

How to Build Resilience in a Stress Epidemic

written by Rory Lodge | December 23, 2020



Last week, Dr. Ryan Todd, Psychologist and CEO of headversity joined us for our last webinar of the year. And what a year it has been. However, there were a great number of questions asked during this short 1 hour session that we were unable to address live. But, you can find the questions and answers below.

What stress is added to workers during COVID?

Some added stressors include: family and personal health concerns, job security concerns, limited social interactions leading to isolation and loneliness, financial concerns, feeling helpless and hopeless over lack of control of circumstances

Best Practices to deal with increased employee COVID-19 Stress

Resilience is a proven way to curb the negative effects of stress, and would be our first recommendation. There are programs (headversity included) to help with this. Aside from this, a big one is communication. Things such as regular check-ins between managers and their direct reports, letting employees know they're being supported. Senior leadership should also be regular communicating with their organization on supports in place and updates as it pertains to health and safety around the pandemic.

How to maintain a positive work culture

We think it starts with good communication from leadership and living company values on a daily basis. Try to help everyone control their controllables: their attitude, their behaviour, and their actions. Limit the time dwelling on external factors outside of our control, such as the length and severity of the pandemic.

How to deal with COVID fatigue

Personal ways to get past COVID fatigue means managing our energy. 3 cardinal rules for our energy management is eating well (think a Mediterranean diet), practicing good sleep hygiene (going to sleep and waking up the same time everyday, getting 7-8 hours nightly), and getting 20-30 minutes of light-to-moderate exercise per day. Professionally – if HR and/or management are getting fatigued of COVID and mental health conversations – we suggest outsourcing training to help carry the load.

What are strategies to assist staff in managing stress without overstepping?

A few things. You could offer them personalized and anonymized training supports (headversity does this). You could schedule regular, work related check-ins and routinely ask how they're doing. It's important to just demonstrate empathy, understanding, and that you're there for them whenever needed. Normalize the conversation by having it more often and lowering the stakes.

How to handle the increased number of leaves due to mental health issues; prevention measures?

We think prevention is the absolute way to go. At headversity we call ourselves the 'PRE-AP' – meaning we are an earlier intervention option for employees that is applicable to everyone, if they're high performers or in mental distress, and can direct to an EAP if crisis arises. Building habits in your workforce earlier can be done through resilience training.

How can we increase our utilization of our company's EFAP?

There will be no one size fits all for this answer. However, resilience training programs like headversity get upwards of 5x the utilization that an EAP will. In our platform, we offer one-touch channeling to EFAP supports. And with our higher utilization and reach potential in each employee's hands, we can help with EFAP utilization, too.

How do we help employees deal with long term, uninterrupted stress with no end in sight?

There are return to work programs that are helpful for this, normally offered through your EAP/EFAP program. We've also had employee case studies of return-to-work being greatly aided through resilience training with headversity.

In your experience, what is the most effective way to encourage employees to 'open up' about how they are feeling?

Anonymizing the support can greatly help to reduce this barrier. You can do this with digital training like headversity. There are self-assessment checkpoints throughout our platform, where employees are more likely to do without feeling they're being watched or observed, than if they're prompted in-person.

What are the long-term implications of the pandemic stress on the workplace?

It's really hard to say. Experts are calling this era the 'echo pandemic', meaning our mental well-being is at serious risk, and the effects of this pandemic will be felt for some time. Pandemic or not, we encourage employers to take this time to build up their mental health strategy to set themselves up for the long term.

How do we support employees and leaders in these stressful times?

Offer them digital, proactive training to build their resilience and mental health habits. Other ways include flexibility. Lean less on traditional work practices (i.e 9-to-5) and understand that working from home has its challenges for each person. A study from PWC from 15 top CEOs suggested that a major trend heading into 2021 is creating more flexible, employee-centric work practices.

How to balance productivity and mental wellness?

These things are not opposed. Building up our mental wellness will lead to greater productivity. It's been linked to greater job satisfaction, work happiness, organizational commitment, and employee engagement.