I Need To Talk To You About Your Mental Health



Data tells us that on average, 44% of the workforce will experience a mental health concern at some point. It is important to be cognizant of the possibility that a workplace performance issue may be the result of a mental health challenge. Before approaching an employee to talk about a performance issue, make sure you have all the information.

This conversation with an employee is not easy. Follow these steps to make the process easier.

Steps For Discussing Mental Health Concerns With An Employee

1) *Gather and Assess Information:*

Ensure that you have an accurate picture of the situation. You need information, but you must be discreet. Spreading rumors will serve to make the situation worse. If behaviours raise alarms and if they have lasted for a while, or are getting worse, you might need to have a conversation. Compile the information as a first step.

2) *Prepare Yourself:*

Familiarize yourself with the signs of mental health issues. Familiarize yourself with your organizations relevant policies including confidentiality, safety and

reporting procedures. Gather resources that you may need to provide your employee. If your organization offers an employee assistance plan (EAP), provide information on the plan and be prepared to talk about it.

As part of your preparations, gather information on the employees strengths and not only the areas of concern. Prepare examples to illustrate your concerns, but do not bring a litany of examples. Identify 2-4 specific examples. Despite your preparations, the employee may not be interested in what you have to say.

3) *Schedule A Meeting*:

Set aside time to talk as soon as you make the request for the meeting. Making someone wait for hours can be stressful. Meeting before lunch or at the end of the day might seem like a good idea but generally it is not. When someone is hungry they are often less able to concentrate and more prone to hearing negativity. Select a time early in their shift or shortly after a meal break.

Approach them in a way you normally would, in-person, over the phone or through email, and indicate that you need to discuss work. Set aside 45-60 minutes, but tell your employee that the meeting will be brief so that he or she will not feel overwhelmed. If possible try to meet them in a place you would normally meet employees. Familiarity of routine and surroundings can be important to put someone at ease.

Try saying this, “I would like to speak to you for a few minutes about work. Can you meet me in X location in 15 minutes?”

4) *Begin the Conversation:*

Keep the focus on workplace performance. Speak for a few minutes first about the person’s strengths and value. Then mention your performance concerns. Do not mention any specific concerns about mental illness. Ask them a question or two to elicit information about how they are feeling. Provide your employee with an opportunity to express their thoughts or ask for help. Consider these questions:

1. How do you feel you have been contributing at work recently?
2. Tell me if you have been feeling out of step with colleagues/projects?
3. Do you feel that there resources or support systems that could help your performance in the workplace?

* Note you are not looking to solve problems in this exchange only provide the employee the opportunity to be heard and you, the opportunity to learn. Thank your employee

5) *Move the Conversation Forward:*

You may need to move the conversation forward. Mention you believe they may be struggling at work and are concerned about their wellbeing.

Pointers:

- In your conversation, use words like “stress” or “health”, but not “mental illness”.
- Ask if the employee if he or she would like assistance gathering information and resources.
- Provide information about your company policy related to addressing performance issues and information on your company’s EAP program.

- Mention the option of workplace accommodation if the employee’s situation requires accommodation.
- Do not provide the employee with information on mental health unless they bring up the topic.

6) *Meeting Wrap-Up:*

Ask the employee if he or she has any questions. If you are concerned about their ability to work, you may allow them to take the rest of the day off. Schedule another meeting in a few days to discuss next steps to address their workplace performance issues. Do not have a discussion about specific discipline at this point in time.

You may have to take this process slowly at first. In most cases there is no reason an employee with a mental health concern cannot be accommodated in the workplace if you take the time to identify possible strategies and approach the person with openness and compassion.

Source

Survey Data from the Conference Board of Canada