

Managers can play a key role in reducing employees' stress

Emma Yearwood

Poor management is a huge driver of workplace stress. While 62 per cent of British employees cite a heavy workload as the top cause of stress-related absences, in reality this is often a case of managers pushing their staff too hard. In fact, poor management style was named as the second biggest driver of stress-related absences – a figure that has risen from 32 to 43 per cent over the past year, according to a report published by the CIPD and Simply Health.

One way to address this issue is for employers to adopt an “always learning” approach to management. Managers who are willing to receive monthly updates on their progress will improve with time and therefore be more likely to reduce colleagues' stress levels, rather than igniting them.

This focus on development is essential. Far too often, people are promoted into management roles without proper training or support, which is not fair to the manager or to the business. After all, becoming a manager involves a whole new set of responsibilities such as delegating, coaching, people development and communication – and these skills cannot be learned overnight.

That is why businesses need to ensure that managers are being provided with consistent feedback, particularly from junior members of staff who might otherwise be too

scared to come forward. This is crucial for managers to not only improve their skills but also create a positive atmosphere where employees feel able to express themselves freely.

Communication is key

Without this strong culture of open communication, staff are likely to keep any issues with management to themselves. As a result, poor managers will continue to make the same mistakes, because on the surface everything appears to be going just fine.

Employees need to feel comfortable about opening up and raising constructive criticism about how they are being managed, without their managers feeling attacked or defensive. Having a supportive workplace culture where everyone wants to improve their skills will not only create better managers but also result in more engaged workers.

Businesses also need to be open about the fact that management roles are not for everybody, and that there are other ways to progress. In some cases, that could mean taking on new responsibilities as part of their current position, while others may be able to move into a specialist role where managing people is not a priority. Employees should be aware that there are many different routes to development, and that even if they



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are not managers, they can still be the fuel that keeps pushing the business forward.

Workload issues

It is no surprise that overworked employees are far less likely to be productive – or happy – in their role, which will ultimately be bad for the business. Providing managers with the right kind of support and an understanding of how to delegate work fairly and effectively is therefore crucial.

At the same time, staff members must not be afraid to say if they have taken on too much work or feel overwhelmed. Employees should always feel comfortable asking their managers or co-workers for help or assistance, without feeling like they have let the team down.

None of this will be possible though unless the most senior figures in the business are providing managers with the right kind of support and leading by example. Far too often, managers are given the freedom to

handle things on their own, when what they really need is mentoring and coaching from an experienced leader.

Taking the time to develop those who are working in management roles and give them the skills they need to thrive will pay enormous dividends for the business. Not only will the rest of the team feel more engaged but also profits will be higher, staff will be more productive and the number of stress-related absences will plummet.