

Tips for Creating a Resilient Workplace

As the world faces unprecedented crises – the global pandemic, growing inequality, the recognition of racial injustice and inequity, and the increasing consequences of climate change – the negative impact on workers’ health, security, and well-being is undeniable. This long period of instability and uncertainty has created a collective trauma that affects workers in their personal lives, as well as how they perform on the job. Now more than ever, workplaces should take action to support the well-being of its workforce. Creating a resilient workplace is a process that needs to be fostered and sustained in a strategic way. Thoughtful actions and meaningful steps can go a long way in building an environment in which all workers can thrive and contribute their best for the success of the workplace overall.

Resilience is a process in which individuals facing adverse conditions adapt and grow in a healthful, positive way. Psychologists identify four components of resilience – connection, wellness, meaning, and healthy thinking:

Connection to reduce isolation and strength through relationships; **wellness** by promoting physical and emotional health; **meaning** through actions that give you a sense of purpose; and, **healthy thinking** to accept change and reinforce progress.

Resilient workplaces promote these four key elements within their workplace and among employees. Consider these five strategies to foster greater resilience among your workforce:

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1. Invest in employee well-being

Employee wellness and strength starts with consistent care, resources, and support. Lay the groundwork necessary for individuals to live safe, stable, and full lives.

- Provide equitable and competitive salaries that are at or above a living wage for an employee's geographic location to promote financial stability and ensure that employees' needs are met, so that economic security is not a concern.
- Provide a reasonable number of annual paid sick and family leave days, to support the wellness and morale of the employee and coworkers.
- Provide competitive and creative benefits that support individuals across the lifespan. In addition to healthcare, dental, vision, paid time off, and paid parental and family leave; consider creative wellness benefits (gym memberships, meditation apps, yoga classes, etc.), flexible remote work policies, and tuition/loan reimbursement for continuing education and professional development.
- Consider the impact of work responsibilities on the mental health and wellness of the employee, and provide referrals to local resources or company-sponsored wellness benefits like an Employee Assistance Program.

2. Create a safe, inclusive, and welcoming workplace environment

Safe and welcoming environments build connection and meaning, particularly for those who have been isolated.

- Create a code of conduct that clarifies expectations for workplace behavior that centers the equitable and respectful treatment of all employees, workplace associates, and clients/customers. A code of conduct should specifically address racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and other harmful conduct that has a negative impact on workplace culture and environment.

For more information on developing a code of conduct and examples, visit: <https://checkyourworkplace.com/assess/code-of-conduct/>.

- Consider telework as a possible reasonable accessibility accommodation.
- Go further than ADA accessibility requirements to make workspaces welcoming for people with disabilities by considering *universal design* in your technology and physical office space, such as creating a level entryway into a building (step-free) and picture signage rather than language signage in the workspace.
- Consider room temperature, overhead lighting, air flow, access to natural light, work area setup and other factors that contribute to an individual's comfort, and provide flexibility to ensure that an employee's working area allows them to be the most successful.
- Ask employees for feedback on what support would be helpful to increase accessibility, and follow-up on their needs.
- Recognize, acknowledge, and confront sexism, racism, homophobia and other assaults on an individual's identity, to ensure all employees feel safe, valued, included, and supported.
- Recognize and address how experiences of trauma and violence may impact an employee's work performance. Educate employees on gender-based violence and trauma, the dynamics, how it impacts the workplace, and what workplace and community resources are available to help.

“Universal Design is the design and composition of the environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability.”

*The Centre for Excellence
in Universal Design*

For sample training content on recognizing and responding to the impacts of violence and trauma in the workplace, visit www.workplacesrespond.org/type/education-and-training/.

3. Set employees up for success and growth

Equipping employees to succeed and grow within the workplace makes for a more connected and productive employee, and promotes a healthful working environment overall.

- Provide effective staff training and opportunities so workers feel prepared and confident in executing their job responsibilities.
- Promote and provide resources for staff to pursue external and internal professional and personal development opportunities to acquire new skills or build on existing ones.
- Ensure that supervisors and managers have the training and resources necessary to be effective leaders who can cultivate and promote employee success.
- Create peer mentorship opportunities: pair managers, directors, leadership, early and mid-career staff, etc. together to learn from each other and rely on each other for support, communication, and reflection.
- Recognize the efforts of employees, and provide motivation and encouragement on an ongoing basis.

4. Foster trust through transparency and collaboration

Open communication and collaboration can strengthen connection among employees, as well as improve their ability to contribute to the workplace.

- Engage workers at various levels to be a part of creating a supportive and respectful workplace environment. Workers at every level should be able to contribute to decision-making that affects their work and well-being.
- Provide regular updates on issues, policies, or resources that impact the workplace or workforce.

- Create a varied internal communications structure that enables workers to choose preferred types of communication such as group texts, instant messaging, and email groups.
- Hold regular staff or team meetings to share announcements, celebrate accomplishments, discuss changes, and collectively problem-solve.
- Create thoughtful and confidential feedback mechanisms in which workers can safely identify problems without fear of retaliation, as well as offer solutions.

5. Building a strong workplace community

Community builds connection as well as the work relationships that can promote wellness and healthy thinking.

- Develop, along with the workforce, a set of core values that can help shape the culture and principles of the workplace.
- Be clear on these values in the interview process and select job candidates that demonstrate a commitment to your values.
- Celebrate and reward achievements big and small, and find opportunities to highlight employees' contributions to the workplace.
- Create a “break” area where staff can congregate and build community: a kitchen with seating, a lounge, etc.
- Provide informal opportunities on work time for employees to connect and build relationships such as company potlucks or luncheons, celebrations for milestones or accomplishments, or [virtual team building activities](#).

For more information on improving workplace policies and practices to create a safe and supportive work environment for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, and all employees, visit the National Workplace Resource Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence at www.workplacesrespond.org.