

Disengaged Employees and the Mental Health Dilemma

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In 2024, employee engagement dropped to its [lowest level](#) in a decade. Employee engagement impacts organizational outcomes like work quality, safety and profitability. How your business deals with this employee disconnect has far-reaching implications. Helping your disengaged employees feel supported is a complex issue for HR executives. One area that you should continue to explore and strengthen is your company's approach to mental health.

You know this. COVID-19 exposed the cracks in the American workplace and each year since has compounded the issue. Persistent inflation, economic uncertainty and the increasing prevalence of natural disasters, the ongoing onslaught has had a corrosive societal effect. These larger concerns have had a reverberating effect in the workplace. Mental health leave has soared [300%](#) since 2017. More than half of all workers surveyed in the [Aflac WorkForces Report](#) reported suffering at least moderate levels of burnout. Women are particularly susceptible with 75% reporting workplace burnout. Your staff is burned out, checked out and increasingly apathetic to your organization's mission. Successfully combating this trend can feel like an insurmountable task for HR leaders who are already stretched thin with the balancing act of talent attraction and attrition, compensation costs, tight budgets and so on.

All these tasks contribute to the stress and burnout of HR and Finance executives as well. In order to mitigate the negative downstream effects, company leaders should commit to fostering an organizational culture and ethos that makes the mental health of its employees a priority. This is easier said than done but the success of your business depends on the drive and initiative of its staff. Finding ways to boost employee wellbeing can improve their engagement.

In 2025, think about how your organization can do the following:

1. **Craft Your Workplace Culture.** Creating a people-first culture was one of the top employee engagement trends of 2024 and that still matters. What does that mean? Consider how cultivating an environment that holds space for mental health needs and aligning it to your organization's purpose can offer employees the tacit support to take care of themselves. For example, many companies have "lunch and learn" initiatives for employees to receiving continuing education in their field. Using the same principle, employers can have mini "meditation meetings" and encourage mental health breaks throughout the workday.
2. **Lead From the Front.** If upper management isn't invested in creating a culture that supports staff, then burnt out and disengaged employees do not have any incentive to engage. Leading from the front can look like C-suite advocating for employee mental health initiatives and leading the push for their implementation at every level of the organization. A popular idiom suggests that employees quit the boss, not the job. Consider how upskilling managers can build stronger connections between staff and your organization. This can mean training managerial staff to engage with subordinates in an authentic manner that allows for accountability and care.
3. **Continue to Leverage Your Wellness Benefits.** For example, your employee assistance program (EAP) is a great resource for employees with acute crises. Actively promoting it throughout the plan year and reminding employees about it at company-wide meetings can help with adoption. Managers should also be able to answer questions from employees and refer subordinates to the program when appropriate. In addition, if there is an appetite and budget for additional benefits, consider how implementing a mindfulness program such as [Headspace](#) can help employees take

control of their mental health. [Research](#) suggests that members who actively utilized the application experienced significant reduction in baseline stress.

Each organization has its particular problems to address as 2025 continues full steam. However, the pervasive nature of employee disengagement is one that needs close attention for the continued success of your business. Talk with managers about what they are seeing in staff. Reach out to your broker partner for guidance and in-depth information on employee trends. The only bad response is keep doing the same thing and expecting a different result. That isn't good for anyone's mental health.

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