

More empathy and sensitivity needed in the post-Covid workplace

By [Blair Burmeister](#), issued by [Clockwork](#)

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These days, it seems that almost everyone you speak to is going through a difficult time. The current cost of living crisis, the climate crisis, war in Ukraine and conflicts in other parts of the world, coupled with the scars of Covid-19 that remain, are all placing serious strain on our mental, physical and emotional well-being.



While life is returning to some semblance of normalcy post-Covid, with the workforce heading back to the physical office more frequently, the reality is that most of us are far from our healthy selves. How could we possibly be after experiencing and witnessing so much loss, sickness, isolation, and devastation?

The events of the past two-and-a-half years have resulted in fundamental changes to our feelings, energy levels, mental health, physical health, finances, etc. Many people are still suffering in one way or another, and the events of 2022 have brought even more structural threats to all spheres of our health and wellness.

Check in with colleagues and respond accordingly

So, as we return to our workspaces in the post-Covid era, many of us are doing so with a heavy load, whether we realise it or not. We are not the same people we were in 2019, and many of us are not okay. This should be acknowledged and taken into consideration when dealing with people around us in the office.

With increased awareness of the lingering physical, mental and emotional issues that people may be dealing with, we can tread accordingly with sympathy and empathy for others. Too often, we get caught up with the daily grind and forget that we are working with people who are not machines, but human beings who run on emotions.

According to a LinkedIn survey of around 23,000 workers, employees are increasingly seeking out bosses who show empathy and compassion in the workplace. Additionally, 61% say soft skills in the workplace are just as important as hard skills.

One of the characteristics of modern life is that we are moving at an ever-increasing pace, and it may seem as if there is no time to pause and check in with one another. But we don't know how someone is doing until we take time to ask. Now, more than ever, we need to get into the habit of checking in daily with our peers to better understand people and their physical-mental capacity.

This could explain, for example, why a colleague may be finding it challenging to work within specific time frames or meet

deadlines. It may then be easier to be patient and understanding, as opposed to being bitter or frustrated or making incorrect assumptions. That said, this may require employers to become more lenient and flexible without compromising the business.

Setting the tone at the top

There are both pros and cons to working from home. While many employees have enjoyed the flexibility of working remotely over the past two years or so, they have also battled to balance work demands and life responsibilities, which has led to increased levels of stress and instances of burnout. They have struggled to put up boundaries as there was a sense of permanently being in the face and as such, many ended up working longer hours.

For employers and leaders, it's important to reflect on what you may be imposing on your staff – intentionally or not. If you, as a leader or manager, send communication late at night, do you expect employees to respond immediately? You may not have that expectation, but employees may feel that they, too, must be available at such a time and mimic your behaviour as a leader.

Ultimately, it takes consciousness to shift that behaviour and be more considerate of your employees who are home based. Even though you, as a leader, may be working late or prefer to work late at night, it might be better to send off that email or Microsoft Teams message first thing in the morning. It is important to consider adopting behaviour shifts and being conscious about your ways of working to mitigate burnout and high stress levels.

Taking time out to heal and rest

While we need to become more aware of what others may be going through, it is arguably more important to put ourselves first. This may come across as selfish, but the reality is that if you don't have enough capacity within yourself, or 'smarties in the box', you won't be able to show up for yourself or for others.

That said, and given what we have all emerged from, people are beginning to see self care as a non-negotiable as opposed to an indulgence. A recent Accenture survey of more than 11,000 consumers in 16 countries found that health and wellbeing are considered essential, with 33% saying they're more focused on self care than they were a year ago.

Why? Because self care has been clinically proven to reduce stress, anxiety and depression.

Of course, this may require implementing some healthy boundaries in the workplace so that you can prioritise self care to see a therapist or counsellor, get out into nature, go for that jog, attend a yoga class, or just simply being and putting a pause on checking emails or social feeds.

Many of us tend to be hard on ourselves, and may feel guilty when taking time out when 'there is just so much to do'. But keep in mind that most of the time, our expectations for ourselves are much higher than those of our colleagues and managers. So, go a little easier and be kinder and gentler on yourself, and take time to tend to your own needs. It is one of the best gifts you can give – not only to yourself, but to everyone around you.

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Blair Burmeister is copywriter at Clockwork.

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