



Proactivity and Persistence: Managing Mental Wellbeing in a Remote Workplace

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For many companies, remote and hybrid working is here to stay. But the mental health knock-on effects don't have to be. Here's how HR leaders can take a proactive approach to support and manage employee mental health.

The sudden shift to remote work during 2020 led to business benefits for some. Various studies show increased productivity and efficiency, a wider talent pool, as well as lower operational costs and less absenteeism.

And from an employee's point of view, Australians appear to be positive about remote working. The latest [Remote Work Report](#) from GitLab found that 34% of respondents would be prepared to look elsewhere if they were forced to return to full time in-office work arrangements.

Contrary to what you might expect when you add the challenge of homeschooling, overcrowded shared houses, or powering through back-to-back video meetings, employees were more engaged overall during the Covid-19 pandemic. The [Impact of COVID-19 on Employee Engagement Report](#) by Peakon, a Workday company, found that overall engagement actually increased by 2% between January and July 2020.

But it would be wrong to assume there were no negative effects from this monumental shift we've all lived through. The pandemic catapulted employee wellbeing to the top of the agenda in 2020. Now, as we figure out how to move forward, the mental wellbeing of our employees must remain a priority.

Work has a Profound Impact on our Mental and Physical Wellbeing

The reality is that employers have a duty of care to look after the mental health and wellbeing of their employees. The workplace has one of, if not the, biggest impact on employees' mental and physical wellbeing, especially when it comes to increased working hours.

[Research from the World Health Organisation](#) found that working 55 hours or more a week was associated with a 35% higher risk of stroke and a 17% higher risk of dying from heart disease.

An organisation has an immense amount of influence on wellbeing, and therefore responsibility to support and manage it. But it's not just a health imperative — it's also good for business. Employee wellbeing has been clearly tied to things like profitability, absenteeism, and productivity.

Proactivity and Persistence are Key

One of the key aspects of understanding your employees' mental wellness is a willingness and appetite to truly know what's really going on, and what you as a leader can do to help.

It's not enough to send out a blanket pulse survey once a quarter. You have to explicitly and continuously ask people about their mental wellbeing, and show that action will be taken, and feedback acknowledged. People need to have a safe platform upon which they can actively discuss it, across all levels of the organisation.

For example, when one of our clients promoted a 30-minute session for leaders on how to deal with the stress and anxiety of leading a team remotely, they thought they might get a handful of responses. Within an hour, all 200 slots were filled. This shows how desperately needed this sort of training and support is for our leaders, who are often ill-equipped to navigate this territory.

That's why [proactively listening](#) and asking people how they're feeling through a series of questions such as "do you feel mentally and physically supported in your work?" is crucial. Keeping a close eye on those responses to note any changes is the most effective way to stay on top of your employees' wellbeing. That way, you can anticipate where the problems are and manage them before they become an issue.

Technology Can Tell You What Your Employees Won't

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, it's inevitable that some employees will feel uncomfortable talking about their mental wellbeing. That's why having a [solid HR data platform](#) is crucial. With confidential, real-time feedback, you can spot any warning signs and be more proactive in managing them.

For example, if you're using [an employee engagement tool](#) and you notice mental wellbeing scores suddenly drop in a particular team, this could be a sign that there's too much pressure on that one team currently, and that more support is needed.

Wellbeing is a Long Term Cultural Change

For most of us, remote work — in some shape or form — looks like it will be sticking around for the time being. Even if the COVID-19 pandemic were to magically disappear tomorrow, most organisations have realised the business benefits of having some sort of remote working set up. And the message from many employees that remote working works for them has been received loud and clear.

As organisations settle into their new working arrangements, whether that's fully remote, remote-friendly, or a hybrid setup, it's important to consider how to embed wellness into the culture at large. Not just as a temporary stopgap to manage things during a pandemic —

but as part of a wider strategic move to improve employee wellbeing, and ultimately increase productivity in the workplace.

If you're interested in learning more about Intelligent Listening and how you can empower every employee, [chat to our team today](#). We're here to help.