

6 Things You Can Do to Care for Your Team's Mental Health

By Liz Walz, vice president, Marine Retailers Association of the Americas

If you are an employer in the boating business, chances are several of your employees are facing mental health challenges right now. And you're not alone.

A month ago, I received an email from a dealer friend who shared how worried he was about the well-being of his team.

He wrote: "We have had multiple staff develop addiction and mental health problems from being at home for so long. We are providing help but often too late as they do not want to talk about it as they are embarrassed."

We have heard from many other members with similar concerns, and frankly, we share them. MRAA is among the employers around the world and throughout the industry attempting to care for our team's mental health at the same time as managing our own and our family's well-being.

While there is a lot to be optimistic about with spring around the corner and vaccinations becoming increasingly accessible to those at highest risk, many of us are experiencing what the Society for Human Resource Management called ["COVID-19 Fatigue."](#)

Add to that the continued increase in demand for our industry's products, and the workforce shortages that so many are facing, and you get the evolution of the burnout that was common place toward the end of last year (one study quoted by SHRM suggested about 75 percent of workers reported being burned out in December) into what a recent Harvard Business Review article called ["Beyond Burned Out."](#)

Here's the good news. In my quest to research what MRAA and our members can do to support our employees' mental health, everywhere I turned last month, I found articles, studies and reports attempting to understand and help employers and employees navigate the mental health challenges being experienced by so many right now.

Then, I had some enlightening phone and email conversations with Randall Lyons, executive director of the Massachusetts Marine Trades Association, where we brainstormed ideas for how to help the industry and shared some of our personal struggles with mental health. For me, that has included waves of anxiety and insomnia on and off throughout the last year. Afterward, Randall wrote a powerful blog on this topic, which you can read here [INSERT LINK IF POSTED ONLINE].

My conclusion, based on everything I've read and experienced? There has never been a better, more important time to take action for ourselves, our team and our businesses.

Take Action

As a marine business owner or manager, you likely don't have special skills or expertise when it comes to mental health. Neither do I. But the experts have some great insight into what you can do to care for your team and your business.

Here is what I've learned about the actions we can take, which may make a real difference in our employees' lives, improve their work performance and boost their loyalty to your business:

1. Talk about mental health at work. At least 60 percent of employees will experience symptoms of a mental health condition this year, according to non-profit [Mindshare Partners](#).

These symptoms will inevitably impact workforce performance. For example, a [Workforce Attitudes report](#) by online mental health services provider Ginger in the first half of 2020 shared that 2 out of 3 employees reported missing at least an hour per day of work due to COVID-19 stress.

As leaders who care about our people and our businesses, we have a responsibility to talk about mental health.

If you can create a space where your team feels comfortable talking about their challenges, that alone can help reduce the isolation and embarrassment often experienced by those going through difficult times and increase the likelihood they will ask for help, if they need it.

Acknowledge that it is normal for a pandemic to impact our mental health, and use a variety of words to describe that impact so that you include as many people as possible. For example, Mind Share Partners suggests in addition to stress, wellness, and mindfulness, you also mention depression, anxiety, and other common mental health challenges.

2. Check-in with your employees regularly. If your team member shares with you that they are struggling with a mental health condition, here are some recommended steps, according to [Harvard Business Review author Amy Gallo](#):

- Thank them for telling you.
- Listen.
- Tell them you want to support them, but don't overpromise.
- Don't make it about you.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Ask for help from experts, when possible.
- Refer them to resources.
- Make yourself "tell-able."

3. Be a role model. By being honest about your own challenges, how you're coping and what healthy behaviors you're working toward, you can set an example for your team, which is especially important as a leader.

4. **Be flexible.** Consider what you can do as an employer to make it easier for your team to care for themselves and their families without sacrificing their performance at work. Some steps you can take may even improve workplace results.

As an example, at MRAA, we offered our employees several opportunities. First, our normal “summer hours” approach requires an extra hour of office hours each day, Monday through Thursday, to allow for afternoons off on Fridays; in 2020, we waived the need to log those extra hours each day but still gave Friday afternoons off. Additionally, that summer hours program typically extends from Memorial Day through Labor Day, and instead, we started it in March last year to acknowledge the stress and anxiety and hard work of the team. We also allowed employees to take a day off, no questions asked, whenever they felt like they needed it, without the need for filing paperwork.

5. **Direct employees to mental health resources.** If you offer company health insurance, be sure to check with your provider about what mental health services and coverage is available. Then, share that information with your team multiple times in multiple ways to increase the likelihood it gets on their radar and stays there, in case they need it.

Virtual mental health services, for example, have become widely adopted. Many are covered by health insurance plans. If your plan doesn't cover them, your company can consider adding these services. [Learn more here.](#)

In addition, be sure to post information on the free resources available. Here is the list Randall Lyons offered in his blog.

- [CDC Mental Health Guidance: Mental Health Tools and Resources](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- [National Health Resources](#)
- [American Psychiatry Association](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255

6. **Educate yourself and your team.** During this unprecedented time, there is a lot of opportunity for most of us to learn new ways to care for ourselves and our team.

The strain and the burnout that was popping up in many dealerships last summer and fall was the focus of our conversation with David Spader of Spader Business Management when we were developing the education for Dealer Week 2020.

As a result, David agreed to provide our attendees with a session, Move Beyond Burnout: The Search for Sustained Motivation for Yourself and Your Team, which was one of the most highly rated education sessions of the event.

This session addressed the fact that, despite the record-breaking results of the 2020 boating season – or perhaps because of them – many owners, managers and employees found themselves struggling to stay motivated by their work. The long hours, the unrelenting pace of business, and the challenge to deliver to high standards may have led to burnout from which dealership teams are struggling to recover.

David led attendees through a process to rediscover what motivates them personally and professionally (and help their employees do the same), and then learn how to use that insight to plan for a 2021 that will deliver the satisfaction and success you and your team seek.

Dealer Week 2020 registrants can access that course in the online event platform through the end of March, and MRAA's Silver and Gold Members will soon be able to take it for free at MRAATraining.com.

In addition, MRAA is opening up free registration to David's post-Dealer Week webinar on burnout March 18 to everyone in the marine industry. Register here [\[LINK\]](#).

As Randall so eloquently expressed in his blog, none of us are alone in fighting for mental health, whether we're battling it ourselves, working to support our team and loved ones, or a little of both. We can often face challenges better when we come together as a community to listen, learn and share strategies and resources that work.

With that in mind, we have used the resources Randall assembled to create a one-page mental health resource sheet you can download, customize and distribute in your dealership. Click [here](#) to access it.