Workplace Wellness Culture and Environment: Key to How People Emotionally Feel and Behave

Think about the worst job you ever had. What made it so terrible? Let me take a guess—you were not valued for your work, you felt like you did not matter to the organization, you were micro-managed, underpaid, and overworked. You were not encouraged to be a better you, rather, you were encouraged to sacrifice your well-being to get the job done. On top of that, you may have even been exposed workplace bullying, manipulation, or discrimination. Now, think about how working in that job made you feel and behave. Maybe you felt burned out, resentful, less motivated to work, and mentally and physically exhausted by the time you got home. Resources depleted, you had no energy left for socializing, participating in a hobby or activity that brings you joy, exercising, or preparing well-balanced meals—all key components to thriving. Both your mental and physical health declined, you felt anxious, depressed, and burnout.

Unfortunately, these experiences are not unique, 84% of workers report that at least one workplace factor (i.e., poor communication practices, no work life balance, emotionally draining work, or lack of recognition) negatively impacts their mental health (Mind Share Partners', 2021). Further, a large body of research has established associations among mental and physical health outcomes with workplace wellness culture, a sense of mattering to the workplace, and other positive working conditions like trust in management and supervisor health (Burns et al., 2021; Jyothindran et al., 2021; Melnyk et al., 2021, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Nigam et al., 2023). More specifically, those with higher levels of workplace wellness cultures, a sense of mattering, and positive working conditions are more likely to have less anxiety, depression, burnout, and better physical health than those without.

Creating and sustaining workplace wellness cultures and environments takes a multi-component strategy that starts with top leaders, but also involves managers, supervisors, faculty, and people in the grass roots of the organization (see https://www.higheredtoday.org/2024/05/13/wellness-cultures-for-student-success/). Top leaders must invest in their people's well-being, role model and support wellness through their organization's strategic plan, mission/vision statements, policies, programming, benefits package, and personal action. Leaders must also fix broken systems that lead to burnout and poor mental as well as physical health as an organization can be resource-rich in wellness programming, but still have issues with staff morale, turnover, and poor health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognize the relationship between work and well-being outcomes, and their *Work Place Health Model* (see https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/model/index.html) explains how organizations can create positive workplace wellness cultures. For resources specific to healthcare workers, the National Academy of Medicine has released an evidence-based resource compendium that houses a collection of tools and strategies to improve health care worker well-being (see https://nam.edu/compendium-of-key-resources-for-improving-clinician-well-being/). Lastly, our BHAC's National Wellness Action Alliance Workgroup has a Faculty Tool-Kit describing strategies to support the well-being of health science students (see https://healthyacademics.org/news/2023-04-04/faculty-wellness-toolkit-strategies-support-students).

Remember, culture eats strategy for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Culture change takes time, often five to 10 years. We need to stay consistent and persistent in building and sustaining wellness cultures and environments that help our people to feel emotionally better and engage in healthy lifestyle behaviors. It pays off—both in terms of return on investment and value of investment.

It has been such a privilege and blessing to be your president over the past two years and to help our fabulous BHAC organization grow with positive impact. Let's keep dreaming, discovering, and delivering a brighter and

healthier future together for our academic organizations so that all faculty, staff, and students across our great nation can thrive.

Fond regards,
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