

DEPRESSION IN THE WORKPLACE: HOW TO HELP YOUR EMPLOYEES

By Denise Hellekson • The Village Business Institute

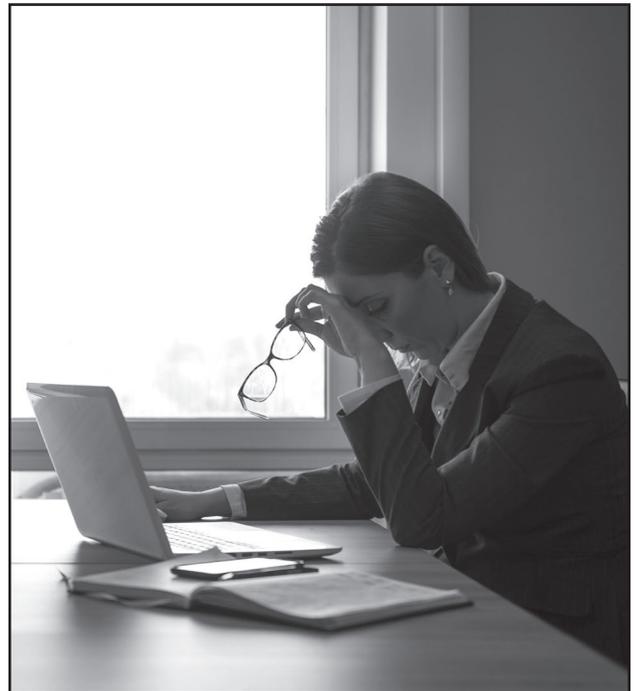


As EAP Clinical Supervisor for The Village Business Institute, Denise provides counseling services to adolescents, adults, couples, and families with concerns regarding anxiety, depression, trauma, grief/loss, relationship issues, self-esteem, life stress, workplace issues, and personal growth/well-being enhancement. She incorporates mindfulness and self-compassion practices into her work where appropriate and is also trained to provide Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM). She received a Master of Science degree from St. Cloud State University with a double emphasis in Community Counseling and Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling. Denise is a Licensed Independent Social Worker, a Certified Employee Assistance Professional, and a trained mediator.

Clinical depression affects over 10 million people in the United States each year. Over a lifetime, 10 to 15% of people will experience at least one episode. Clinical depression is more than just having the “blues” or having a bad attitude, and it is not something an individual can just “snap out of.” It is a major medical disorder that affects a person’s thoughts and feelings, their physical health, and their behaviors.

Quality of life for the individual with untreated depression can be seriously compromised, negatively impacting relationships, overall health, and employment opportunities. Those with untreated depression also have a higher risk of suicide.

Because depression tends to affect people in their prime working years, those suffering with untreated depression can have a significant impact on the workplace. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP), depression results in 200 million lost workdays in the U.S. annually and costs employers up to \$4 billion. The CDCP estimated employees with depression miss an average of 4.8 workdays and suffer 11.5 days of reduced productivity. In the CDCP report, rates of serious difficulty with work, home or social activities related to depressive symptoms also increased as symptom severity increased, from 3.9% among people with mild depressive symptoms to 15.8% among people with moderate symptoms, and 42.8% among those with severe depressive symptoms.



The good news from the CDCP is that 80% of people with depression will improve with treatment. However, although effective treatments are available, many people who suffer from depression do not seek help. A CDCP News Brief dated December 2014 reported that 35% of Americans with severe depressive symptoms and fewer than 20% of those with moderate depressive symptoms reported having seen a mental health professional in the past year.

If depression is not treated, it is likely to become a chronic issue. Just experiencing one episode of depression places a person at a 50% risk for experiencing another episode, and further increases the chances of having more episodes in the future.

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So, if effective treatment options are available, why don't more people access help?

One major problem is that many people do not realize they are suffering from depression, and even if they are aware, they tend to hide it. Although things are changing, many people are concerned about the stigma of having mental health issues. Employees can be fearful that a mental health issue could jeopardize their job and financial stability.

How can your organization help employees get the support they need?

1. Help to remove the stigma attached to mental health issues.

Organizational leaders, supervisors, and managers can help to remove the stigma attached to mental health issues by having open conversations in the workplace about depression and mental health.

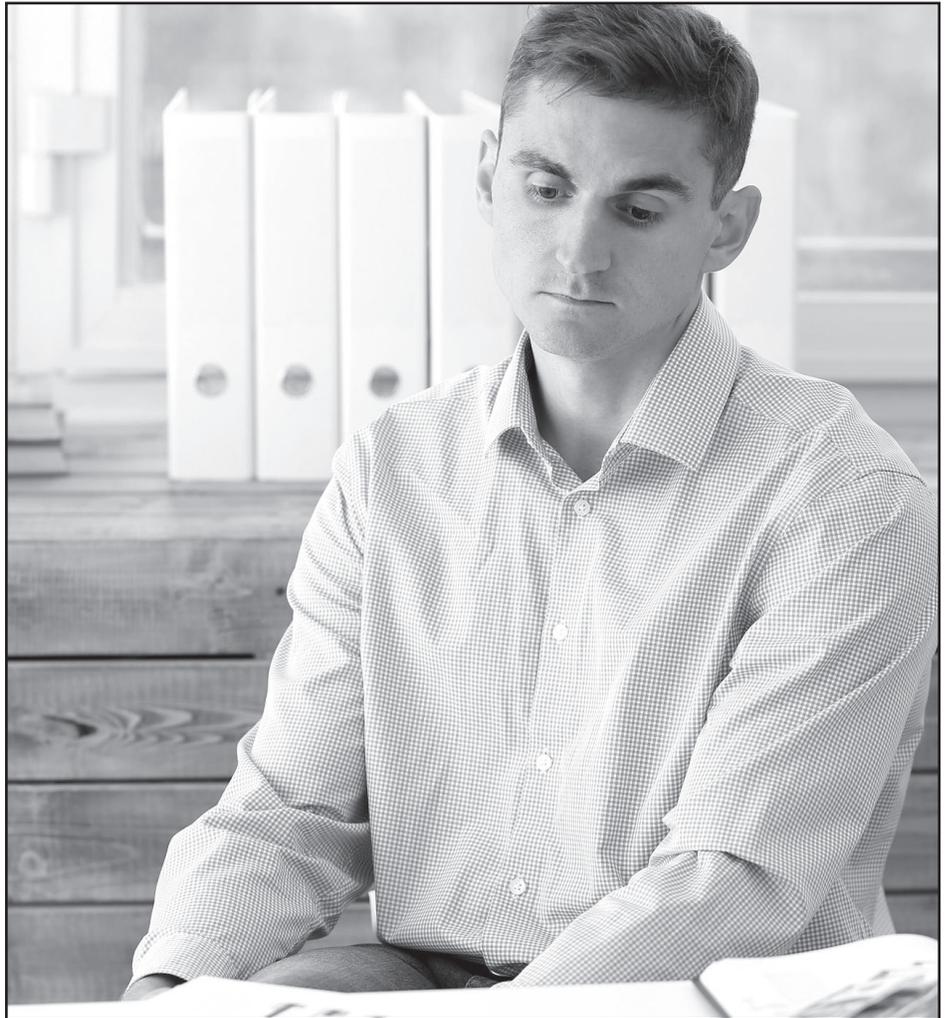
Treating mental health concerns the same way we treat other health conditions, talking openly about it, educating all employees about the signs and symptoms of mental health issues and where they can go for help, and providing a supportive environment for bringing forth concerns can help employees feel more comfortable seeking the assistance they need, when they need it.

2. Know the signs and symptoms.

Be familiar with your employees and take note when there are changes in work performance, working relationships, and general attitude. Keep in mind people suffering from depression as well as other mental health issues are many times the last ones to realize they are struggling. Being aware of significant changes in performance, mood, and interpersonal relations can help supervisors address concerns before they become critical.

Many of the signs exhibited in the workplace are performance related and can include:

- Poor quality of work (such as incomplete duties or tasks)
- Loss of motivation, low morale, and/or procrastination
- Increased accidents on the job
- Fatigue, tiredness, excessive yawning
- Increasing frequency of sick days
- Changes in social behavior in the workplace (social withdrawal, conflicted relationships)
- Increased irritability, anger, and/or tears
- Nervousness and/or restlessness
- Increased complaints of physical issues
- Impaired judgment, indecisiveness, and forgetfulness



3. Address concerns in a supportive, professional manner.

As with all other health and/or work-related concerns, supervisors are not expected to diagnose a mental health issue, but to be aware of the signs, address the performance issues, and refer your employee to appropriate resources. Make sure to schedule time to have a conversation with the employee in private, and follow-up with them to make sure issues are being resolved and they have the support they need to be successful.

Keep in mind The Village EAP is here to help. Accessing the Supervisor Helpline at 1-800-627-8220 can be a great place to begin if you have questions about employee mental health issues and how to proceed.

DEPRESSION AT WORK

Depression takes a major toll on those who have the disease and on their workplaces. Consider these annual statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- **Lost work days:** 200 million
- **Cost to employers:** \$4 billion
- **Reduced productivity:** 11.5 days per employee with depression
- **Difficulty with work activities:** 42.8% of those with severe depressive symptoms



THE CHALLENGES OF LEADING A TEAM WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN

*By Pratap Nambiar
ThoughtPerfect.com*

In a coaching conversation with a CEO, recent challenges surfaced. Over the last several months, there have been many negative customer experiences, with a new problem surfacing every time an old one was fixed. What, asked my client, is the CEO missing? Is it all really only technical challenges, or is there a bigger issue at play?

I threw it right back at her, and she said there was certainly something missing.

Sensing change within an organization is the leader's job, but more often than not, a leader's attention is absorbed by external circumstances and competitive changes.

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What is happening internally – in terms of the cognitive, psychological, and spiritual development of people, and how subtle changes in their behaviors based on shifting values, beliefs, and assumptions are derailing the culture of the organization – is often missed out.

Writer Ken Wilber, whose “integral theory of spirituality” tries to map human understanding and consciousness, refers to four quadrants of change – two internal and two external. Organizations usually spend much time and money on design, workflow, processes, policies, and procedures. Investment is also made to develop individual skills and competencies to improve performance. Both of these have a clear external orientation.

Technical problems can always be addressed with an external focus. However, adaptive challenges – problems or dilemmas that have no apparent solution – need a whole new mind to deal with them.

It is the structure of mind, the degree of complexity of thinking, the evolved mind that needs to find a new approach, a new way of resolving a problem.

Adaptive challenges are difficult to deal with because often, we do not realize that we are facing one; it has a way of sneaking up on the organization over time without the leader’s knowledge, and then when things begin to fall apart, all kinds of technical solutions are thrown at it in the hope that it will go away.

Solutions to adaptive challenges cannot be found with the same level of thinking at which the problem was perceived. It needs a whole new mind, a more complex thought process that can keep pace with the ever increasing complexity of doing business.

In the words of my client, “It is not enough to mechanically run an engagement survey at the end of a year. The CEO needs to have his finger on the pulse of his leadership team and through them, the rest of the organization. People, performance and culture are strongly interlinked.”

More often than not, leaders cannot sense the slow change that has been taking place in their organizations over time. These changes are happening at the internal level, inside each individual first and then collectively, where they share the same beliefs and assumptions which shape their collective behavior.

An organization is nothing but a collection of people. Strategies don’t mean anything if the people do not implement

them. If people are not committed, not motivated, and do not take ownership of their roles and so their business, the organization is doomed to fail. This is not news, yet when you treat your people as if they were secondary to processes and do not matter in the larger scheme of things, you get a dysfunctional workforce that are victims of their own negative narratives which kill their self-belief and self-esteem.

What they need is the trust of the leadership, the autonomy to do the things they need which will give them a sense of pride and achievement to see how they play a role in the success of the organization.

This can only be done if the leaders have instilled a strong sense of purpose in the organization. People come to work to express themselves, not to impress others. They need to feel a strong emotional connection with what they are doing and how it contributes to the well-being of others.

It is never just about the money. They need to be inspired to perform.

There are leaders, and there are those who lead. Most leaders do it with power and through exercising their authority. We follow those who lead not because we have to but because we want to, because the leader inspires us. We don’t do it for the leader, but we do it for ourselves.

So leaders need to give their people a very strong reason as to why their organization exists. The key question to ask is: Are we living our purpose, are we feeling good about why we are doing what we are doing?

If a leader has sensed the change and is ready to deal with the adaptive challenge, the first thing she or he needs to do is to change the language in the organization. If she wants to create a new way of being for the organization, she needs to create a new way of being for the people so they develop a new way of doing things.

The culture will only change with new beliefs, new values, new behaviors which need to be fueled by new conversations. Conversations perhaps not had before. This requires a new way of thinking, a new way of engaging, opening minds to new perspectives, and listening to learn.

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