

Guide

11 Ways HR Leaders Can Support Employee Mental Health: Expert Advice from the Field

Are your employees *mindful*, or
are their *minds full*?



The global workforce is facing unprecedented challenges that are taking a toll on mental health and wellbeing. **95% of HR leaders** admit burnout is hurting retention, contributing to up to half of annual workforce turnover.

And the cost of unhappiness and stress has skyrocketed. Not only is lost productivity estimated to cost the global economy up to **\$1 trillion a year**, but global employees recently reported being the **unhappiest now** more than at any point in the last three years.

Don't worry. There is hope!

Forward-thinking companies are taking action to prioritize employee mental health through workplace wellbeing programs, policies, and human-centered initiatives.

Two of these organizations, Headspace and Personify Health, joined forces on World Mental Health Day 2023 to address this urgent need for employee mental health.

Inside this guide, you'll learn 11 ways to support employee mental health for HR leaders, by HR leaders, with examples of how Headspace and Personify Health use these strategies today.



From their discussion, three key themes surfaced: Boundaries, Balance, and Building Up & Out.

Attendees on the line wanted to know:

- 1. How can I help employees establish better boundaries to support their mental health?**
- 2. How do we find the right balance that works for employees and our business?**
- 3. How can we better build up our leaders and build out our mental health initiatives with intention and for results?**



Meet the speakers:



Di Holman, Chief People Officer at Personify Health

Di is a Global HR expert with broad experience at Fortune 500 companies across industries and well known growing a best-in-class culture. She is passionate about growing top talent and creating high-performing teams.



Janette Muñoz, Former Director, Talent Development at Headspace

Janette has over a decade of experience working with startups to multi-billion-dollar brands. As a Global HR leader, Janette is helping to enhance workforce performance, leadership capabilities, and skills.



Part 1: Balance

1

Don't pour from an empty cup

TL;DR: Model the behavior you wish to see.

HR leaders today can be categorized into a similar bucket as caregivers: they put the needs and wellbeing of others before themselves.

But if your goal is to improve the health, wellbeing and balance of your employees, you must practice what you preach.

By taking care of your own wellbeing, you set an example for your team and establish cultural norms to take time for selfcare and to disconnect.

You'll metaphorically fill your cup so that you can continue to pour back to others.



Food for thought?

When an employee takes time away, what does our own behavior look like? Are we emailing and pinging them consistently, and do we expect a response? Or do we give them space to truly disconnect?



Part 1: Balance

2

Promote flexibility and autonomy

TL;DR: The 9-5 might not be realistic for everyone every day.

94% of employees say they want flexibility when they work. And both our experts wholeheartedly agreed that offering flexibility is one of the most impactful ways to combat burnout.

This approach allows individuals to manage their time effectively and find what works best for them, giving them a sense of control and trust.

This might translate in the workplace as openness around working hours for mid-afternoon school pick-ups, working at the time of day when personal energy and productivity levels are the highest, or remote work policies.



Part 1: Balance

3

Embrace the hybrid work model

TL;DR: Work is where the Wi-Fi is.

Comparatively, 80% of employees say they want flexibility in where they work and 98% of workers want to work remote at least some of the time.

If you are going in-person, consider designing a return-to-work policy that adheres to individual preferences.

Instead of mandating set office days, let teams decide what hybrid schedule works best for them. This approach empowers employees to balance their personal and professional lives.



Part 1: Balance

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Create space for breaks

TL;DR: Carving out time away can help prevent work-fatigue and burnout.

Encourage your teams to schedule time in their calendars for breaks, both big and small.

There are two types of breaks all employees should incorporate into their schedule:

- 1. Micro-breaks:** Short breaks throughout the working day to help employees refocus and recharge. This might look like a nature break with a walk around the block, a lunch break to fuel up, or a mindfulness break with meditation.
- 2. Macro-breaks:** Longer breaks after hours where employees shut down their laptops and disconnect. This might look like a vacation or personal time with the intention to fully unplug—cell phones included!



Part 2: Boundaries

5 Encourage employees to own their calendar

TL;DR: Meetings with no agenda? Consider it a no attenda!

Have you ever caught yourself in meeting jail? You know, when you log online for the day and are greeted by 5 meetings in a row, wondering where you might sneak in a restroom or water break? If you catch yourself in this predicament regularly, it might be time to evaluate you and your team's meeting hygiene.

Take a critical lens to your meeting cadence and ask:

- Do these meetings require my attendance? Do they also require my team's attendance?
- If so, how regularly should we meet?
- Does this need to be 30 minutes, or can we shorten it to 25 so I can have a quick break before my next one?

By streamlining meetings and reducing unnecessary interruptions, you can create a more productive workforce.



Part 2: Boundaries

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Establish clear priorities (and make room for them!)

TL;DR: You don't work for the calendar; your calendar should work for you.

A main theme that surfaced from attendees was prioritization. Specifically, how to prioritize and achieve your goals when you're doing more with less (a smaller team, a decreased budget, etc.)

Establishing priorities can be a real challenge in today's fast-paced environment, especially when the priorities from yesterday might vary today or even tomorrow.

You can stay focused in the short term by identifying your most-important tasks for the week and where things rank on the priority scale. Empower employees—and yourself—to renegotiate timelines when new projects arise.

In the long-term, you can prioritize by setting clear goals, outlining roles, and ensuring that everyone understands the expectations and processes in place.

Now that we've covered how to prioritize and practice good meeting hygiene, let's look at your calendar vs your to do list
Which one are you prioritizing?

Sometimes, our most important tasks are not represented in our daily calendar.

Our HR leaders recommend blocking off time on your calendar for heads-down, focused thinking and work time. Identify your most important tasks and give yourself time to complete them uninterruptedly.



Part 3: Build Up and Out

7

Offer manager training

TL;DR: Your employees are your changemakers! Invest in their growth.

Like any great initiative, the change you wish to see starts from within.

By investing in the soft skills of your managers, you can help them build strong and empathetic relationships with their teams. Compassion, empathy, and active listening are all critical leadership qualities that can enhance connection and trust.

Here are a few examples of how you might set your managers up for success:

- Train them in emotional intelligence skills like mindfulness, deep listening, and building trust.
- Teach tactics for having candid career conversations and deliver feedback effectively.
- Provide tools and resources to identify team priorities and renegotiate timelines as needed.
- Create cohorts for managers to share ideas and problem-solve together.

“

If leaders are connecting with someone in front of them—even for just a couple minutes on a human level—before jumping into tasks, that can make such a difference.”

Janette Munoz, Director Talent Development at Headspace



Part 3: Build Up and Out

8

Create opportunities for connections

TL;DR: Breakdown virtual barriers to create community.

Regular communication is key to keeping your teams connected and engaged.

And to ensure everyone feels seen, heard, and valued, employee communications must be a two-way street.

Here are a few examples of how you might foster community and engagement among employees:

- Facilitate open communication channels for personal and professional conversations. “Fun” channels are a great way for employees to network and create camaraderie over shared interests.
- Train employees in providing peer-to-peer recognition.
- Hold skip-level meetings where managers’ report out team feedback.
- Send quarterly engagement surveys with pulse checks in-between.





Part 3: Build Up and Out

9

Listen to and involve employees

TL;DR: Involve the voice of the people.

Nobody knows more about what employees want better than employees themselves. If you don't know what they want or need, ask them!

By involving them up front, they become invested in mental health solutions and serve as champions for your program. They play a crucial role in setting the tone and driving adoption.

Continuously collecting feedback allows you to design programs that meet employee needs. Surveys, focus groups and open dialogue channels can help you reveal pain points with honest insights while empowering their voices.

The data collected can help you show the need and impact of your mental health efforts to leadership.

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Go small to go big

TL;DR: Meaningful support does not require a big budget.

Going back to the concept of doing more with less, it's important to note that all employee mental health initiatives do not require a large budget or time commitment.

Small moments and interactions can make a big impact.

One prime example of this is the conversations you have with employees.

This might be praise in a public or private setting to congratulate team member on their performance, or even a touch base to see how they're really doing.



It's the simple things - thank you, praise, taking people to breakfast or lunch. It goes such a long way," said Di Holman, Chief People Officer at Personify Health.

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Lean into the experts

TL;DR: It's time to take your mental health and wellbeing program to the next level.

Introduce digital tools such as [Personify Health](#) and [Headspace](#) to support employee mental health and wellbeing.

(Did you see we took the next step? See how [Personify Health](#) and [Headspace](#) defined the relationship)

By bringing in a trusted partner, you'll harness their years' worth of experience and expertise to show real results for your employee's health and your organization's bottom line.

Personify Health, the leading global digital-first health, wellbeing, and navigation company, and Headspace, the provider of the world's most comprehensive digital mental health platform, are collectively on a mission to make providing high-quality, affordable mental health resources easier.

Remember, you're in a unique opportunity to support employee mental health and make a tangible difference on the wellbeing and happiness of their teams.

While not every tactic mentioned requires significant resources, putting support structures in place is an urgent priority.

Part 4: Ideas to Consider for Your Organization

From

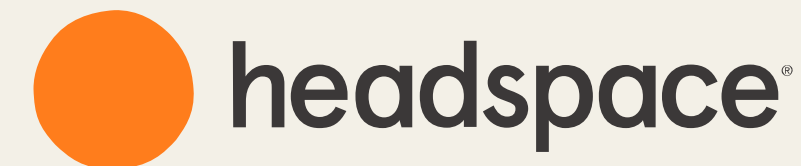


Personify Health's HR team is taking a 3-part approach to combatting the current mental health crisis:

1. Acknowledge hardships and offer support.
2. Establish clear priorities for what needs to be done and when.
3. Keep people focused with clear communications and a supportive community behind them.

Employees use the Personify Health Homebase for Health platform to give public praise via shoutouts.

From



Headspace is supporting employees with a human-design approach to align with their mission and vision:

1. They spend time listening, reflecting, and evaluating where the organization and employees are to guide their mental health initiatives.
2. At the core of their efforts are mindfulness and connections to help employees stay grounded and aware each day.

Headspace employees leverage the Headspace app throughout the day with mindfulness moments and meditations breaks.

Flexible working hours to help employees improve their balance and show up to work more aware.

Part 4: Ideas to Consider for Your Organization

From



Employees are encouraged to connect in-person when opportunities are available.

For example, during Quarterly Town Halls, employees in regional hubs join to watch in-person and enjoy quality time after with one another. Employees can also participate in an Annual Service Day to give back to their community and have fun.

Provide Leadership Essentials Training to invest in managers' soft skills like how to lead with empathy, better understand, and connect with employees, etc.

Host leadership cohorts where managers can share ideas and challenges with each other and work to solve them.

From



Break down virtual barriers to connection with monthly meet and greets.

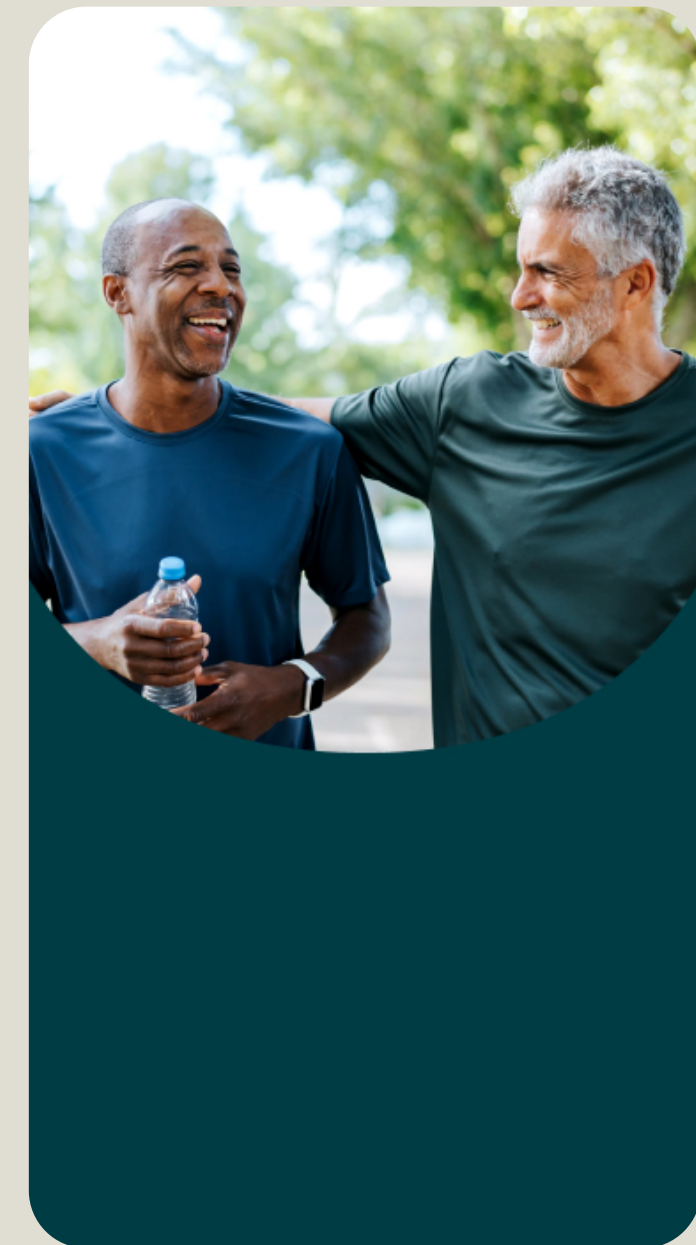
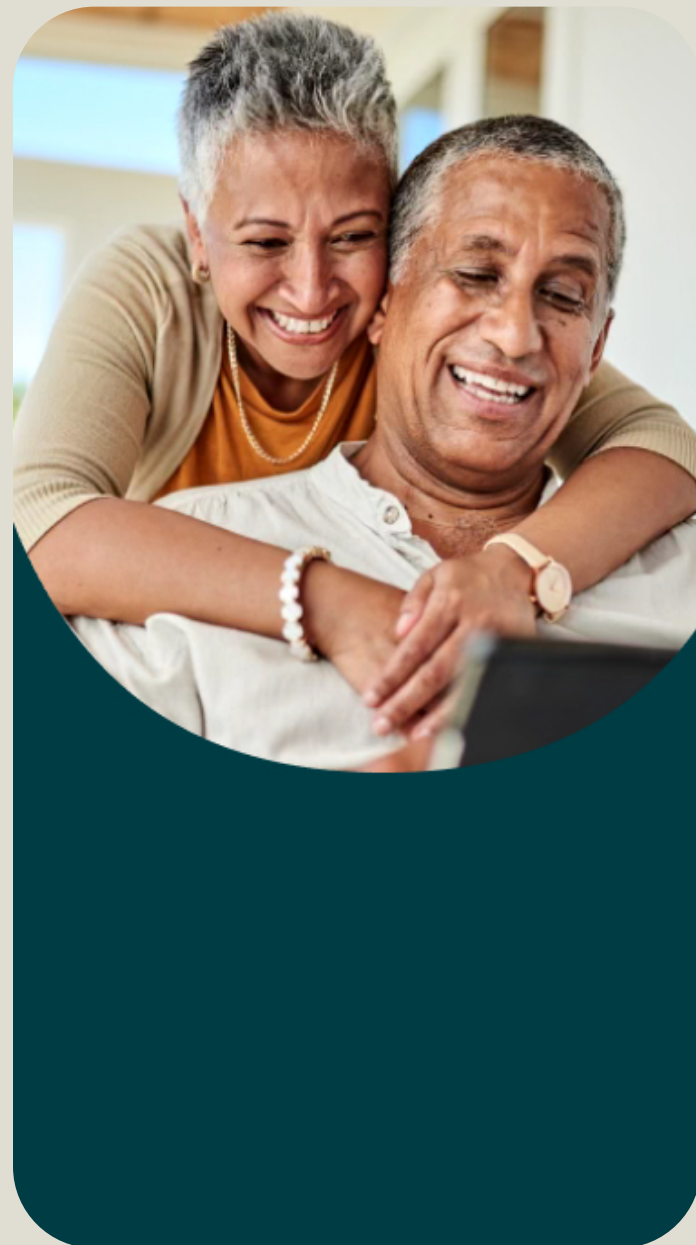
Employees take 30-minutes out of their day to participate in a team activity and split into breakout rooms to get to know one another better. The virtual capabilities gives access and inclusion to their global workforce.

Encourage employees to build positive habits that help them manage their energy by owning their calendar with scheduled breaks, identifying most important tasks (MITs) and focus blocks to work on MITs. A [team charter](#) can help you provide clarity for your teams.

Invest in people leaders to build connection, compassion, and empathy from the top down to create a human-centered culture.



For more resources to support employee mental health, and wellbeing.





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Find us on [Instagram](#) | [LinkedIn](#)

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