

How to Help Employees Thrive in Challenging Times

From [WorkWell by Unum](#)

Keeping your team productive and engaged can be challenging at the best of times — and these are hardly the best of times, right?

Fact is, employees are stressed out. [A recent survey by Colonial Life](#) found 40% of U.S. adults have high or moderate stress levels on a daily basis — enough to distract them from work and derail productivity. Nearly one in four adults say

they spend more than five hours of work time each week worrying, and more than a quarter admit their stress makes them less productive at work.



What's on their minds? Money is at the top of the list, named by 21% of those surveyed. Work is right behind at 20%. A significant number of employees also cite health concerns for family members (17%) or themselves (13%). And worries about finances, work and health all collide with the coronavirus.

But ... there's a lot you can do to help employees with their emotional wellbeing during these unprecedented times. Here are three strategies to focus on that can pay big returns in the productivity, morale and health of your workforce. (Hint: Many are low- or no-cost, too.)

1. PROVIDE MORE FLEXIBILITY.

Workers name more pay and more time off as the top two things that would help relieve some of their stress, according to Colonial Life's survey. But interestingly, those responses are significantly lower than in a similar survey last year: Higher salary dropped from 67% to 52%, and more time off fell from 50% to 40%. However, workers now express higher interest in a more flexible work schedule (up from 34% last year to 38% this year) and a more flexible work location (up from 20% to 25%).

With many offices still in work-from-home scenarios during the pandemic, you're likely finding your workforce can be just as productive with increased flexibility in hours and locations. Many folks may be glad to return to the structure and society of a traditional office at some point. But you can use this time to learn and get prepared for more flexible work arrangements as the "new normal" going forward.

2. OFFER WELLBEING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

Another significant change in the survey results over last year is increased interest in wellness programs and discounts, up from 17% to 23%. Some ideas to consider:

Offer an employee assistance program that provides short-term counseling and referral services to help employees with personal and family issues and work/life balance.

Provide discount programs for drugs and medical services that help employees save money on doctor office visits, prescription drugs, vision and hearing products and services, lab work and imaging tests.

Include tele-health services in your medical coverage so employees can get quick, convenient and safe access to care.

3. TALK IT UP.

Of course, the best programs in the world don't work if employees don't know about them. And on the flip side, employees who understand their benefits are more engaged at their workplace, more satisfied and more likely to stay.

Use a variety of communications to engage employees when and where they want: websites, apps, emails, virtual meetings and even good-old-fashioned print materials. Make sure they know about (and appreciate) what the company has to offer.

In today's challenging environment, stress is unavoidable. But you can help your employees thrive despite the unexpected moments in life with a focus on flexibility, wellbeing and communication.
