How To Manage Employee Wellbeing In A Small Business

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The demands, challenges and risks that come with running a small business can bring personal pressures and impact on health and wellbeing.

No matter what the size of an organisation, however, its greatest asset is its staff and there is a strong business case (https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/17538351011031948/full/html) for investing in workplace health because a happy and healthy workforce is proven to enhance business performance.

Promoting health and wellbeing at work not only helps to improve individual health and quality of working life, but employers can reap benefits (https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1757913913489611) from improved staff morale and job satisfaction, increased productivity, better performance at work and less days off sick. Increased absenteeism and reduced business productivity are the implications of not taking this agenda seriously. Consider how you can make changes (http://primarycare.imedpub.com/influencing-organisational-change-in-the-nhs-lessons-learned-from-workplace-wellness-initiatives-in-practice.php?aid=1126) in your workplace so that health and wellness is a core part of company values.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to wellbeing, but there are plenty of ways that small business owners can promote wellbeing to suit their business, their staff and themselves. Based on my own experience of working with businesses through the University of Nottingham’s Ingenuity Network, and guidance from the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) (https://www.fsb.org.uk/docs/default-source/fsb-org-uk/well-being-and-small-business—how-you-can-help.pdf), here are some top tips for managing employee wellbeing.

1. Being self-reliant doesn't mean going it alone

Find a mentor that you can talk to about problems in your business. Talk regularly about work in one-to-one sessions or lunchtime catch-ups. Stress (https://theconversation.com/what-happens-to-your-body-when-youre-stressed-81789) can make us physically ill, and has a significant impact on productivity. Take steps to build resilience (http://theconversation.com/six-ways-to-beat-the-back-to-work-blues-by-building-resilience-102824). Promote open conversations about mental health, which can break down...
prejudice and encourage staff to share their issues sooner, before they reach crisis point. Take time to network with others in similar situations.

2. **Well-designed jobs protect health and wellbeing**
Line managers make all the difference to staff feeling support and valued. Look into different approaches to line management, supporting people with mental health problems, and handling conflict at work. Allowing more flexibility through homeworking, part-time working, flexi-time or job sharing is beneficial for recruitment and retention, and can help people get the right work-life balance. Good planning and organisation of work can prevent unnecessary stress. Provide opportunities for staff to volunteer in the community – it enhances quality of life and builds transferable skills in team-building, time management and communication.

3. **Our environment influences how we feel**
Think about improving air quality within your working environment – ventilation, air conditioning or even some green plants. Increase exposure to natural light through outdoor meetings, rotating use of the office desks near to windows, or shared break spaces with windows. Sitting for extended periods is not good for our health. Think about ways to break up prolonged sitting, through encouraging walking meetings, moving photocopiers and drinks facilities a little further away from workstations or using apps and digital innovations to encourage people to move around ([https://www.jmir.org/2019/2/e11079/](https://www.jmir.org/2019/2/e11079/)).

4. **Being fit allows us to work when we want to**
Healthy diet ([https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/dr-holly-blake-increasing-engagement-nutrition/](https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/dr-holly-blake-increasing-engagement-nutrition/)), regular exercise and adequate sleep are important for general health and concentration. Offer staff health checks ([https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/news/free-health-checks-for-construction-workers](https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/news/free-health-checks-for-construction-workers)), and consider ways you can encourage your staff to exercise ([https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/bjhp.12052](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/bjhp.12052)) at work. Promote active travel to work (walking and cycling), organise group fitness classes, running or sports clubs. Use technology to improve staff health and fitness, such as pedometers ([https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14635240.2015.1016621](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14635240.2015.1016621)), online learning packages ([https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.2017.26.21.1182](https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.2017.26.21.1182)) apps, email or mobile phone messaging ([https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.4278/ajhp.140415-QUAN-143](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.4278/ajhp.140415-QUAN-143)). Consider staff musculo skeletal health – looking after our bones, joints and muscles, preventing and managing back pain. Be an inclusive workplace – there are grants you can access to support staff with disabilities or long-term health problems, providing money to fund new equipment or adapt existing equipment at work. Think about gradual return to work processes for staff that have been absent with long-term health problems.
5. **When you don't have the answers, ask the experts**

When faced with situations you do not know how to manage, reach out. The FSB offers medical and health advice, legal advice and access to UK networking events. Public Health England and Healthy Working Lives Scotland have a range of tool-kits and resources around creating a safe, healthy and motivated workforce. The UK Green Building Council offers sustainable environment solutions. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development has a wellbeing hub, and a range of fact sheets and resources. Check out local or regional programmes of activity around mental health at work that may provide opportunities ([https://www.midlandsengine.org/7-million-funding-mental-health/](https://www.midlandsengine.org/7-million-funding-mental-health/)) to access resources or support for your company. You can access more information about mental health from MIND, Scottish Association for Mental Health, INSPIRE Northern Ireland, and national campaigns such as Time to Change.