



Contributor: Z. Colette Edwards
Posted: 04/14/2014

The (Hidden) Cost of Insecurity: Can Un-ease Lead to Dis-ease?

While the majority of employers in the United States have some type of health and wellness program in place, and the Affordable Care Act provides additional support to do so, many employers have yet to assess the role they can play in addressing the underlying issues that cause stress in the workplace and beyond.

Stress as the Undercurrent

The feeling of instability in America is pervasive and tangible. Whether it's rising global temperatures and extreme weather, the fact that the minimum wage is still not livable for most, or the bewilderment and accompanying grief of mass killings and disappearing aircrafts, stress is an undercurrent in our always-on, globally-connected world.

As an employer, you may ask, "If I can't control these things, what can I be expected to do about them?" While these issues may be out of most employers' control, it's important to recognize the workplace impact of not addressing underlying stress.

The Impact of Unease in the Workplace

According to a 2013 study on stress by the American Psychological Association and the American Institute of Stress:

- The number one cause of stress in the U.S. is job pressure
- The number two source is money, related to loss of job, reduced retirement, and medical expenses
- 77 percent of people regularly experience physical symptoms caused by stress
- The annual cost to employers attributable to stress related healthcare and missed work is \$300 billion

Tossing and Turning at Night

What are some of the thoughts driving employees' feelings of insecurity? The degree to which unease may be present in your workforce will depend on many factors:

- demographics of the population
- average salary, benefits strategy and resources available to encourage growth
- amount of support outside the workplace
- type and number of resources allocated to foster employee development
- presence and actions of leaders and managers who personify security and authenticity as they go about the business of the organization

Be aware that your employees may be facing a wide variety of challenges in their lives as well. Some common sources of anxiety, and accompanying questions, include:

Financial Insecurity

- Will I have enough to pay my bills and make it to my next paycheck?
- Will I be able to send my children to college?
- Will I be able to help my parents if they need support?
- Will I be able to retire when I can still enjoy it?
- Can I save the recommended 6-months' salary for a rainy day?



Contributor: Z. Colette Edwards
Posted: 04/14/2014

The (Hidden) Cost of Insecurity: Can Un-ease Lead to Dis-ease?

Job Insecurity

- Is my job at risk due to downsizing?
- Are they being strategic when they eliminate positions or are they just cutting bodies to save money?
- Am I at higher risk of being cut because I'm older and have been around longer?
- If my job is saved, how can I possibly take on more work, since there will be much more of it for those of us left behind?
- Why does there seem to be an ongoing cycle of downsizing, even when the company is doing well and they are hiring in other parts of the organization?

Career Insecurity

- Will I be given the chance to grow and develop?
- Is there a clear career path available to me or one I can craft that will add to my skills, knowledge, and marketability?
- Is there a real opportunity to move up in the organization?
- Will I be able to lead a team and be recognized for my efforts, commitment, and performance?
- Can I grow within the company and be financially rewarded to the same degree that might be possible if I moved to another organization?

Is my manager someone I can trust to be honest with me, provide mentorship, and give me a heads up when I'm headed down an unproductive path?

Time Insecurity

- Can I turn my feeling of time "famine" into a perception of time "affluence" so I have more time to get the important things done and without being under constant stress?
- Will I ever have time to "just" think and "just be" at work to increase my productivity and creativity as well as my energy and enthusiasm for the tasks at hand or is constant "doing" the thing that's valued and rewarded?
- How do I find the time to achieve balance, establish a self-care routine, and build in time for the activities and people who bring me joy?

Longevity and Retirement Insecurity

- What do I need to be doing now to plan for living longer with fewer disabling or limiting health conditions? What can I do to support healthy aging?
- What resources do I need to plan for retirement, and how do I protect myself for the future?
- What financial resources will I have available in retirement?
- Will I be able to retire, or will I need at least a part-time job to make ends meet?
- Am I going to find myself in a "generational sandwich," providing support to kids and parents simultaneously?
- Will Medicare and Social Security even exist in a way that will provide material financial support and the healthcare coverage I will need?



Contributor: Z. Colette Edwards
Posted: 04/14/2014

The (Hidden) Cost of Insecurity: Can Un-ease Lead to Dis-ease?

Taking Steps to Conquer the Fear

These types of questions and concerns may be causing sleepless nights and stressful days without you realizing the weight it adds to you and your associates in their daily lives. What can you do to address this reality and create a win for all parties?

1. Explore in-depth the issue of insecurity – financial, job, career, time, longevity and retirement – in your employee feedback surveys and needs assessments. Find out how prevalent these fears are among your ranks.
2. Evaluate how such concerns may play out for your employees and impact productivity, stress levels, attendant health costs, and the retention of talent.
3. Acknowledge and reward leaders/managers who exemplify security, a humble self-confidence, and really know their people. Such individuals delegate rather than micromanage, enable it be OK to make a mistake and turn it into a learning and growth opportunity, are honest and transparent, communicate well, and create a shared vision that communicates the role that each individual plays in achieving the overarching strategy of the organization.
4. Take a comprehensive look at your benefits and HR strategy. Do you have benefits, resources, incentives, and programs interwoven in your offerings that help your employees plan for their financial, career-job, and retirement future? Does your system make it easy for them to save for a rainy day? Are there incentives in the workplace to lighten the load of stresses?
5. Identify any gaps between what you have in place and what employees need. Millennials may have very different ideas about the future than Gen-Xers, and Boomers face different challenges than their younger colleagues. It's important to design a program and approach that provides protection to everyone under the umbrella.

Addressing Insecurity to Create Better Health and Business Outcomes

Employees distracted and strained by issues which produce a nagging and ongoing sense of insecurity are also employees who are not well-positioned to do their most creative and productive work. Additionally, they become a workforce vulnerable to the physical manifestations of stress and its brain health impacts, which include reduced focus, concentration, and attention to detail—as well as an increased risk of depression and anxiety.

Will addressing insecurity be easy? Of course not, especially if you have not embarked on this journey in a meaningful way so far. However, in order to recruit and retain the talent necessary to stay competitive in today's environment, to reduce stress and its associated health/productivity/pre-senteeism/absenteeism impact, and to continue to improve the well-being of your workforce, addressing the cost of insecurity becomes a critical key to success and an investment in the security of your organization.

References:

1. Fidelity-NBGH Survey Findings: <http://www.fidelity.com/inside-fidelity/employer-services/fidelity-nbgh-wellness-survey>
2. Stress Statistics: <http://statisticbrain.com/stress-statistics/>
3. The Affordable Care Act and Wellness Programs: <http://www.dol.gov/ebsa/newsroom/fswellnessprogram.html>
4. Arianna Huffington. *Thrive: The Third Metric to redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder*. The Crown Publishing Group, New York, March 2014.