

CARING FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Vital for Leaders

"A business leader/owner leads by example for their staff - encouraging a healthy culture in the workplace, and by extension to their customers and community."

- Dr. Susan Myket, licensed clinical psychologist



By Kaylea M. Hutson-Miller

Mental health, like physical health, is an important component for everyone, especially business leaders / owners.

"Mental health is health," explained Dr. Susan Myket, licensed clinical psychologist. "A business leader/owner leads by example for their staff - encouraging a healthy culture in the workplace, and by extension to their customers and community."

Myket said poor mental health can not only lead to absenteeism, but also presenteeism - when employees are at work, but aren't actually working.

"It can lead to decreased productivity, low morale, staff sickness, poor customer experience, high employee turnover, burden on HR, and poor quality goods," Myket said. "Owners and leaders need to be able to maintain the business through various challenges, while balancing staff and their own health issues."

While seasoned generations do not talk about mental health problems, Myket said every business and family, regardless of age, is affected by mental health issues during the course of time.

By recognizing, acknowledging, and tending to those challenges, business leaders can support both healthy workplaces and communities.

DEFINING THE ISSUE

Mental health includes everything surrounding a person's emotional, psychological and social well-being.

"It affects how we think, feel and act, and helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices," Myket said. "To use a simple physical analogy, if you have a significant backache, it may affect your concentration, mood, decision making, interactions, and productivity on the job—that is, if you can even work."

"Clients and staff have often complained that not-outwardly-visible mental health issues, unlike their physical counterparts, can be more difficult to cope with, as family and friends may be unaware of the struggle and therefore not offer support."

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

A good mental health status allows a person to see the big picture, make good decisions and delegate tasks to others as appropriate, encourage a healthy work culture, and network with and refer to community partners.

"Mentally healthy individuals have the ability to see outside of themselves and their own internal experiences, and more positively impact the lives of others," Myket said. "Leading or managing from a position of strong mental health attracts others to consider pursuing the same for themselves."

MENTAL HEALTH

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Good mental health, she continued, allows a person to live life with others - by connecting with people authentically, on a regular basis.

"It is an engagement with life and people," Myket said. "It involves thinking of others, being understanding of people, and giving one another the benefit of the doubt. Consistently."

"In contrast, if you are depressed, you may have low energy, be distracted, lack confidence, make poor decisions, and not have the bandwidth to creatively solve problems."

Consequently, this means business relationships may suffer. People may not feel wanted, listened to, or understood by the business leader/owner.

"You may be just getting through the day, and so as the stress from inevitable procrastination builds, people may have negative experiences in your company, and they may leave and not return," Myket said. "Poor mental health affects all of one's relationships and interactions, and so it is part of the very fiber of our communities."

Businesses become embedded not only within the community, but also within the lives of those who live and work in the region.

"The reach of businesses is far," Myket said. "We may enjoy visiting a particular company and bringing our loved ones. We may see the business as a resource."

"The loss of a company can reverberate through the community. It can affect our sense of having roots in a town, and we may feel it personally. Nearby or connected businesses may be affected. The loss can even make us feel unsafe."

DISCOVERING SELF-CARE

Having a good mental health outlook comes from taking part in a strong self-care routine.

Self-care, explains Myket, takes into account a person's physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual needs.

For business owners/leaders it also means having a good outlet for stress - including getting quality sleep, nourishing meals and taking time to be outside in nature. It also means getting regular check-ups and catching potential issues in the early stages.

"In terms of our mental health, are we growing as individuals," Myket asked. "Do we



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read? Are we aware of what is happening in our community? Do we 'leave it at the office?' Is there a hobby we pursue—even if we're not good at it—because we enjoy it?"

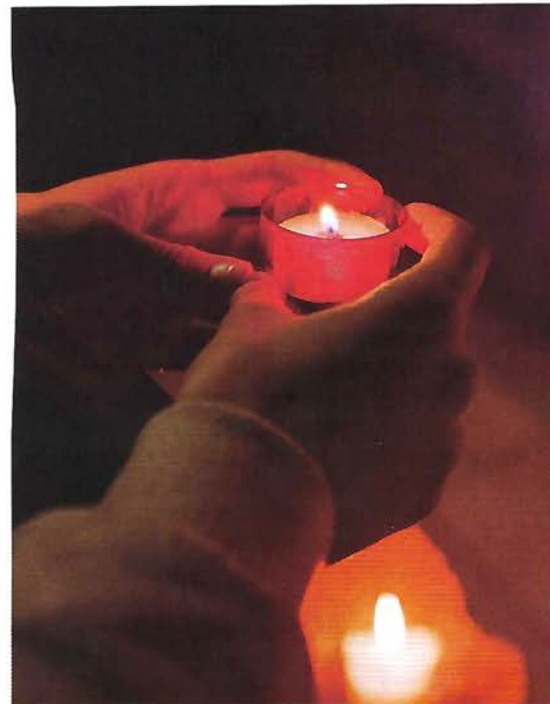
For emotional health, Myket said people need to decide if they experience joy - and see what brings them refreshment.

"Do we ask for help or consult when we feel stuck," she continued. "Are we taking a day off regularly?"

Regarding social health, Myket encourages people to make time for friends and family outside of work.

She said having authentic conversations, and engaging in life with people - and not just screens - can help business leaders maintain their mental health.

Spiritual health includes a focus on how a person engages in reflection, meditation and prayer. It can include regular attendance in a house of worship, finding time to be quiet, and ultimately connecting with something larger than themselves.



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CURBING ANXIETY

Anxiety is the most common mental health issue. Myket said nearly four in 10 adults (39.3 percent) reported symptoms of anxiety or depression in February 2021.

A Kaiser Family Foundation / CNN survey in October 2022 found "90 percent of the public believes there is a mental health crisis in the U.S."

"It is normal to experience anxiety as a business leader or owner," Myket said. "Anxiety does not discriminate - management, staff, and customers alike feel it.

"If you have 10 people in your shop from front to back, assume that four are significantly struggling with their mental health at any given time."

Owning a business and leading others is stressful, Myket said, for a multitude of reasons.

"Financial anxiety is common; for the business, for the staff you must pay, and for your own household," Myket said. "Anxiety can be crippling; you avoid things you should face, you want to get out of situations, and your mind goes blank when you need to make decisions.

"It may be difficult to communicate clearly, and hard to be present for others, or handle business demands."

Yet, she said, anxiety is highly treatable - through individual therapy, consultation, support groups, psychological testing and medication, or a combination of several of those items.

Business leaders/owners need to remember their companies often have wellness benefits. She encourages people to look at their insurance to determine what is available for behavioral health issues.

"Managing anxiety calls for a skill-set that can be acquired," she said, adding business owners/leaders have met challenges in the past as they created their business. "This is a problem you can face, and resources are available.

"The sooner you begin to address problematic anxiety, the quicker you will function, think, and feel better. Anxiety typically worsens without care."

Like other illnesses, anxiety can become unmanageable and affect others, including a person's employees and customers.

"You would not want mental health issues to become safety issues," Myket said. "Like diabetes, there are researched therapeutic protocols that can effectively impact the problem, and you can experience renewed health like you have not felt in some time. This will naturally have a positive effect on your work, relationships, and community."

Myket said business owners and those in leadership are not exempt from mental health struggles.

"Leaders and business owners, in the many hats that they wear, often struggle with burnout," she said. "They may not engage in sufficient self-care to prevent this. Managers may sit for long periods on their laptop, not exercise, or eat to self-soothe at the end of a long workday. They may misuse substances."

When not taken care of, unaddressed mental health concerns among leadership, Myket said, can acutely impact workers, families, and neighborhoods.

"Working for a burned out or toxic boss may make it difficult to go home and effectively parent your children," she said.

"A true ripple effect can ensue, which ultimately hurts our communities.

"With the challenges inherent in being a business owner or leader, and the commonality of mental health issues, we must actively monitor for, and work hard to prevent, continued issues. Getting help in the early stages of a mental health problem can improve daily business functioning, staff morale, and regional impact."



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A GROWTH MINDSET

Myket encourages business owners/leaders to take charge of their whole health - and then encourage those around them to do the same.

A 'growth mindset' she said, or fostering good mental health, can be developed through dedication and hard work.

"I've been a business leader in the community for more than 15 years," Myket said. "I see and work through these issues daily and am passionate about mental health and flourishing."

"I have worked with other business owners, leaders, and people from all walks of life. The owner / leader is not exempt from facing mental health challenges, but they can model effective coping."

As the oldest child of a small business owner, Myket said her life was shaped from a very young age by the challenges and victories of running a business.

"It is not only hard work and perseverance that sustain us and cause us to thrive," she said. "To continue to successfully serve this generation and the next, we must attend to the emotional side that all people (staff, community, and we) bring in the door."

"Robust mental health is a great societal need currently, and it is therefore what our employees, and what we need too."

Myket said business owners/leaders need to recognize challenges bring special opportunities for growth both personally and within the staff they serve.

"[Challenges] force us to sharpen our mindset, adapt, and design new initiatives," she said. "What does our community need at this time? Good, whole-health care of ourselves and staff, so that we can continue to serve the community for our children's children."

"Caring for our collective mental health is time well-spent; it pays dividends. Mental health is vital to your business, because it is vital to us all."

For more information, persons interested may contact Myket at Susan Myket Ph.D. & Associates, at www.myketandassociates.com.