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How to Cultivate Effective Workplace Conversations around Mental Health

Creating a safe space starts with leadership. Demonstrating vulnerability encourages others to do the same.

Training sessions or workshops on mental health literacy equip employees with the knowledge and tools to effectively recognize and address mental health issues.

Sharing one's story can be a powerful tool in cultivating beneficial workplace conversations around mental health.

Join us in creating a culture where everyone feels seen, heard, and supported in their mental health journey.

Psychological Safety at Work

Cultivating an environment for open dialogue and sharing one's story at work begins with fostering a psychologically safe workplace. This means creating a space where individuals feel secure in expressing their thoughts, experiences, and concerns without fear of judgment or repercussion. Employers play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining such an environment. While this toolkit provides insights and strategies for promoting mental health awareness and dialogue, it is essential for employers to prioritize the development of a culture that values psychological safety. By doing so, organizations can empower their employees to engage in authentic conversations, ultimately leading to increased trust, collaboration, and well-being in the workplace. Standards can be found here

Key Components to a Psychologically Safe Workplace

Trust	Employees feel confident that they can trust their colleagues and leaders to respect their opinions, ideas, and contributions.
Open Communication	There is an atmosphere where individuals feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, feelings, and concerns without fear of backlash or retribution.
Respectful Feedback	Constructive feedback is given and received in a respectful manner, focusing on improvement rather than criticism
Empathy	There is a culture of empathy and understanding, where individuals show compassion towards each other's experiences and challenges.
Inclusivity	Diverse perspectives and opinions are welcomed and valued, creating a sense of belonging for all employees.
Risk Taking	Employees feel encouraged to take calculated risks and innovate without the fear of failure or blame.
Supportive Environment	There is a sense of mutual support and cooperation, with colleagues and leaders offering help and encouragement when needed.
Psychological Safety Net	Employees feel that there are mechanisms in place to address any issues or concerns they may have, such as confidential support resources or grievance procedures.

Note: While fostering open dialogue and peer support is essential for promoting mental well-being in the workplace, it's crucial to recognize when professional support may be necessary. If you or someone you know is experiencing significant distress or mental health challenges that exceed the scope of peer conversations, it's important to encourage seeking professional help. This could involve accessing resources such as employee assistance programs (EAPs), mental health hotlines, or scheduling an appointment with a qualified mental health professional. Remember, seeking professional support is a proactive step towards managing mental health concerns and building resilience. Encourage open communication about mental health resources and destigmatize help-seeking behaviors within your organization to ensure that everyone feels supported on their mental health journey.

How To Support Meaningful Conversation

Demonstrate Vulnerability

- Integrate mental health discussions into team meetings or company-wide events, **normalizes the conversation and reduces stigma**.
- By sharing stories we not only encourage a deeper sense of compassion for others but we also **learn to cultivate self-compassion**.
- By relating to the stories of others we **feel less alone**, more understood and ultimately take the shame out of our experiences.
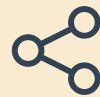
[Leaders, Sharing Your Own Mental Health Story Can Help You Become a Better Ally](#)

Unsinkable Storytellers

[Peter Neal - Balancing Acts](#)

[Lindsey Thomson - Love Thyself](#)

[Rhiannon Rosalind - From Chaos to Clarity](#)

Encourage Storytelling

- **Invite guest speakers or host storytelling sessions** where employees can share their personal experiences with mental health challenges.

- **Share articles and TED talks** relevant to mental health within your industry, as well as those focussing on self-awareness and team building.
  - With these, send out reflection questions and encourage teams to set aside time in their meetings or 1:1 discussions to debrief what they took away

- **Model the value of storytelling** around mental health by sharing a piece of your journey as a leader. By demonstrating openness to authentic mental health dialogue, you humanize yourself to your team and create a safer environment for them to share their own stories

Storytelling Guiding Prompts:

1. Describe a time when you have struggled to navigate workplace expectations, deadlines or activities
2. Reflect on a situation when you have had to ask for help at work
3. Share a time when you lacked confidence in your role
4. Discuss a mistake you made at work and how you responded.
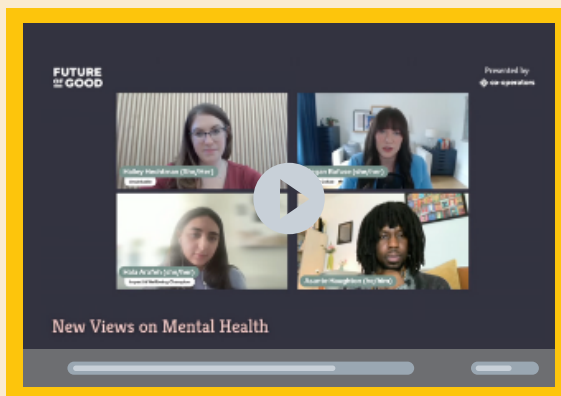
[Future of Good's Changemaker Wellbeing Summit](#)
How to integrate mental health at work in an authentic way

Articles & Books on the Benefits of Storytelling

- ['This too shall pass.' World-first study proves the power of mental health recovery stories](#)
- [How Storytelling Can Support Employee Mental Health](#)
- *[Long Story Short: The Only Storytelling Guide You'll Ever Need](#)* by Margot Leitman
- *[Unleash the Power of Storytelling: Win Hearts, Change Minds, Get Results](#)* by Rob Biesenbach

How Sarah Cultivates Conversation at Work

Storytelling Example to Share

In a bustling office nestled in the heart of downtown, Sarah, a dedicated team lead, noticed a shift in her colleagues' demeanor. The once lively chatter had quieted, replaced by subtle whispers and tense expressions. Sensing the unspoken tension, Sarah decided it was time for a change.

Over morning coffee, Sarah shared a personal story during a team meeting. She spoke openly about her struggles with anxiety and how seeking support had transformed her life. To her surprise, her colleagues began to open up, sharing their own experiences with stress and mental health challenges.

Inspired by this newfound openness, Sarah and her team embarked on a journey to cultivate a supportive workplace culture. They introduced regular "Wellness Wednesdays," where team members could participate in mindfulness exercises and share mental health resources. Sarah also collaborated with HR to implement mental health awareness training for all staff. The sessions included tips on recognizing signs of distress and fostering empathy in the workplace.

As the weeks passed, Sarah noticed a positive change in her team. Colleagues felt empowered to discuss mental health openly and seek support when needed. The once-muted atmosphere had transformed into a space of understanding and compassion. One day, Sarah received a heartfelt note from a team member expressing gratitude for creating a safe environment to discuss mental health. It was a testament to the power of vulnerability and empathy in the workplace.

Through Sarah's leadership and the collective efforts of her team, they had cultivated a culture where mental health conversations were not only encouraged but celebrated. Together, they had broken down barriers and created a supportive community where everyone felt valued and understood.

Conversation Guiding Prompts:

1. "How are you feeling today? **Anything specific on your mind that you'd like to talk about?**"
2. "What **self-care activities** have you found most effective recently?"
3. "Are there any stressors or triggers you're facing that we can address together?"
4. "Is there something on your mind that you haven't shared? **I'm here to listen**."
5. "How do you typically manage anxiety or low moods? Any new strategies you're considering?"
6. "What initiatives could our workplace implement to better support mental well-being?"
7. "Do you have mindfulness or relaxation techniques that you find helpful?"
8. "How can we **encourage more open conversations about mental health** among our team?'"

Please consider the following when sharing and encouraging others to share their mental health related stories:

Audience - know who you are speaking to and what subject matters are personally, socially, and culturally appropriate

Content Warning - Include a warning if you'll be sharing content that is potentially harmful or damaging to certain audiences

Representation - Ensure you are speaking about stigmatized experiences in a respectful and supportive way

Support - Offer support and resources for storytellers and their audience

Unsinkable @ Work

Unsinkable is available to facilitate mental health storytelling sessions in your workplace. Please reach out to Executive Director, Hailey Hechtman for more information *hailey@weareunsinkable.com*