

Season 2 | Episode 53

# The Importance of Mental Health for You, Your Employees, and the Culture of Your Company

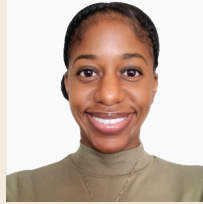
**PAYCHEX**  
Business  
Series

Coronavirus



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Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

## Full transcript

### **Gene Marks:**

Hey, everybody, and welcome to the Paychex Business Series podcast. My name is Gene Marks. Thank you again for joining us. We've been talking a lot about mental health because you really can't get enough of it. It's such an important issue that affects us as business owners and our employees, the entire workplace, and the culture of our company.

### **Gene Marks:**

So today we're going to be talking to Dr. Krystal Lewis. Krystal is a Clinical Psychologist at the National Institute of Mental Health, and she is a private practice psychologist, so she's kind of a combination business owner, private psychologist, but also works for the NIMH as well. And our conversation is just varied issues. We talk about anger and frustration and tools to deal with that. We talk about what happens if you're not getting your job done, or if you are unhappy in the office or at work, how to deal with that. She gives her thoughts on taking a nap. She gives her thoughts on getting some outdoor exercise as well and other advice for keeping yourself, as a business owner, mentally fit, but also your employees as well, because it's so critical at this time. So, I am here with Dr. Krystal Lewis. Krystal, please, first of all, say hello to everybody.

### **Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Hello. Nice to be here.

### **Gene Marks:**

Glad to have you here. And again, as I said in the introduction, Krystal is a clinical psychologist at the National Institute of Mental Health and also a private practice psychologist as well. So, really, Krystal, you are your own business owner as well, right? You run your own business as a psychologist?

### **Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Yes, exactly. Exactly.

**Gene Marks:**

Got it. All right. Well, we're going to talk about mental health this episode and reducing anxiety. Maybe we'll bring you back and talk about how you collect money from all those patients who don't pay you, and about the other headaches of business owners that we all have.

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Exactly.

**Gene Marks:**

We're going to focus on your-

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Running a business.

**Gene Marks:**

Yeah, I'm sure you've got plenty of stories to tell and whatever, but, you know what? I don't want to put you in a bad mood. We want to talk about... We want to actually ease the stress, and that's what this conversation is about. So first of all, what do you do, first of all, at the National Institute of Mental Health as a clinical psychologist?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Sure. So I've been at NIMH for almost five years. As a psychologist there, I work with pediatric anxiety neuroimaging lab. And so, while I'm there, we work with children, adolescents eight to 17 or 18 with clinical anxiety and conduct research basically related to neuroscience and clinical treatment outcomes studies. So as a psychologist there, I provide cognitive behavioral therapy to the kids in the study, which we know is evidence-based treatment for anxiety. And then we collect data on basically brain functioning and kids who have clinical disorders, and then our healthy volunteers or children who don't have any significant anxiety. And then we look across to see how their brains are operating differently in stress contexts, or just different studies... Not studies, but different tasks that we have for them to engage in.

**Gene Marks:**

Got it. Okay. That's great. And, do you do the same thing in your private practice? Do you mostly see kids? Or do you see adults as well?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Right. So in the private practice I see children, adolescents, adults, college students, and so it's more of a broad range there. I also use CBT, but other appropriate methods to individuals who are struggling to manage stress, anxiety, depression, and essentially just life challenges. And so it's a little more balanced in the private practice where I see adults and kids. NIMH is all kids.

**Gene Marks:**

Got it. Okay. And I am assuming as a... I live in Philadelphia and I don't know what it is in our neighborhood, but we're friends with a lot of psychologists. A lot of people work from home, so they seem to gravitate towards people like me because they know I probably need a lot of help. Do you work at a home, or do you have an office?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

I have an office space. At NIMH we're working towards transitioning back, much like other organizations, and so I'm there a few days a week. And then the private practice is fully virtual at this point. And so that will just be developing over time to determine at what point we're going back into an office space safely.

**Gene Marks:**

Okay. So, our audience are small business owners and there's a big focus, including this month, on mental health. We all read the news. We know this has been a stressful year and there's a lot of employees that are still very much suffering from mental health issues because of COVID. Coming back to the workplace is an issue. I'm meeting people like... You know, the President just last week said, "You don't really... If you're fully vaccinated, you don't have to wear a mask outside anymore. The chance is minuscule of getting it." And I still personally know people that are still nervous about taking off their masks even now and they're fully vaccinated because it's like a big whatever. So, as we go back to office life over the next few months, put yourself in the driver's seat of a business owner. What are the big mental health issues with our employees that we should be sensitive to and aware of?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Yeah. I mean, that's a great question. A big one, but a good question. I think just in terms of as a business owner, helping your team to manage stress and anxiety is an inclusive practice to demonstrate at anytime, but especially during these challenging times. So I would say, just going into it with a mindset that this is not business as usual, and so it's going to be a slow uptake in terms of how you're incorporating your employees back in the space. I think a few things to keep in mind, just as you mentioned there, just with the mask mandates and how far apart we should be from each other, so making sure business owners are, one, following CDC guidelines, that would be the first step to make sure that they're following those practices. And then when considering employees, so what is needed for your employees to make them feel comfortable and focusing on having an environment where there are a lot of resources.

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

And so, as a business owner, being able to provide, whether it be website recommendations or specific apps for just managing stress, general stress and anxiety, there are many websites that people can go to to get that information. I think keeping the lines of communication open with your employees as business owners is really important. So have a plan in place for how you're going to strategically get people back in that space if that's your plan, having a list of people who they'll reach out to if it's not you directly as a business owner, for managing some of the issues that might come up in the workspace.

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

And so we know communication is very important, right? And in terms of anxiety and stress, the need to know is very strong. And so as a business owner you want to make sure that any information employees may want, they have access to that whether it be through you or specific resources that you're putting out there. And I would just say, include general practices within the work space, or the work day, so that employees can relax, incorporate some mindfulness, send around really useful videos or comedy videos, something to make people laugh. So just things to lighten it up as we go back into your normal working environment.

**Gene Marks:**

I have some clients already, they're planning on doing outdoor barbecues, having half days in the office, the other half day back at home, again, just trying to make it a fun atmosphere to come back to and as stress-free as possible. Does that make sense?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I think business owners are going to have to be very flexible, but then also figuring out how to make people feel a little more comfortable, outdoor barbecues, outdoor events, making sure you're shifting. So if you are in the office, but then you have team meetings, can you still do that virtually so everybody's not in one space? But then you still have your one-on-one meetings or small

group meetings. All of that's going to be very necessary to think about how you're going to figure out how to arrange that in your office space. But then, yes, making sure there are ways that you can provide some stress relief and some just normal socialization in a safe way. And if that's outside, this is a great time as the weather's getting warmer, we can do a little bit more of that.

**Gene Marks:**

Krystal, I have to ask you. As a psychologist, I mean, and you practice in this field, you see a lot of people. There's this famous photo. I wish I had it, I would share it with everybody. It was taken in 1940 during the bombing of London, during World War II. And it's this milkman who is delivering milk and he's walking over the rubble of a bombed out house while delivering milk, because he's an employee of a milk company, you know what I mean?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Right. Right.

**Gene Marks:**

And you look at it and you're like, "Oh, my God." And you do think to yourself, like, "So, what has happened?" I mean, almost half of the generation of employees that are working right now are considered to be millennials, they're younger. But it's just a different change in culture and attitude that maybe some older business owners don't understand. What can you say to help them understand why mental health has become so much bigger of an issue? And why it's so important to them?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Yeah. That's a wonderful question. I think there's a lot of literature out there that's highlighting mental health, and there's a lot more that we see on social media and in the news. And so, for maybe business owners who are a little bit older, who don't have that level of exposure, that would be the first step of just starting to read things online and listen to different podcasts and get information about mental health and how it's affecting people across the board. But I think you're exactly right. With the millennials it's just a different way, I think, of functioning and working, and there needs to be that level of flexibility.

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

And so for business owners who've been doing this for such a long time and don't quite understand, "Well, we've been through X, Y, and Z, and we just kept going." I think it might be hard to make that shift to know that people are operating a little bit differently now, and it's just important for our just overall well-being, our mental well-being and our physical well-being to pay attention to these things, to figure out, "Well, how can we adjust the way that we're working to make sure that everybody is functioning at their best capacity for your business?"

**Gene Marks:**

Sure. And what's in it for the business owner? I mean, happier employees means what?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Happier employees, essentially, would mean... Well, it should mean more productivity, and for whatever your business is, it helps you to do better as a business. And so, employees can rate their work-life balance higher, and so it looks good not just for your business in terms of money, but just in general for people who want to come work for you or your name in general, it can help when people like to work in your business space, like to work with you. And so there are many benefits that way as well.

**Gene Marks:**

Yeah, I agree. I mean, labor disruption is our biggest issue this year so we're all looking to recruit people-

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Exactly.

**Gene Marks:**

... and the companies that have a culture, which are more open for better mental health, are the ones that are going to be able to land better employees.

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Exactly. We're in a space right now where people are looking for that inclusivity in these environments at work, and also just the ability to take more time off, or the flexibility to work from home. All of that is a consideration. And so I think all businesses are going to have to reconsider what they're willing to offer people who they want to come work for them, because it's going to be a lot of competition for other businesses who are now restructuring broadly, given what happened through this pandemic.

**Gene Marks:**

Sure. Krystal, you are very much like a lot of small business owners, independent people that listen to this podcast. I mean, you've got your own practice, so you're seeing your own patients, you're seeing them virtually for now. And then you've got your gig at the NIMH as well. So, you're running around and doing all of these things, and that is not uncommon with a lot of independent people that are out there.

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Right.

**Gene Marks:**

So, what about you? What do you do to sustain your own mental health? I'm curious.

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Yeah. What do I do? I give a lot of advice to other people. I think-

**Gene Marks:**

Does that make you feel better, sometimes, when you're giving advice and you're like, "You know, that's pretty good advice. I ought to be doing that myself," right?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Yeah. On the one hand it could make me feel better to know I have all this great advice, but then knowing, "Am I following my own advice?" That's what I always try to remind myself of. Yeah. I think for me, I like to do a lot of outdoor activities, and so with the weather transitioning, that's been helpful for me to just take a walk, get up, go outside for a few minutes in between sessions. It's very easy to get immersed in your work hour-by-hour, what you're doing, especially when you're wearing multiple hats. And so what I've started to do is just to kind of overload certain days where I'll have busier days where I'll put more of my patients maybe on one day, and then the days that are lighter, I'll make sure that I do an outdoor activity, or that might be working out for me.

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

I used to love boxing and doing lightweight lifting, but I'm not doing any of that now. So for me, it's kind of like, "I need to get back doing that." Right? That made me feel good. It's a good physical outlet. It's good for my mental health. Playing tennis. I'm very active. So I think just integrating exercise, outdoor time. And then for me, I've increased the amount of time that I'm spending with family. I've moved around a lot so I don't have anyone immediate in my area, but it's great. I take time off to go visit my significant others, to go visit my parents, to make sure I'm around my loved ones. And so I just remind myself that everybody needs breaks. I know I'm the provider and the helper, but the helpers need help as well, and the helpers need time off as well. And so I just kind of remind myself of that, everybody needs to have their outlets.

**Gene Marks:**

I'm not sure if I agree with you about visiting your family, helping one's mental health, but I guess it depends on your family, you know.

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Exactly.

**Gene Marks:**

I mean, some people are like-

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

... I've been very blessed in that sense.

**Gene Marks:**

That's right. Visiting had the opposite impact on my mental health. And it's funny you mentioned about, you used to box and lift weights and all that. There's a gym right near where I live and it's a big open windowed one, and it's one of these boxing ones. So if you drive by after work, you see people in there just beating the heck out of punching bags. And you think to yourself, "That looks like a very therapeutic activity."

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Yeah. It's cathartic. It's great.

**Gene Marks:**

It's funny. You know, one of the common themes about mental health and anxiety-reducing stuff that I keep hearing over and over again, and you just said it, going outside, you know what I mean? Doing physical activities. It almost seems like that is like, you really need to be making time for yourself to go into the sunshine, regardless of what it is. Do you agree with that?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Yeah, no, I agree with that. I think it's important to get out for a variety of reasons. You mentioned the sunshine, right? But just the sun and Vitamin D, I think being in nature for a lot of people helps just to ground you, spending time if you like walking, then make sure you try to find a walking trail that has a lot of trees, a nice paths. Even just going out in your backyard, it doesn't have to be anything elaborate, but just getting air, getting outside. Yeah, I think that's very helpful. I know our physical health is closely tied to our mental health, so the better we're able to take care of what we're putting in our bodies, the exercise that we're getting, the better we're going to feel. And in turn that helps with our overall mental health. And so those things are very important.

**Gene Marks:**

Let me ask you some specific strategies, some tools that you might recommend to some of your patients for dealing with some of the stresses that we have. So first of all, what is your take on taking a nap?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

It's necessary if you feel exhausted and you need a break throughout the day. I think you can plan it out so it's not just... You end up sleeping through your meetings, right? But making sure that if you feel like you need a nap, you're not sleeping as well overnight, structuring your day in a way where you move your meetings around, or you have a set period of time that you're able to take a nap. For some people that won't work because once they're asleep, they are asleep, and so it actually disrupts their day and causes more of an issue. But napping can be helpful for some people.

**Gene Marks:**

What advice do you have for either an employee or a business owner that always finds themselves not able to catch up? You know, stressful, because they feel like they're overloaded with their work and it's having an impact on them, both physically and mentally. What advice do you give them? What tools would you recommend?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

I think there are two things with that. You can have the experience of feeling like you're always behind, there's always something to do. You're feeling overwhelmed, but you're actually doing what you need to do, right? So you're getting your work done but you're forward-thinking. A lot of times people who experience anxiety are always thinking about the future, what needs to get done, so that sense of feeling overwhelmed is there more times than it needs to be when they're actually caught up with their work. So in that case, I would say focusing more on your mindset, using more just kind of mindfulness, stay in the moment, relaxation practices, and focusing on how you're thinking about things.

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

So, people who do have significant anxiety tend to jump to the future. They try to plan out the unknown. They're thinking about things aren't going to get done. And so the way that they're talking to themselves isn't very helpful. So we suggest changing that language and saying, "Generally my boss gives me good reviews. I get all my work done. Even though I feel like I don't have a lot of time, I'm getting what I need to get done, done." So it's changing that conversation. But then there are a subset of people who actually are behind, right? Depending on the work that they're doing, they have a lot that they have to get done. And so in those scenarios we would encourage people to reach out to either their boss or people that they're working with, maybe colleagues, to figure out a way to share some of that work.

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Speak up if possible when you feel like you're not able to get certain things done or meet certain deadlines. Maybe you have things going on at home with your kids or your eldercare and there's a lot that's been happening during this time. So figuring out who those people are in your work environment you can talk to to ask for help, to share some of the work or talk to your boss if you have, hopefully, that positive relationship, to figure out how to structure things so that you can get things done. So I think there are those two camps of people who obviously might approach this a little differently.

**Gene Marks:**

Sure. That's great. How about anger and frustration? I mean, that is both, you know... Employees and also business owners are constantly dealing with a lot of people that sometimes... Or they can't get stuff done, or they're frustrated with their jobs, or they're just angry. What recommendations do you have for someone in a professional environment that you meet that might be dealing with those kinds of issues?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

For the person who is experiencing a lot of anger or frustration in that work environment, I would say, similarly, just making sure that if there's a specific problem, seeing if you can problem solve. So, what is it that's making you frustrated in that environment? If it's a person, if it's just the work, maybe you just don't like what you're doing, but you have to do it, then it might be, "Okay. Well, what are ways to reduce that anger before you get into that workspace?"

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Maybe it might be shifting your workouts in the morning, doing something active before you go into work, having something to look forward to, integrating a lunch break in the middle of the day, or something that breaks things up. If you don't have control over changing whatever it is that's making you feel angry, I think the first step to that would just be evaluating, like, "Why am I feeling so angry?" Right? "Is it the job itself? Is it just the fact that I have to roll out of bed and go to work? Or are there specific things that are happening at work that are making me angry?" And then taking steps to address those issues.

**Gene Marks:**

Good. Finally, Krystal, what are your thoughts on business owners seeing a licensed psychologist as a help for them to deal with the pressures in their business and the pressures in their home life? And part two to that question is, how do you feel about companies making available the use of a licensed psychologist for employees that might want to take advantage of those services?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Right. Of course I'm biased. I think every company should have a psychologist working for them.

**Gene Marks:**

Of course. And they should hire you.

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Exactly. You know, mental health is extremely important. I think whether you're a business owner or an employee, but for business owners, there are a lot of specialists now who actually deal with a subset of the population, the people who own businesses, specific professionals, to get help from therapists and psychologists. So I would say that is something that anyone should do, but a business owner should do, that's a way to help you manage some of the stress that you're dealing with your business, with your family life. Working with a psychologist, a licensed professional, can be very helpful.

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

You don't have to have a clinical diagnosis to reach out for help. It could just be managing, especially during this time of the pandemic. We've got a significant increase in people who are reaching out for help and really just structuring things at their job, managing their businesses, and then some of the home-related stress as well. So I would definitely encourage business owners to seek help if they feel that they can use that support, and my belief is that at some point in time everybody can use that support.

**Gene Marks:**

Dr. Krystal Lewis is a clinical psychologist at the National Institute of Mental Health and a private practice psychologist. Krystal, where can people find you or reach you?

**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

So, essentially putting my name in, Krystal Lewis, and put NIMH, and it'll pop up there. And then I'm listed on Psychology Today for my private practice as well.

**Gene Marks:**

Fantastic. Hey, thanks so much for coming on. Your advice is just great and we appreciate it so much. Hopefully we'll talk again sometime in the future and COVID will be well behind in the rearview mirror and we'll be talking about whatever other workplace issues that are affecting mental health at the time. But-



**Dr. Krystal Lewis:**

Yeah, that would be great.

**Gene Marks:**

That would be great. So, thank you, Krystal. I appreciate it. Everyone, for any further advice, tips or tools that you need to help run your business, visit us at [paychex.com/worx](https://paychex.com/worx). My name is Gene Marks. I appreciate you watching and listening to this podcast and video. And we will see you again soon. Take care.

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