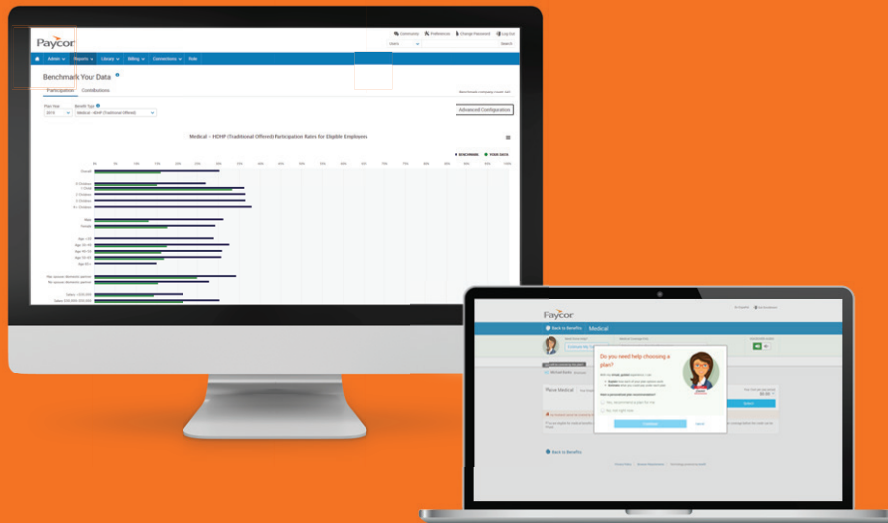
A financial wellness program is designed to educate employees about the proper way to manage their money. Many plans include tools such as financial counseling and coaching either online or in person, credit counseling and retirement modeling calculators.

Here are a few other benefits you should include in your [financial wellness programs](#).



How Paycor Helps

Paycor's Benefits Advisor transforms open enrollment and simplifies the complexity of benefits. For administrators, all benefits data is available in one place, saving time and ensuring accuracy. For employees, a guided tour helps eliminate confusion during open enrollment.





Paycor Can Help

Paycor builds HR software for leaders. Our Human Capital Management (HCM) platform modernizes every aspect of people management, from the way you recruit, onboard and develop people, to the way you pay and retain them. But what really sets us apart is our focus on business leaders. For 30 years, we've been listening to and partnering with leaders, so we know what you need: HR technology that saves time, powerful analytics that provide actionable insights and a Personalized Support Model. That's why more than 40,000 organizations nationwide trust Paycor to help them solve problems and achieve their goals.

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