



# Addressing Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being With Purpose

## 3 STEPS LEADERS CAN TAKE NOW TO INFLUENCE CHANGE WITHIN THEIR ORGANIZATION

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It's well documented that an engaged, healthy workforce correlates to better business performance. Data has proved that when employees feel engaged and valued, productivity, retention, and customer satisfaction all benefit, driving increased profitability for the organization. Yet, employee engagement continues to dwindle nationwide while reports of burnout and declining mental health rapidly rise.

It's not a new concept that the effects of the work environment extend beyond the workplace, but it's become a focal point as the pandemic increasingly blurred the lines between work and home life. Lack of work-life balance, long work hours, and emotional exhaustion or stress were the top contributing factors of burnout among healthcare workers in [Huron's healthcare talent research](#).

The [surgeon general's recently released framework](#) for workplace mental health and well-being emphasizes the reach and gravity of the situation across industries, signaling that the issue has transpired into a public health

crisis. However, the healthcare professionals dedicated to caring for us and our loved ones are suffering at some of the highest rates.



of healthcare workers report feeling burned out more than a few times a month.



of burned-out workers are considering leaving their current position in the next 12 months.

Growing mental and physical health issues stemming from workplace stressors and toxic conditions — both of which can be prevented — put greater stress on an already strapped healthcare system. This strain exacerbates healthcare staff burnout and puts patients' and providers' well-being at risk. When people are not at their best mentally, emotionally, or physically, they can't provide the best care for those in need.

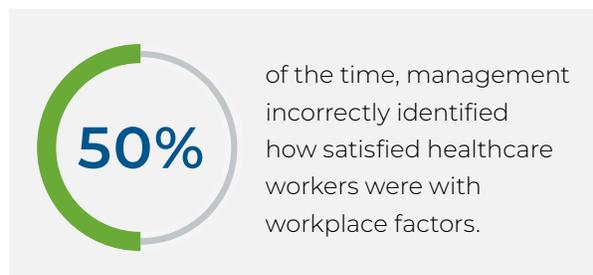
Now more than ever, employers must take a holistic approach to care for their teams. While it may feel that employee wellness is out of leaders' control, there are many ways that leaders and organizations can better support their people and create a healthy environment where they can thrive.

**Here are three steps leaders can start taking today to make substantial, positive changes that will have a lasting effect on employees' health and well-being:**

## 1. Listen to Your People

Excellent leaders are excellent listeners. When leaders take the time to understand what's important to employees in their workplaces and what causes friction, recognizing that it won't be the same for every person, they can begin to make meaningful change that influences employee perception and experience.

In [Huron's talent research](#), healthcare leaders were asked to rank workplace factors that they thought were most important to their nurses, clinicians, and nonclinical staff. In comparing leadership's responses with what healthcare workers said, we found that leaders over- or underestimated the importance of those factors more often than they got it right for clinical staff. For nonclinical staff, leaders correctly gauged importance only about half the time.



These findings reaffirm that leaders cannot assume what matters most to their people. Mechanisms like [rounding for outcomes](#) provide consistent, structured, and purposeful interactions between employees and management. A 10-minute conversation with employees can go a long way in demonstrating that leaders care about them as people, cultivating a sense of value and belonging.

## 2. Show Employees They Are Valued

Feeling valued and formal recognition are among the workplace factors that healthcare workers indicate as key areas of improvement in Huron's talent research. Showing — not just telling — your people they are valued can significantly affect employee morale and well-being. Leaders can do this by:

- **Fostering a connection between employees, their work, and the organization's mission and values:** Regularly sharing how your team's work is helping others, improving outcomes, or contributing to a common goal adds purpose to one's work, generates pride, and fuels motivation. Organizations can initiate this sense of connection early on by emphasizing in job descriptions and interviews the impact an individual can make in the role.
- **Engaging workers in workplace decisions:** Involving teams in activities, such as setting goals and standards, developing solutions to problems, and innovative thinking, conveys that leaders value their team's opinions and input. Autonomy provides individuals with a feeling of control over their work and a greater sense of fulfillment and accomplishment. Create autonomy by inviting employees to share their thoughts and feedback; and coach rather than criticize when mistakes are made, providing the necessary tools and training for professional development.
- **Building a culture of gratitude and recognition:** Small acts of kindness, from handwritten thank-you notes to verbal recognition of an individual's accomplishment, show people they're appreciated. Intentional, structured mechanisms for rewarding and recognizing employee actions and contributions are equally important. For example, incorporating employee recognition into team huddles or meetings can be an effective way to celebrate staff members and create an environment where they feel seen, respected, and valued.

### 3. Cultivate Trusting Relationships

Building trust between colleagues and leadership is essential in fostering psychological safety and security in the workplace and enabling individuals to perform at their best. Recognizing that building trust takes time, leaders can make progress by:

- **Facilitating small, consistent interactions:**  
Open and ongoing communication is foundational to building trust and community. Invite your team to share important moments or personal wins during morning huddles. Regular check-ins with employees are a proven way to build trusting relationships and boost employee engagement and retention. Rounding provides leaders with an avenue to gather feedback on what's working well and what's not to ensure individuals feel heard and understand the rationale behind decisions, even when their leader's response is "no."
- **Leading with compassion:** Employees need more than an open-door policy; they need leaders who are compassionate and willing to have an

open mind and heart. Listening and showing up can be a difference-maker in someone's day. Leaders should not take on the role of a therapist, but they can strive to be present and trusted advisers. Take the initiative to educate yourself on the signs of stress and burnout and become familiar with helpful resources, such as employee assistance programs (EAPs).

There isn't a single solution to improving the work environment or employee health and well-being, but organizations cannot wait it out and hope things improve. We owe it to ourselves and those we work alongside to start taking action to create positive, healthy workplaces where people feel valued. This often can be accomplished in ways that are simple in execution and big in impact.



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