

Workplace Wellness: Strategies for Creating a Healthy Work Experience

When you head into the office, the biggest priority on your mind is likely *work*. However, it's important to consider how you take care of yourself in the workplace environment. This is especially true over the past two years, as the pandemic has added mounting challenges to overall health and wellness.

When Did the Workplace Wellness Movement Start?

Burnout is not a new phenomenon. Workers have experienced fatigue and frustrations for decades. What are “newish” concepts to the workplace include mindfulness and self-care practices.

“Self-care and mindfulness have really become more mainstream in the last 10 years or so. And, it's all coming full circle. Whether it's company policies or we're incorporating our own strategies, we see less burnout, less turnover, and better overall happiness in the workplace,” states Dana Ellis, licensed psychotherapist at Stoughton.

Multitasking Myths PLUS Importance of Setting Boundaries

As Ellis illustrates it, mindfulness really starts with “being where your feet are; present in the task you're doing.” In fact, despite its reputation, multitasking actually makes workers *less* productive.

“If we can focus on what we're doing one task at a time, we're really being mindful. We're going to get done a lot faster,” she notes.

Another tactic Ellis advises is to set healthy boundaries. Efficient workers often get assigned more work, because they complete tasks so quickly. That doesn't mean you should get “dumped on.” It's important to identify personal priorities and goals. Can certain tasks be delegated to others? Are you taking the time off you deserve, including sick time—even if it's a “mental health day”?

Even so, many people wrestle with being firm in their wishes. Clear communication is the best way to set boundaries in a professional setting.

For example, relay to your team or superiors the exact hours you will be unavailable. If someone messages you after, say, 8:00 p.m., they will already know you won't be getting back to them until the following morning. It's difficult for many to leave work at the office, but it's so important for maintaining those healthy boundaries—as well as one's personal sanity.

“We have to be able to take a step back, look at ourselves and say, ‘What do I need? How do I get more successful? Do I need to have a conversation with my boss that so much is being put on me?’ Really just be aware of what *you* need,” urges Ellis.

Self-Care Tips

One positive effect to come out of the pandemic is that many companies are being more flexible with work schedules. Some are offering work-from-home options—either part- or full-time. Employers are recognizing they need to take care of their employees if they expect to keep them, and they're increasingly factoring self-care into that equation.

“More and more companies are handing out a bit more vacation time or flex time where you can add extra days here and there. If you can spread out time off, you make it very purposeful,” shares Ellis. “We need to take time and say, ‘This is for me. These are my days to help me nourish myself, to grow in my self-care, and to take that time for myself.’”

Of course, there are also ways to practice self-care while in the workplace. Ellis encourages proper hydration, avoiding sugary snacks or drinks, taking exercise and stretching breaks, creating a “Zen” work environment (as much as you can), and even dedicating time for a quick meditation or breathing exercises.

It may be helpful to set self-care goals for yourself, to make sure you’re actively participating in these efforts. “We really have to celebrate those goals that we make.”

Finally, if you’re struggling at work, there’s no shame in asking for help. “Sometimes, jobs are super stressful or companies are going through growing pains. Or, you're not sure if you're on the right track. You can always seek help,” assures Ellis. “There are counselors, therapists, mentors. Those professionals are there to help you get back on track and reach your goals.”



***To listen to an in-depth conversation on this topic with Dana Ellis, licensed psychotherapist, please follow this link: <https://radiomd.com/stoughton/item/46339>*