

## 3 Steps Companies Can Take To Improve Mental Health In The Workplace

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HEALTH



Sick days among workers are commonly associated with physical ailments, but mental health issues also account for frequent absences. A report from the 2018 Mental Health in the Workplace Summit showed that more people miss work due to stress and anxiety than for physical illness or injury.

Dealing with mental health can be a delicate issue for both employers and employees. Some think it carries a stigma, thus employees may attempt to hide their problem. A survey by the American Psychological Association found that less than half of American adult workers felt their companies supported the well-being of their employees.

Yet more companies, cognizant of productivity and cost issues associated with employee absences, are starting to implement mental health initiatives as part of their workplace wellness programs.

*“Employees try to hide what they’re going through because they fear the negative consequences of being discovered. And these fears are justified,”* says Ken Dolan-Del Vecchio, formerly Vice President, Health and Wellness, at Prudential and founder of GreenGate Leadership®. *“Many otherwise capable managers become very uncomfortable when they hear one of their team members mention words like stress, anxiety, and*

depression.

***“Forward-thinking employers are implementing initiatives that break the stigma and improve access to effective care. They recognize the role of leaders at all levels in creating positive, respectful, health-promoting work environments. As has often been said, culture trumps strategy every time. An employer can have all the right policies in place, but it’s the culture that either brings these to life or makes them a joke.”***



**Dolan-Del Vecchio’s tips for employers:**

- **Break the stigma.** Studies indicate one in five American adults experience a form of mental illness. ***“Like most health conditions, these are most effectively treated when identified early,”*** Dolan-Del Vecchio says. ***“Stigma causes many who suffer to deny their need for care and, therefore, delay seeking it. Senior execs are in the best position to break the stigma. They can share their personal story if they live with a mental health condition, talk about how they have supported others, and sincerely encourage their employees to get the care they deserve.”***
- **Improve access to effective care.** ***“Hold your benefits provider system accountable for effective care delivery,”*** Dolan-Del Vecchio says. ***“Take a searching and fearless look at how well your organization’s mental health benefits actually serve those in need. You do that by creating an anonymous feedback mechanism for your employees and their family members. Sadly, I can almost guarantee that the results will show the need for significant improvement.”***
- **Train leaders.** ***“Stress,”*** Dolan-Del Vecchio says, ***“is the enemy of health and sustained productivity. More than any other factor, our immediate supervisor creates the culture of our workplace. When leaders at every organizational level treat those who report to them with an attitude of caring and respect, including respect for an initiative, autonomy, diversity, and reasonable limits when it comes to productivity, the best***

***organizational results will follow.”***

***“It’s in everyone’s best interest for employers to fight the stigma linked to mental health issues, ensure medical benefit partners are delivering on their promises, and make sure leaders of people are up to the task,” Dolan-Del Vecchio says.***

#### **About Ken Dolan-Del Vecchio**



Ken Dolan-Del Vecchio is an author, speaker, family therapist, leadership, and life skills consultant. His books include *Simple Habits of Exceptional (But Not Perfect) Parents*, *The Pet Loss Companion: Healing Advice From Family Therapists Who Lead Pet Loss Groups* and *Making Love: Playing Power: Men, Women, and the Rewards of Intimate Justice*. Ken founded GreenGate Leadership® after retiring from his role as Vice President, Health and Wellness, at Prudential, where he was responsible for behavioral health services for the company’s 20,000 U.S. Employees. Ken’s team’s work led Prudential to receive the American Psychological Association’s 2017 Organizational Excellence Award. Ken is a monthly NBC TV affiliate on-air guest and has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Reuters*, *Fast Company*, *Bloomberg*, *Ignites*, *Entrepreneur*, *Fox Business News*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Inc. Magazine*, *Working Mother*, *HR Executive*, and other media. In 2016 Ken was named Corporate Leader of the Year by the National Alliance of Mental Illness’ New York City-metro chapter.