

The role of leadership when it comes to mental health and wellbeing

By Shazreen Hussain

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on peoples' health globally. It is not just the physical health that the virus has affected – it has also harmed everyone's mental health. As the weeks and months of seclusion roll on, some Kiwis will inevitably struggle to maintain their mental health while working.

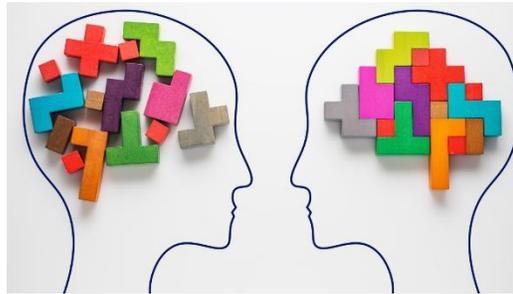
During these unprecedented times, leaders face both a great opportunity and challenge in helping employees to maintain not only positivity, but mental health. Most leaders want to do the right thing by helping employees experiencing mental distress, but they don't know what to do exactly. It can be very difficult to see your employees in distress and you can easily think that you can make the situation worse. But then many effective responses from leaders do not require extreme intervention. In other words, small actions such as active listening now and then can make a vast difference.



Recommendations for Leaders

With management and leadership support behind you, your actions to improve the mental health of your team are more likely to be effective. Employees who believe their leader cares about their mental wellbeing are more productive at work than others.

The New Zealand Mental Health Foundation champions the following **Five Ways** to enhance employee mental wellbeing at work:



Active listening — actively listening to your employees lets them know you are interested in their needs. When employees feel their leadership team cares about them, it will make them more likely to engage and provide feedback. You can ask your team what they think about the Five Ways

and take on board any recommendations.

Creating a shared sense of purpose — Building positive relationships with people is part of what makes us human. Positive interactions with your employees will make them happy, connected, and secure. By sharing experiences and communicating your vision for a mentally healthy team you can discover how you can help your people during times of distress.

Setting the tone — you can champion the Five Ways by delivering information through notice boards, staff emails, staff Facebook groups, and other online messaging platforms. These communication channels will create an opportunity to speak about the Five Ways and will encourage employees to participate in activities.

Leading by example — Strong teams have ethical leaders who lead their teams by example. At optimal levels, take care of your physical, emotional, and mental health by going on a well-earned break, for example. Be a role model for others and take the lead by introducing the Five Ways into your life first.

Setting clear prospects — This is especially important when taking employee mental health into account. Ask people managers to support the mental wellbeing of their entire team, to prove to the employees that their life and well-being matter to the organisation. The leadership team can achieve this by asking managers to promote and support their teams to participate in the Five Ways.

Where to find help and support:

- [What's Up](#) - 0800 WHATS UP (0800 942 8787)
- [Depression Helpline](#) - 0800 111 757
- [Suicide Crisis Helpline](#) - 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)