[Pleasanteeism: Understanding the Workplace Trend and Its Impact on Employees](#)

The modern workplace often presents a polished, professional front, but beneath the surface, employees may be struggling. One trend that's gaining attention is "pleasanteeism," a term describing the habit of masking true feelings behind a cheerful demeanor at work. While it might seem harmless—or even beneficial—to maintain a positive attitude, pleasanteeism can have serious consequences for both employees and organizations when it becomes a default coping mechanism.

Pleasanteeism is more than just putting on a brave face; it's about suppressing emotions to avoid vulnerability, judgment, or stigma. This trend is often fueled by workplace cultures that overly prioritize positivity, leaving employees feeling like they can't be honest about their struggles. For HR professionals, understanding and addressing this trend is crucial to creating a healthier, more authentic workplace environment.

What Is Pleasanteeism?

At its core, pleasanteeism involves employees pretending to be fine when they're not. Think of the coworker who smiles through a stressful workload or the team member who says "I'm fine" even when they're overwhelmed. While politeness and professionalism are essential, constantly suppressing emotions can lead to more harm than good. It creates an environment where genuine concerns are hidden and stress is internalized.

Employees might adopt pleasanteeism for several reasons. They could fear being labeled as unprofessional or worry about job security. Sometimes, it stems from a workplace culture that values positivity over authenticity. Whatever the cause, the effects can ripple through an organization, eroding trust, communication, and morale.

The Hidden Impact of Pleasanteeism

Pleasanteeism might seem like a minor issue, but its consequences can be profound. When employees suppress their emotions, they risk their mental health and productivity. Over time, this behaviour can create a toxic cycle that impacts both individuals and the organization as a whole.

For employees, the emotional toll of pleasanteeism often manifests as stress, anxiety, or even depression. When people feel they can't express their true feelings,

they may experience isolation or think their struggles are unique. This can exacerbate existing issues, leading to burnout—a state of chronic exhaustion and disconnection from work.

For organizations, the effects are just as damaging. When employees are focused on maintaining appearances, their productivity can suffer. Creativity and innovation take a hit, as workers are less likely to share honest feedback or new ideas. High turnover rates and absenteeism often follow, creating additional strain on teams and resources.

What HR Managers Need to Know

HR professionals play a pivotal role in identifying and addressing pleasanteeism. The first step is recognizing its signs. Employees might avoid discussing challenges, exhibit burnout symptoms like fatigue or irritability, or consistently show up to work despite being unwell. If these patterns emerge across teams, it's time to take a closer look at workplace culture and managerial practices.

It's also important to understand the underlying factors driving pleasanteeism. Is there an unspoken expectation to always be positive? Do employees feel comfortable discussing mental health? Are managers equipped to handle sensitive conversations? By identifying these root causes, HR managers can create targeted strategies to address the issue.

How HR Managers Can Combat Pleasanteeism

Addressing pleasanteeism isn't about eliminating politeness or professionalism; it's about creating a culture where authenticity is valued alongside respect. Here are some practical steps HR managers can take:

Foster Psychological Safety

Employees need to feel safe expressing their concerns without fear of judgment. This starts with leadership. Managers should be trained to listen empathetically and respond constructively when employees share challenges. Creating opportunities for open dialogue, such as regular check-ins or anonymous feedback channels, can help employees feel heard and supported.

Invest in Mental Health Resources

Organizations should prioritize mental health just as they do physical health. Offering Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), hosting workshops on stress management, or providing access to counselling services are all effective ways to support employees. Simple measures like allowing mental health days can also make a big difference.

Encourage Authentic Leadership

Leaders set the tone for workplace culture. When they model vulnerability and authenticity, it creates a ripple effect. For example, a manager sharing their own challenges—in an appropriate and professional way—can make employees feel more comfortable doing the same. Training leaders in emotional intelligence and effective communication can further support this shift.

Reevaluate Workplace Norms

Sometimes, pleasanteeism thrives because of unspoken norms that discourage honesty.

HR can help redefine these norms by promoting balanced conversations about challenges and successes. Instead of always celebrating positivity, organizations should also recognize resilience and problem-solving efforts.

Measure Progress and Adapt

Combatting pleasanteeism is an ongoing process. Use tools like employee engagement surveys or focus groups to gauge whether initiatives are making a difference. Monitor metrics such as turnover rates, absenteeism, and satisfaction scores. Be prepared to adjust strategies based on feedback and changing needs.

A Case Study: Turning the Tide at WellCare Inc.

At WellCare Inc., employees often described their workplace as "positive," but HR noticed troubling patterns: high turnover, burnout, and disengagement. After conducting an anonymous survey, they discovered pleasanteeism was rampant. Employees felt pressured to maintain a cheerful demeanor, even when struggling.

To address this, WellCare implemented several changes. Managers underwent training in emotional intelligence, and the company introduced monthly mental health check-ins. An anonymous feedback platform encouraged candid communication, while enhanced EAP offerings provided more accessible support. Within six months, burnout reports dropped by 30%, and employee satisfaction scores improved significantly.

Moving Toward an Authentic Workplace

Pleasanteeism may be subtle, but its impact is anything but. By understanding its signs and causes, HR managers can take proactive steps to create a healthier, more supportive workplace. Addressing pleasanteeism isn't just about improving employee well-being; it's about fostering a culture where people can bring their whole selves to work. The result? A more engaged, innovative, and resilient workforce.

Now is the time to examine your workplace for signs of pleasanteeism and take action. By prioritizing authenticity and mental health, you can unlock your team's full potential while building a stronger, more inclusive organization.