

Well-Being at Work - Key steps to take

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Well-being at work

With redundancies, layoffs and downsizing all over the place, there are situations where those left in organisations are expected to do the work of those let go with real work well-being consequences. Owners and employers need to manage workloads, time, priorities and goals effectively while not sacrificing their employees

In this paper I will share with you some practical steps you can take to create a workplace where well-being is as important as targets and profits.

These steps are not designed to represent a full legal interpretation of Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and associated regulations. Each employer will need to take independent, competent advice to ensure that they comply.

What is workplace well-being?

Workplace health and well-being is a state of being for each employee and employer which enables each individual to reach their full potential in the workplace by ensuring their work ability through the promotion of mental, physical, emotional and psychological health and well-being. (HSA Workplace Well-Being Strategy, 2008).

What are the signs of poor workplace well-being?

High absenteeism and staff turnover

Interdepartmental conflict

Deterioration in industrial relations

Poor productivity

Low Morale

Higher rates of accidents, injury and poor health

General dissatisfaction, poor atmosphere and poor work performance

What about Stress?

‘Work-related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope’ - **World Health Organisation**

Research has shown that there are 6 main causes of work-related stress:

- 1. Demand** - e.g. long working hours, excessive workload, too little workload, boredom – concept of burn-out v rust-out
- 2. Control** - e.g. no control over pace of work, not able to use skills and initiative
- 3. Support** - e.g. not enough resources to do the job, not enough support from manager or colleagues
- 4. Relationships** - e.g. poor working relationships, harassment and **bullying** which is widespread
- 5. Role** - job insecurity, bad workstation design
- 6. Change** - e.g. mergers, restructures, redundancies

Staff can be suffering from personal stress too which they may bring into work – financial difficulties, relationship issues etc.

Stressed employees don't feel good and don't work well.

There are healthy ways to overcome stress – good lifestyle, diet, social solidarity, meaningful work etc.

Brief overview of your legal duties if you are an employer

You have a Common Law duty of care for those who work for you. You also have extensive legal duties within Safety, Health & Welfare at Work Act 2005 and associated regulations to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable safety, health and welfare of employees. You are required to manage and conduct work activities to ensure above etc.

If you are found in breach of these you can be fined or imprisoned. Fines can be on the company and/or you as the employer depending on the circumstances.

Costs of poor employee well-being

At the Individual level: suffering, physical and mental pain, loss of earnings, medical costs

At the business level: absence and sick pay, compensation and insurance, loss of production and quality, replacement and recruitment

At society level: output, social insurance (occupational illness and disability benefit), hospital and medical treatment.

Strong business case

There is a strong business case for striving to achieve well-being at work. Here are some of the tangible benefits:

Prevent illness – prevent absenteeism, have your people at work when you need them doing what you pay them to do

Reduce costs – replacements, disappointed customers etc.

Rehabilitate individuals who experience illness, injury or disability back to work

Ultimately have a healthy, productive, high performing workforce

Some practical steps you can take:

- 1.** Show real leadership that really proves you care about your people. You as the owner/CEO set the culture, tone and values for your staff workforce. Treat all staff with dignity.
- 2.** You need to be an excellent role model for others, in terms of management behaviours and also 'self-care' behaviours. You need to be seen not to work long hours or take work home. You need to be seen to keep fit and are willing to seek support when needed.
- 3.** Communicate with your staff about the tasks that really need to be done - cut out all the non-value add activities – focus on the delivery of goods or services to customers. Ask for their ideas about how to get the key jobs done, by whom, when etc.
- 4.** Allocate work in a reasonable way – try to ensure that no one individual is overloaded.
- 5.** Communicate all the time about the state of business and the priorities – ethics are back, profit as the only motivator should be gone.

6. Listen to your staff and their concerns.
7. Up skill them by giving them extra training.
8. Train them to manage their time better, prioritise better. Train them in quicker better software, encourage their ideas to streamline tasks.
9. If possible offer them flexible working arrangements to encourage work/life balance – pay off X 20 times
10. Encourage employees to take exercise during breaks and after work
11. Provide healthy eating options in canteens and staff rooms
12. Provide support for staff with problems – counselling, Employee Assistance Programmes - If you are seen to offer a confidential EAP/Counselling service you are unlikely to be found in breach of your statutory duty
13. Organise an odd staff night out to thank staff and get them to bond together
14. Celebrate every little success e.g. landing a new contract, getting better credit terms from a supplier etc. – bring doughnuts or muffins into the office
15. Give positive feedback at every opportunity. Key piece of advice - praise in public, criticise in private
16. Manage absence/return to work interviews
17. If you can, facilitate and subsidise health checks (screening) at work for early detection of illness and identification of risk factors
18. Raise awareness by distributing free health leaflets e.g. Irish Heart Foundation and Irish Cancer Society at work.

What does Health & Safety Authority say about well-being at work?

In their document “Workplace Health and Well-Being Strategy” published in 2008 they state that:

“Well-being increases work satisfaction and improves trust and commitment and benefits staff and employers alike.”

Looking after your staff is the finest investment you can make.

ENDS.