

# Strategies to maintain your staff's wellness this winter

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Mental health awareness is gaining momentum globally, its significance and impact on productivity has become a subject of increasing scrutiny and concern. Businesses worldwide are now facing the challenge of how to balance economic growth with the mental wellness of their workforce. This highlights the universal recognition of mental health as a critical factor for a thriving society. Complementary to each other, mental health and productivity are closely linked; research shows that individuals who prioritise their mental well-being are more focused, creative and efficient, making significant contributions to the economic health of nations.



Dr Samke Ngcobo, mental health advocate and founder of Vocal Mentality

As South Africa braces for the colder winter months, the country contends with the seasonal change and an array of economic and societal challenges that exacerbate the struggle for mental well-being. The upcoming elections introduce an additional layer of uncertainty and anxiety, compounding the stress of daily life. This anticipation of political change adds a feeling of instability that affects the nation's collective psyche, influencing individual's feelings of security and outlook on the future.

Furthermore, the rise in interest rates and slow economic growth pose a significant burden on individuals and families, making daily living costs increasingly difficult to manage. This financial strain not only adds to the stress, anxiety, and depression many are already experiencing due to the seasonal shift and political unrest, but also hinders their ability to maintain productivity at work.

According to the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (Sadag), one in four South Africans have depression, with employee absenteeism due to depression costing the economy R20bn annually. Therefore, the correlation between productivity and mental health cannot be overlooked in ensuring long-term success and resilience for businesses and their employees. In light of these complexities, adopting strategies to support mental wellness in the workplace is more critical than ever.

## Strategies for supporting mental wellness in the workplace

Firstly, businesses must foster an environment where mental health is openly discussed and destigmatised. Creating a culture of openness and understanding encourages employees to seek help, without fear of judgment or reprisal.

Secondly, employers should offer accessible resources such as employee assistance programmes (EAPs), mental wellness days, and counselling services to support their workforce's mental well-being.

Furthermore, promoting work-life balance through flexible working hours and encouraging regular breaks can significantly reduce stress. Encouraging physical activity, whether through company-sponsored sports or exercise classes, can also play a vital role in alleviating symptoms of depression and anxiety, fostering a healthier, more productive workforce.

Additionally, providing training for managers and supervisors to recognise signs of mental distress and equipping them with tools to offer appropriate support ensures a safer and more supportive environment for everyone.

## **Leadership commitment**

In this age of heightened awareness, it is paramount that leaders and managers at all levels commit to these strategies with authenticity and purpose. By integrating mental wellness practices into the company culture, organisations not only enhance the well-being of their employees but also pave the way for sustained economic growth and resilience against future challenges.

As we continue to navigate these uncertain times, the collective prioritisation of mental health and productivity is not just a matter of individual well-being but a strategic economic investment that can lead to a healthier, more productive future.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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