

How Employers Can Reduce Burnout Among Women in the Workplace

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Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion?

Increased mental distance from or feelings of negativity related to one's job?

Reduced professional efficacy?

You probably recognized at least one of these symptoms in your workplace in the last year. Perhaps it was in one of your colleagues. Maybe it was in you. These are the signs of burnout, the occupational phenomenon recently classified by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Burnout has become more widespread in the last decade, inflicting strain on employees and businesses and affecting engagement, satisfaction, productivity, retention, and more. In fact, its increasing prevalence has led to the phenomenon's inclusion in the Internal Classification of Diseases. Burnout is no longer a benign reference to feeling stressed. It is not something that can be cured by a few days off or time on the beach.

We now know burnout affects women in larger numbers than men. This is especially concerning for companies as women have flooded the workforce—from salaried employees to hourly and contingent workers—which has seen a spike in young, single mothers in recent years. The effects of burnout on female employees could take a toll on a company's bottom line; research from McKinsey & Company found companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 percent more likely to have financial returns above national industry medians.

While the cause of burnout is an amalgam, studies have identified a few key factors that explain why it affects women more than men.

Women contend with:

undue stress of varying expectations in the workplace

less decision-making authority within their jobs or career progression

more unpaid work on the home front.

These concerns are plaguing business leaders. As companies fight to retain employees in a time of low unemployment, more thought is being given to how to combat burnout in female employees.

Flexible Workplace Scheduling

The days of being chained to a work station for eight hours a day are gone. Today's workplace needs a modern approach to work hours and policies to match women's

changing schedules and responsibilities. Shiftboard & Lux Insights recently found that employees view work-life balance as the most important factor for job satisfaction, and women value it more than men. Flexible scheduling can influence a woman's ability to be there for her family and do things she loves outside of the office—activities that can build up tolerance to burnout. The study also found tight work schedules create as much strain as other sources of job stress, such as commutes, relationships with managers, and even pay.

“More and more women want work to align with their lives,” said Nika Kabiri of Lux Insights, a Seattle-based research firm. “We live in an age where more male and female employees want their jobs to realistically accommodate their life challenges rather than the other way around, and it's time that was of importance to modern corporations too.”

Changes to improve flexibility can take many forms. It could be additional remote working options during the week or flexible work hours that allow employees to set a schedule that accommodates their other responsibilities (childcare, parental care, or continuing education). For those employers with contingent or hourly workers, this could mean more predictable and consistent scheduling to allow women greater control to work around life's obligations. Family-friendly policies and flexibility allow employees to maintain autonomy and consistency, improving satisfaction and engagement for female employees.

Mentoring Programs and Networks

Creating a human connection to the workplace is another vital component to combatting burnout. Companies need to create a sense of community and support to emphasize that employees have each other's backs. This is especially important for women. One study found career development for women is tied more to attachment and relationships. To provide this, companies should implement mentoring and relationship building within their organization.

Mentoring programs humanize the employee experience, building elements of inclusion, development, and support that embolden female employees to feel like more than cogs in a wheel. Whether it's one-to-one mentoring, group mentoring in the form of circles, or employee resource groups (ERGs), these engagement programs can be safe spaces for physical and mental health discussions in the workplace. Mentoring relationships can help women feel less isolated and discover new avenues for career development and progression.

Value-Based Work and Compensation

While higher compensation is constantly at the top of the list of reasons why employees leave a company, a recent Payscale study found that the main factor attracting employees to a new organization is the opportunity to do meaningful work, proving it's important for companies to focus on what is meaningful to female employees. It can be as simple as managers asking direct reports what they find meaningful. Another way is by presenting

greater transparency around how the work employees are doing is directly connected to the company's mission and vision.

Creating value also extends to the compensation and benefits of the employee equation. Values and meaning should be embedded in the compensation philosophy and reflected in pay decisions. This can be transparent salary ranges, equitable pay practices across the organization and employee demographics, or total rewards benefits packages such as work-from-home policies, unlimited paid time off, and significant development in addition to standard job responsibilities.

Focusing on meaning to combat burnout gives back to female employees and companies. Employees who find work highly meaningful are 69 percent less likely to plan on quitting their jobs within the next six months and have job tenures seven months longer on average.

In today's working world, we glorify stress and optimize for just about everything. This constant need to be on and available isn't without consequences. If companies don't implement tactics to fight off the effects of burnout, this increasing phenomenon could grow to epidemic proportions, affecting retention, productivity, and ultimately a company's long-term innovation.

About the Author

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Amanda Schnieders is a senior marketing manager at Chronus. A believer in the innovative capabilities of the modern workplace, she focuses on how human engagement can improve employee productivity and growth in an organization.