

# Focusing on Mental Health in the Workplace is a No-Brainer in 2022



**Gene Marks**

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## **Gene Marks:**

Hey everybody and welcome to On the Mark. I am your host Gene Marks, and today we are going to talk about mental health in the workplace. But before we get to that, let me first of all just remind you for those of you that are listening to this podcast all the time, I'm always looking for topics to talk about and guests to interview as well and if you've got a good topic that you would like me to discuss, maybe some advice you'd like, things I can share, or even a good guest that you would like to share, please let us know. If you join us at [payx.me/thrivetopics](https://payx.me/thrivetopics). That's P-A-Y-X dot M-E. You can submit any ideas that you have. We'll consider them all. And I'm looking forward to hearing your ideas and suggestions.

Now, mental health. I am recording this right now the first week in January. In the middle of December, Paychex released a new study of about 603 full-time employees at small and midsize businesses in the U.S. That they conducted between November 11 and 12, 2021. They asked about questions regarding the workplace. The study itself was administered by an organization called Future Workplace. And they're trying to get points of views on employees and their priorities and trends that they're facing, some of their top concerns.

Here was one big thing that came out from this study; Over 60 percent of the employees that were surveyed said that wellbeing support was one of their top priorities when seeking employment. And just to dig down into those numbers just a little bit; 69% of employees said that prior to the pandemic, their overall wellbeing was good or very good, and yet during the height of the pandemic, fewer than half of the employees felt that way. It dropped from 69% all the way down to 44%.

Now, as you guys know with the Omicron raging, we are still in the midst of this pandemic. So, even though the numbers are ticking back up, they're now back up to 59%, they still have not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Now, who are the most concerned by all of this when you look at your employees? It's the Gen Z types. Now, Gen Z are people that were born after the year 1995. So really these are a lot of the people in the workplace in their low- to mid-20s and they were the ones, they were the generation that said that their biggest desire was better mental health benefits. I mean, in general there were two younger generations,

the Gen Zs and the Millennials, those are the ones that said that they needed more benefits. It was the boomers that really are paying a little bit less attention to the mental health benefits that are out there. But let's not forget, between Gen Z and Millennials, that is like more than half of the workplace that's out there. I mean, these are the people that are coming to work and working for us and they put mental health as one of their top priorities.

So the question is, what do we do as employers? I mean, if you know that mental health is an issue, and by the way, I'm not necessarily a boomer. I was born in 1965. So, please don't refer to me as a boomer. I'm a Gen X. But boomers, the cutoff was like 1964. The bottom line is that the average small business is run by somebody over the age of 50 in this country. So, whether you're a boomer or a Gen X, you're of that generation where mental health and mental illness was not something that you really talked about. In fact, frankly, it was more of a stigma than anything else.

But listen, to all of my fellow business owners out there, to all the people out there that are running companies that are my age and my generation, I have to tell you that the world has changed significantly. I mean, you can thank Naomi Osaka. You can thank Simone Biles. You can thank any other people that are out there, celebrities, Meghan Markle, that have expressed publicly their struggles with mental health. And because of those influencers and those celebrities, and just because of just a growing awareness of mental health issues, many younger people - generations younger than us - are stepping up and saying, "Hey, listen, mental health really is an issue and it's an issue for me."

And by the way, mental health can include a whole lot of different things when you're talking to employees. It can be depression, it can be anxiety, it can be just feeling the blues. I mean, it doesn't have to be so severe that you even notice it, but it's there and it's a thing and it's no longer a stigma and employees are talking about it, especially younger employees. I am telling you now, as we are searching for new employees and we are looking to retain our best employees, particularly if they are on the younger side, people are asking us, and if they haven't they will be, what are your mental health benefits? What are you doing to improve our mental health in the workplace?

Now, the Paychex survey found that employees, the number one thing they wanted to help them with their mental health was additional paid time off - 35% of respondents said that that would go a long way to help them with their mental health. Now, I get it, I get it. People my generation are like, "Come on, with the time off, we're going to pay you not to work." But that's not what's going on here. When we're saying additional time off, I really read that as additional flexibility and time off. The ability to work from home, the ability to take time off where they want a few hours here, a few hours there. That flexibility is a strength of a small business. And if you're running one, that should be something that you should be emphasizing.

Right behind giving more paid time off, those same employees - 29% of them in the survey - said that they just want straight out better mental health benefits, and I'll talk about that in a minute. They also said they like to get better health insurance, better staffing, and also some help with financial wellness training and benefits. And that's another topic I'm going to take up in another day.

So the bottom line is this, what do we do as employers? We have got to make mental health a priority benefit that we are providing in 2022 and subsequent years. I've got like six things that you want to consider.

Number one, consider subscribing to like an online service or an online platform that can support your employees with mental health issues. One of them is [betterup.com](https://www.betterup.com). That's the one by Prince Harry and

Meghan Markle. They're one of the investors, or Prince Harry is one of the investors in that platform. They're one of a number of mental health awareness platforms that you can subscribe as a company, make available to your employees and your employees cannot only get resources, they can talk to counselors on there, they can watch videos, they can get private and confidential help and at least a resource to talk to if they're struggling with any issues. So you might want to consider offering a platform like BetterUp.

In addition to that, talk to your health insurance and your benefit consultant or advisor. Ask them flat out what mental health benefits are provided by your existing insurance plans. A lot of them are adding them, so you want to be aware of it. If the plans have additional benefits that might be available for a slightly more cost, it might be something that you want to consider either paying for or at least making it available for your employees to pay for. But, find out what those benefits are and make sure your employees know that as well.

Number three, consider hiring a coach or a therapist for your business. I have some clients that are putting coaches and therapists on retainer for, I don't know, \$500 a month, \$1,000 a month, and making them available for employees to talk to confidentially about whatever issues that they are having.

Number four, just like we talked about earlier, PTO. You really want to visit your paid time off policies. How flexible are they? Are you giving your employees the ability to work from home? Do they have the ability to be independent and mobile and make some of their decisions as to where they get their work done, what they do? You want to change the culture of how you're thinking about work. It's really not about how many hours people are working nowadays, it's about what they are delivering for the hours that they are spending. So look at your PTO policies and see if they are progressive and make sure that they're competitive with what your other competitors are offering.

Two more things, you might want to consider sending your managers into your company to mental health awareness training. You can Google because there are lots of training both online and face-to-face as the pandemic recedes. Well, your managers, they need to be able to identify employees that might be struggling with certain mental health issues. So as a company, you can take steps to help those employees. So get your managers trained so they can be more aware of the things they should be looking out for.

Finally, lighten things up around your office. Think about the culture in your company. Are you bringing in lunch? Does your company participate in sports leagues and out-of-office things like that where people can be friendly and competitive and have a good time? Do you participate in nonprofit and volunteering opportunities that your employees can get out of the office, may be compensated so that they can give back to the community and make them feel good about themselves? Do you take half-days off, like a half-day on a Friday or a half-day on a Monday? Do you have silly things like picnics and barbecues? These things do go a long way. And if you've got a fun, nice, light atmosphere in your office, that really does make a difference.

So those are the things that I would recommend to improve the mental health culture in your business. It's a big issue this year. It is not only a benefit that you should be providing, it's something that, really, it's necessary to provide now because it is something that employees are looking for when they're considering working for companies or staying working for companies as well.

I hope this information helps you. And if you've got other ideas or things you'd like to add, let me know. Visit us again at [payx.me/thrivetopics](https://payx.me/thrivetopics). We can talk more about mental health and I'd be happy to interview mental health experts as well. We've done that before in the past and this is going to be an issue that's going to continue on.

So, thanks for listening. We'll be back next week with another topic to help you run your business. My name is Gene Marks, and hope you have a good rest of the week. Take care.

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