

[Voiceover 0.00]

Small and medium sized practitioners today face challenges on many fronts. In this series, brought to you by Accounting and Business magazine, we'll be talking to practitioners around the world about issues surrounding talent management during and post-pandemic, wellbeing in the workplace, and how to differentiate your firm's brand. We hope you find their insights and tips useful in navigating the changing business environment.

0.36 The global pandemic has caused stress and anxiety on both professional and personal levels. Practitioners have had to struggle with their own issues while also being responsible for their staff's wellbeing. In this podcast, we look at some of the practical ways practice leaders can support staff in difficult times.

Stacy-Ann Golding FCCA, a former audit partner at KPMG in Trinidad & Tobago, says feelings of isolation among employees is one of the key challenges.

[Stacy-Ann Golding 1.05]

Increasingly our world citizenry, and by extension, our employees have been building lifestyles that reduce human interaction, whether because of the use of increased use of emails, or phone calls, or we're now meeting virtually versus meeting face to face. But this juxtaposition against the basic human need for direct interaction creates a problem.

As human beings we're not socialized to live in, in isolation. And therefore, the practices of our community need to be reintroduced or even re established, so that our young people who work with us are able to thrive, despite the pandemic.

[Voiceover 1.54]

Dmitry Milashchuk, a certified coach for professionals, agrees it's time to use the human touch

[Dmitry Milashchuk 2.01]

The pandemic has given employers increased visibility into the life struggles of their employees. I think it is important that managers shift the focus from only organizational issues to individual human life experiences.

They have to consider their employees not just the numbers on the spreadsheets, but also be genuinely present with each of them during the challenging year

[Voiceover 2.24]

Practice leaders need to understand that their teams have been through a lot, adds Stacy-Ann.

[Stacy-Ann Golding 2.29]

Grief counselling is another responsibility that employers will have to embrace. Unfortunately, death and sickness are foremost in the news. And the happenings around us on a daily basis tend to be negative things or mortality faces us every day. And it can be very intimidating concept to consider to ponder or to even just live with it. So it's gonna be very important that we provide counseling to both allow employees to grieve should they be facing death or have an experience of death of a loved one, but also to be able to recognize that this is part of this process called life and that the future can be positive. 5.19

[Voiceover 3.30]

The pandemic has also caused many practitioners to take a fresh look at their careers. Dmitry says that leaders need to communicate how they can remain an attractive employer as their staff realign their priorities

[Dmitry Milashchuk 3.42]

Back in 2020, they have even coined the term 'great resignation' when many people decided to change their careers. What's driving this talent migration is the need to continue working remotely, to look for a better compensation plan, and of course to improve the work life balance.

For employers, this is translated into the range of talent policies to retain workers. And those policies include also increased compensation, enhanced learning and development programs, new internal talent mobility opportunities, and of course, online coaching, and resilience training to help employees deal with massive disruptions and the new ways of working.

I firmly believe that the cornerstone here would be honesty. Honesty from the employers' side in the first place. Employees need to know the truth about their performance and what are the next steps possible in terms of career.

[Voiceover 4.42]

Stacy-Ann agrees that practice partners need to formalise this sort of support.

[Stacy-Ann Golding 4.48]

Organizational leaders need to communicate to employees that the organizations are there for them. They need to make this message resound clearly in the things they do, the systems they put in place. And there needs to be visible demonstration of that commitment.

[Voiceover 5.17]

It's also vital that employers ensure the corporate culture is fit to support staff suffering from current pressures. Dmitry explains.

[Dmitry Milashchuk 5.25]

Goes without saying that the culture in the workplace need to be adopted to help employees' wellbeing. For me, key actions here shall be to destigmatize mental and emotional health and creating new commitments for the hybrid workplace. Responsible managers need to start creating a safe environment at work where everyone every employee feels that it is okay to share feelings and it is okay to be weak sometimes. Also, you as a manager need to strike the balance between the overwhelming number of online meetings which are annoying, and at times cause more harm than good. And the necessity to keep in touch with every employee, every remote employee even more important.

[Voiceover 6.15]

Stacy-Ann agrees: And leaders need to show empathy, she says.

[Stacy-Ann Golding 6.19]

Empathy is a concept that many persons perhaps, may believe that they understand. But it's a very deep and complex issue, especially when we are going through things that we have never faced before.

So it's important that our organizational leaders demonstrate empathy in the things that they do. So it's a visible demonstration of caring about someone, even though you don't necessarily X understand or fully experienced what they are going through.

[Voiceover 7.01]

And what can employees do to help themselves through difficult times?

[Dmitry Milashchuk 7.06]

The responsibility to improve the wellbeing is not always the managers but it's the employees house and they can do many things to improve all aspects of the wellbeing for them.

I believe having meaningful friendships in both your personal and work life is one of the key predictors to long term happiness. Building strong bonds in the workplace can also help ease the feelings of loneliness, which have become prevalent nowadays. Employers on their side may also start with offering employees opportunities to be involved in their local community in the life of their local community as well. It will deepen the ties an employee has to their employer, the local community and the planet.

[Voiceover 7.52]

Stacy-Ann agrees that creating a sense of being in it together is a huge help.

[Stacy-Ann Golding 7.56]

I'd also say to our employees, develop your kindness muscle. You would like kindness to be shared and an extended to you.

So display empathy, and be open and willing to encourage your teammates, be positive, and where necessary, share your experiences with others. It is we will make it through this pandemic and through this rather challenging life journey. Once we have a community of soldiers who were able to share and encourage as we go along.

[Voiceover 8.39]

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