

I think my employees have good stress management skills. I don't detect any signs or symptoms of excessive workloads. I figure if they don't speak up, it is safe to say that work distribution is about right. Correct?

A. There are reasons an employee might not choose to complain about their workload. However, engaging with employees, asking questions, and listening carefully will help you discover those workers who are in distress. An employee might worry that expressing concerns about the workload could lead to negative consequences, such as being seen as incapable of handling the work. Pressure to conform to this perceived norm and avoid standing out might keep them mum. Also, a strong desire to please the supervisor or maintain a positive image within the team could explain not speaking up. Job security concerns are another issue if the employee believes complaining would make him or her appear expendable. Another reason to engage with workers is to be able to spot performance issues that could be related to problems like depression, stress, anxiety, and conflict. These can be masked, which means you don't see the symptoms.

Q. What are some tips for building relationships with employees in the workplace with the goal of understanding their needs and strengths and detecting issues and problems (even personal problems) earlier?

A. There are many ways to get to know your employees. 1) Make it OK for employees to meet you for conversations, and establish safe spaces so they can share with you privately what's important. 2) A few times a year, schedule regular meetings for a few minutes one-on-one to discuss workload and challenges. 3) Do not discuss just work. Show real concern for their well-being by expressing interest in their work life and happiness on the job. 4) Share and disclose some of your own work struggles in your career history so employees see the real you. This will make you relatable, which is a powerful relationship-building dynamic that builds loyalty. 5) Be quicker to understand and learn employees' perspectives rather than make immediate judgment calls about their work, ideas, and problems. 6) Offer feedback and praise. This will cause them to speak up sooner about challenges before they become larger problems.

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