

Helping Us Live Mentally Healthier Lives Since 1933



**Mental Health Matters:
A Monthly Blog Post from the Director**

**Breaking Stigma in the Workplace:
Business Leaders Can Model the Way**

Stigma: A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person.

When applying for a position with a company or organization, we

don't list our mental health on our resume, we don't talk about it in our interview and, unfortunately, many continue to remain silent about a mental health diagnosis once hired. Why? Most often it is because of the stigma that continues to persist around mental health and the fear of repercussions if a mental health diagnosis is revealed.

According to the article from One Mind titled *Why Mental Health is an Executive Priority*, "Most of the world's population spends one-third of their adult lives at work. When work is fulfilling, it can help a person feel engaged, valued and productive. When work is stressful, the overall quality of life suffers, and work-related concerns can exacerbate mental health conditions including anxiety and depression."

While overcoming stigma is everyone's responsibility, employers can play a major role in starting the conversation around mental health. While people living with mental health conditions are often seen as irresponsible, lazy or even dangerous, many are productive, reliable employees and leaders who live full and satisfying lives. "Stigma drives silence, which can prevent employees from seeking help and getting better," according to a report from Kaiser Permanente, *Reducing Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace*. "As an employer, you can't afford to stay silent about mental health in the workplace, because the mental health of your workforce and your company's bottom line are inextricably linked."

According to Kaiser Permanente, mental illness is the single greatest cause of worker disability in the United States; 62 percent of missed work days can be attributed to mental health conditions; and depressed employees are 20 to 40 percent more likely to become unemployed because of their condition. By taking a stance against stigma, an employer shows its employees that the organization values and cares about them as people. In a workplace with an eye to health and inclusiveness, disclosing and talking about mental health isn't considered a sign of weakness, but is celebrated as a source of strength.

Kaiser Permanente Chairman and CEO Bernard J. Tyson said, "Improving mental health care is not only an industry issue, it has become a critical societal issue. Our nation's ability to address mental health in a holistic, comprehensive way may just determine how successful we ultimately are in our quest to improve the health of America and the world...we must tackle and remove the stigma associated with seeking mental health care."

Provided below is a list from Mental Health America (mentalhealthamerica.net) of **10 ways organizations can create a mentally healthier workplace:**

- 1. Productive Atmosphere.** Clean, functional and well-lit space. Good working relationships with all staff. Employees feel respected, appreciated, incentivized and rewarded. Signs of intimidation, bullying, sexual harassment, and fear are absent.
- 2. Livable Wage.** Providing a livable wage encourages a committed and sustained workforce.
- 3. Reasonable Accommodation.** Employers and employees have to work collaboratively to identify reasonable accommodations (not special treatment) in the workplace as well as mental disabilities. From changing physical work space and schedule to the use of interpreters or technologically adapted equipment.
- 4. Health, Wellness and Environment.** Provide a comprehensive health insurance plan including smoking-cessation, weight-loss, and substance abuse programs.
- 5. Open Communication.** Keep the communication process transparent. Creating an environment of open communication contributes to a more energetic and productive workforce where all employees feel invested in the company.
- 6. Employee Accountability.** It takes two to make a healthy workplace. Employees have to come with a "can-do" attitude and be willing to support each other as well as management.
- 7. Management Accountability.** Allow employees to provide work-related feedback to their supervisors. It can be anonymous to avoid the possibility of negative repercussions.
- 8. Work/Life Balance.** We now live in a world where technology is available to keep us connected to work around the clock. Work options such as flexible scheduling or telecommuting ought to be implemented if applicable.
- 9. Clear & Positive Values.** Be transparent and definitive about what the organization stands for. . . people in, as well as outside of the company, should have a good understanding of this.
- 10. Fitness.** Offer a gym membership, fitness class or even just an exercise space that encourages employees to become physically active and stay fit. If possible, incentivize employees to access such services.



According to the Forbes article, *Stigma About Mental Health Issues in the Workplace Exists: Here's What Companies Can Do About It*, states, "An environment where vulnerability is an asset is one where emotional intelligence is high and valued as a leadership trait. An executive comfortable with their own anxiety will be more compassionate with a struggling employee. . . Making mental health stigma a thing of the past is ultimately about refusing to put people in neat little boxes—with those clinically diagnosed with a mental health condition in one box, and the rest of us in another."

At Mental Health America of Central Carolinas, we want to help corporate leaders and their employees realize the importance of breaking stigma around mental health. Through [Mental Health First Aid](#), we can provide employers the information needed to better understand mental health. Specifically, participants learn the following:

- The potential risk factors and warning signs for a range of mental health problems, including: depression, anxiety/trauma, psychosis, eating disorders, substance use disorders, and self-injury
- An understanding of the prevalence of various mental health disorders in the U.S. and the need for reduced stigma in their communities
- A 5-step action plan encompassing the skills, resources, and knowledge to assess the situation, to select and implement appropriate interventions, and to help the individual in crisis connect with appropriate professional care
- The evidence-based professional, peer, social, and self-help resources available to help someone with a mental health problem.

No matter where we are, we all play a role in breaking stigma and eliminating the discrimination that exists around mental health. Whether at work, in a classroom, at a park, on a bus, or in line at the grocery store, practicing kindness and acceptance will go a long way. [Register Now](#) or [contact MHA](#) at 704.365.3454 to bring the 8-hour evidence-based course to your place of work.

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Mental Health America of Central Carolinas promotes mental wellness through advocacy, prevention and education in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.



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