Supporting workers with anxiety

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Anxiety, perhaps differently to many other mental health problems, is something we are all likely to go through at one point or another in our lives. Whether it's work related or something that's triggered by stressful things going on at home, the physical and emotional effects of anxiety are something we can all empathise with.

However, not everyone will be affected in the same way by anxiety. For some, it may be a short-term issue but for others, it may be chronic. At its worst, anxiety can be derailing and limiting. It can make going to work feel almost impossible, especially if there isn't a foundation of support, care and guidance embedded into the business's culture.

Supporting someone with anxiety in the workplace

1 in 6 workers are dealing with mental ill-health such as anxiety, depression, or stress, but only 10% are seeking support. This huge disparity is happening for several reasons, the most common one being fear of being open and honest

about their current situation.

The responsibility for making an environment that fosters the ability to speak freely about mental health comes down to the employer. This isn't going to happen in a matter of hours, building culture takes time. But it all begins by making small changes that encourage consistent conversation around mental health and mental wellbeing.

Understanding the signs and impact of anxiety

A brilliant first step to take as an employer is to undertake your own training around mental health and mental wellbeing. By showcasing to your staff that you want to understand different mental health problems, including anxiety, and how to recognise them in yourself and others, you'll begin to build trust and confidence throughout the team.

This training will also support you in understanding how to create safe spaces in the workplace to discuss mental ill-health and how to talk on a one-to-one level with someone who may be struggling.

Understand individual triggers

Someone opening up to you about their anxiety is a brave step for them to take. When you're having this conversation, be sure to explore whether there are steps that could be taken within the workplace to help reduce or manage anxiety, working together to pursue greater understanding and provide support where possible.

By seeking to understand and recognise signs of anxiety, mutually agreeable plans can be put in place to provide support. However, it's important to note here that I'm not talking about dismissing or excluding those experiencing anxiety from new opportunities, but instead ensuring all are able to perform and grow from an equitable and inclusive foundation.

As with many areas in business, empathetic and authentic conversation is key - everyone will experience anxiety in different ways. Some may want additional support and might be happy to disclose their anxiety; others may wish to be supported more discreetly. It's about having open dialogue with the individual in question.

Find their superpower

Someone with anxiety has traits and skills that perhaps others won't because of the experiences they've had. Maybe they're more empathetic, have great patience or a keen eye for detail; it's important to praise these strengths and ensure they're used to the employee's advantage in both current and new tasks. A person with anxiety, as with someone without anxiety, who engages with their 'superpower' will create amazing work.

Be flexible

If someone had a broken leg and struggled to come into the office while they recuperated, there would be no doubt that this would be allowed. If someone is having a bad time with their anxiety and finds it easier to work at home during these periods, the same flexibility, where practicably possible, needs to be given to support them. Of course, some people with anxiety may find symptoms are eased when they're in the office – it's about exploring what support they require. Being as flexible as possible with people who are going through a period of mental ill-health is crucial.

Signpost

It's not your job to fix someone, but it is your job to create a culture of acceptance and care, as well as provide employees with the tools and resources to seek support. Speaking to Jersey Business about the importance of authentic, empathetic leadership Matt Falla, Managing Partner for Evelyn Partners explains:

'I rail very much against wellbeing starting and stopping with the fruit basket. Wellbeing is pointless and a fruit basket is pointless if people are working twelve-hour days. You must care about how people are working first and foremost, and truly speaking to and caring about the response you get from your staff, that is the start.'

Signposting is an important part of this, which means showing members of staff where they can turn to for guidance, counselling, and therapy in their local area.

In Jersey, we've got lots of brilliant places that offer mental health support for individuals and organisation such as Jersey Recovery College. We've also got Jersey MIND and Jersey Samaritans. Having leaflets displayed around the office can be one way to enable employees to undertake self-help, as can having a list of signposting options available to give to those who may reach

out to you on a one-to-one basis.

Employees that feel cared for and understood, whatever path they may be treading, are not only more likely to remain happy, healthy, and motivated, they're more likely to remain loyal to you as an employer. A team that thrives is one that remains empowered and productive which, in turn, means delivering excellent results. It only takes a few small steps to make a big difference to those who work with you.

If you'd like to understand more about wellbeing in the workplace and how you, as a leader, can support your team; talk to us today for further guidance.