

Creating a Network of Employees Focused on Mental Health Awareness



OVERVIEW

EY has a long history of a culture that supports and welcomes all people, inclusive of those with a disability. The notion began with EY's founder, Arthur Young, who was both sight and hearing impaired. Inclusiveness is key to their 'people first' culture.

As part of their commitment to an inclusive culture, EY's employees have created a network focused on mental health awareness. This group aims to provide employees with information on and support for coping with mental health challenges and stress. The key to this network is that it was built in a grassroots way, with employees really leading the way. This, combined with senior-level support, has resulted in a successful initiative.

OBJECTIVES

In creating an employee network focused on mental health awareness, EY aimed to:

- Take a preventative approach to mental health and wellness.
- Support a "bottom-up" approach where employees designed what the network would look like, and its function.
- Get the entire organization involved in creating a collaborative culture of mental health and wellness.
- Give employees an outlet to discuss challenges they were facing, in regards to mental health and stress management.
- Encourage disclosure from employees facing mental health challenges.

APPROACH

The employee network was launched in January 2017, and started with an employee who had previously experienced mental health challenges and wanted to start a conversation



with her colleagues, in case others were feeling the same. The employee reached out to people in her department at the firm, and tried to gauge interest in creating a network. Once the employee determined that there was interest, the following approach took place:

- Gaining support from the organization.
- Organizing the work.
- Deciding on first steps.

Gaining Support

The employee took the idea to the firm's Managing Partner. After receiving support from her, the employee drafted an email that the Managing Partner sent out firm-wide to gather interest. 100 people responded citing support, or declaring interest, in being part of the network. An initial meeting was set to talk through the vision of the employee network with 40 employees attending the first meeting. After the first meeting, a smaller core committee of 10 people was formed and two chairs were appointed. Two partners stepped up and offered to be executive sponsors.

Time Commitment

The committee meets as a larger group monthly now. However, when the committee first formed, they met weekly for the first month, then bi-weekly for a couple months, and have now moved to once a month.

In addition to the larger committee meetings, sub-committees meet once a month as well. It was decided that there would be four sub-committees: training, resources, integration, and feedback and monitoring. The rest of the committee was designated as mental health champions.

The average time commitment varies -- with mental health champions spending 2 hours/month on the work, while a core member who is also on a sub-committee member spends 2-3 hours/week. The largest commitment is for the chair who spends 4-5 hours/week on this initiative.

Deciding on First Steps

Through consultation, the group decided that their first event would be a panel of employees sharing how they manage their mental health and wellness. Combined with a facilitated discussion opened to the firm, this event served as an introduction to the initiative and kicked off Mental Health Month in May.

This event received so much positive feedback that the group put into action one of the major requests that came out of the panel discussion: mindfulness training. They had a mindfulness trainer from Vancouver do a four-week series on finding focus, managing stress, the science behind mindfulness and mindfulness in everyday life.



OUTCOMES

The initiative is still in early stages, but it is clear that progress is being made on raising awareness about mental health. Employees cite that once the initiative started, people were more comfortable talking about their anxiety or stress at work, or any mental health challenges they were facing in general.

The network also had a tremendous response to the mindfulness training that they facilitated, with many more employees who were unable to attend requesting further sessions.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some of the lessons EY learned during this process include:

Striking Balance between Ideas and Action

The first few meetings were about brainstorming the directions the network could go, what ideas they wanted to pursue, and what would be done in the short and long term. EY learned that it was important for people to feel heard and contribute – and at the same time, there needed to be a point in time where the brainstorming turned into an action plan.

Deciding on a Roadmap

One of the hardest pieces of this initiative was understanding what pace to move at and what would be considered a success. EY felt that having a roadmap of the first 30, 90, 180 days would help the chairs and core committee see if they were on track to their original goals.

Communication is Key

Communicating the initiative was key in garnering support, but as a firm with so much going on all the time, it was hard to get people's attention. EY found that having the committee personally reaching out to their internal networks, and having senior support on firm-wide emails, really helped spread the word.

Grassroots Cultural Shift

EY found it imperative that the network was built from the ground up. The group was started by one employee and really grew naturally and organically.

NEXT STEPS

EY will be continuing with this network and building on the success of their events and initiatives so far. The mindfulness training will become an annual initiative. They are also discussing ideas such as introducing mental health and wellness components into the new hire training, or integrating mental health into the formal performance review process so employees feel supported by their managers as they self-care.