

6 Ways to Support Your Team's Well-Being

Employees who feel overwhelmed and underappreciated are at risk of burning out, and those who feel stalled in their careers or struggle with work-life balance may opt to leave before it reaches that point. Taking care of the well-being of your workforce reduces turnover and raises productivity, but most important, it makes your agency a good place to work.

So how do you support your employees? Here are six tips:

1. Pay attention.

The first step in keeping your employees from burning out is to know how they're doing. Some signs of burnout:

- Decreased productivity, or lower quality of work
- Avoiding interaction with co-workers
- Taking more time off
- Being irritable with co-workers, managers and customers
- Expressing cynical or negative thoughts

2. Remember they're human.

“During the early stages of the COVID pandemic,” noted Lisa Jammer, Director of People and Culture for the Texas Department of Information Resources, “we stopped treating them like employees, and essentially, we started treating them like people. And we can't go back.” Some steps to build a culture that recognizes the humanity of everyone on the team:

- Hold weekly one-on-one chats with a set agenda
- Give feedback — especially positive feedback — often
- Organize team events — some of them in person to bring in remote workers
- Start meetings with icebreakers that let people share things about themselves
- Keep an eye out for things that don't seem right, like a disheveled appearance or signs of exhaustion

3. Emphasize the mission.

Despite increased stress on public servants, government has an advantage: Many, if not most, employees are in their jobs because they believe in what they're doing. To focus your team on its mission:

- Remind them that their work matters and that they are improving lives
- Connect every task and project to the mission
- Build collaboration around the team's shared goals and values

4. Help them advance.

As much as you may want to keep your staff, most people need to feel they're moving forward in their careers. Show them you support their ambitions:

- Ask about where they want to go and what interests them
- Give opportunities to try a variety of assignments
- Facilitate learning new skills, even ones not directly related to their current role
- Celebrate promotions and advancement

5. Allow for flexibility.

Perhaps the biggest change to work in the past few years is the adoption and acceptance of remote work. Many workers now prefer a hybrid situation, where some, but not all, work time is spent in the office. But there are other forms of flexibility that can help employees feel valued and balance their lives, including:

- Giving autonomy over how work gets done
- Letting them adjust their hours to accommodate other responsibilities
- Asking for their preferred work style (email vs. virtual meetings)

6. Frame wellness as a group need.

We tend to treat wellness as an individual responsibility. But in the workplace, that emphasis can leave employees feeling singled out and alone, according to the Harvard Business Review. Instead:

- Discuss adversity as belonging to the whole team. That results in coping strategies that build connection and improve recovery.
- Create formal opportunities for people to discuss, as a group, how adversity is affecting them. Brief "relational breaks" let people acknowledge what's going on and compare experiences to help build group solutions.

Don't forget to take care of yourself.

You'll also be helping everyone else. If you're a conscientious manager, you might feel you have to take up the slack. But that can foster an environment where self-care seems off-limits. "One thing we tell our leaders is to model the expected behaviors," said Jammer. "[When you ask why] people don't take vacation, sometimes it's because their leader doesn't take time off. That becomes expected behavior among their employees, and people burn out."