Managing Health & Wellbeing at Work

Workbook

Module 2: Fostering a Supportive Workplace Environment

Section 4: Creating a Supportive Culture and Encouraging Help-seeking behavior for Mental Wellness at work

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Instructors of the program:
BENEDICT LIM, CEO & Chief psychologist

My name is **Benedict Lim**, and I'm the CEO and chief psychologist of iGROW. If I may share about how iGROW was started, its because I was working with at-risk youth in my first career and realized that one to one, the youth are very good, but when they go back to the home environment every good gets undone. So I was thinking how can we reach out to the people that they are living with? And we figured that most adults spend their time working, right? And if you can make the workplace happy and healthier hopefully they don't bring negativity back home. So, that was how iGROW was started. So right now I dedicate my time and energy helping business leaders who are frustrated with teams missing goals, build work cultures that are results oriented, productive, and loyal, so that there's more time and freedom to grow their business.

Instructors of the program:
MARIA PLENGSANGTIP, Partner & Consultant Psychologist

My name is **Maria Plengsangtip**, and I'm a partner and psychologist at iGROW. I'm from Thailand, and now based in Singapore. I help human capital professional facing difficulties to improve employee engagement and health of their employees by designing and developing customized strategies to achieve better health and employee well being. This frees up the precious time and energy to focus on their many priorities at work. I do this through individual counseling, coaching, culture training, as well as lecturing at the local university.

AGENDA

1. Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace
2. Identify and Support colleagues in need of help
3. Mental Health Self-Care to manage Stress and Build Resilience
4. **Creating a Supportive Culture & Encouraging Help-Seeking behaviour for mental wellness at work**

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Section 4: Creating a Supportive Culture and Encouraging Help-seeking behavior for Mental Wellness at work.

WHEN "I" IS REPLACED BY "WE" ILLNESS BECOMES WELLNESS

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Achieving good health in the workplace begins by building and sustaining workplace cultures that enhances health and wellbeing. It is a combination of having a good policy in place as well as having a supportive social support that can tend to the needs of the individuals.

One way to have a healthy company culture is for leaders to be effective champions. While I agree that this requires a top-down approach, I want to share with you some things that we can do bottom-up which are within our personal control to foster supportive environment with our colleague.

I like this quote very much, "When I is replaced by we, illness becomes wellness." In the previous section, we covered one common cognitive signs and symptoms for mental health issue which is feeling of loneliness and helplessness. It can take people years to seek help because they feel that nothing that they do can make the situation better. To them, it is impossible to reach out when they feel that no one is around to provide support.

This is where you come in. We have covered the facts about mental health, understand the stigma, become aware of the symptoms in ways for people to cope better. So what can you do next? In this section, I will cover two crucial actions that you can do to create a positive and supportive culture and encourage people to seek help. You can take an active role in helping others.

Do you feel emotionally supported at work? In a study of 800 working adults, who work on average of 8.8 hours a day through a two-decade period, adults reporting having low social support at work have a higher risk of dying sometime within the next 20 years. The study concluded that the perception of having an emotional support, was the strongest indicator of future health.

What does that mean for us?

Studies have shown that people with strong healthy relationships and social circles tend to live longer. They respond better to stress and have enhanced immune system.

If we spend 8 to 12 hours a day at work and if our emotional support is not strong, then our health would definitely be affected. Therefore, we need to build and maintain our relationships, starting from today.

Creating a Supportive Culture

- ➲ Relationships are **Required**
- ➲ Healthy relationships improve **Health**
- ➲ Strong relationships lead to **Better Work Life**

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HOLISTIC APPROACH WHOLESOME LIFE

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Numerous research agree that relationships are important for us to survive and thrive. We cannot survive alone in this world. Strong and healthy relationships improve our health. If we build a strong relationship, we are more likely to reach out for help.

When we have good relationships, it is also much easier to see the changes in people around us and evaluate if they need the support. It becomes natural for us to start a conversation and check if people around us are doing alright.

Building a supportive environment and encouraging help-seeking behavior is challenging if the relationships are not close. If the workplace environment does not support building relationship, people do not feel comfortable to open up and seek help. It is also harder for us to check-in.

Strong relationship also works as a preventative action towards stress. It keeps people healthier and reduce the perception of stress. It also helps people to reach out.

Building & Maintaining Support

FINDING CONNECTIONS

- Look for opportunities to connect
- Make time for communication
- Focus on the similarities
- Deepen the connections

APPRECIATION

- Look for the positive
- Acknowledge and Affirm
- Catch others doing good

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How well do you know your colleague?

If you do not know the people in your team well, start by finding connections.

Look for opportunities to connect - this could be at the coffee corner, pantry, or even during lunch. Focus on the similarities that you have and build the relationship on it. It could be a love for Korean drama, for a certain singer or the love of cooking or eating or any other activities that you have in common. Slowly, deepen the connection so that you and the others can feel safe to discuss other issues when necessary.

Another way to help create a positive culture is to show appreciation. In Section 2 on Behavioral Indicators, I mentioned the culture of blame. Blame puts people on the defensive. Appreciation, on the other hand, helps people to open up. It also helps to acknowledge what people are good at and build their confidence.

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I had a chance to work with students in Primary 3 and 4. I asked them to do an activity with me. I gave them a piece of A4 paper and asked them to fold it in half. On one side, I asked them to write down all the things that they are not good at. Do you think they can do it? Of course! Many of them wrote at least 10 items such as having bad handwriting, their math is not fantastic, can't swim properly and the list goes on and on and on and on. It was not difficult task for them.

On the other side of the paper, I asked them to write down their strengths. Do you think they can do it? Some of the students could while some struggled. On average, a lot of them were able to write two or three as compared to the list of 10 items weaknesses.
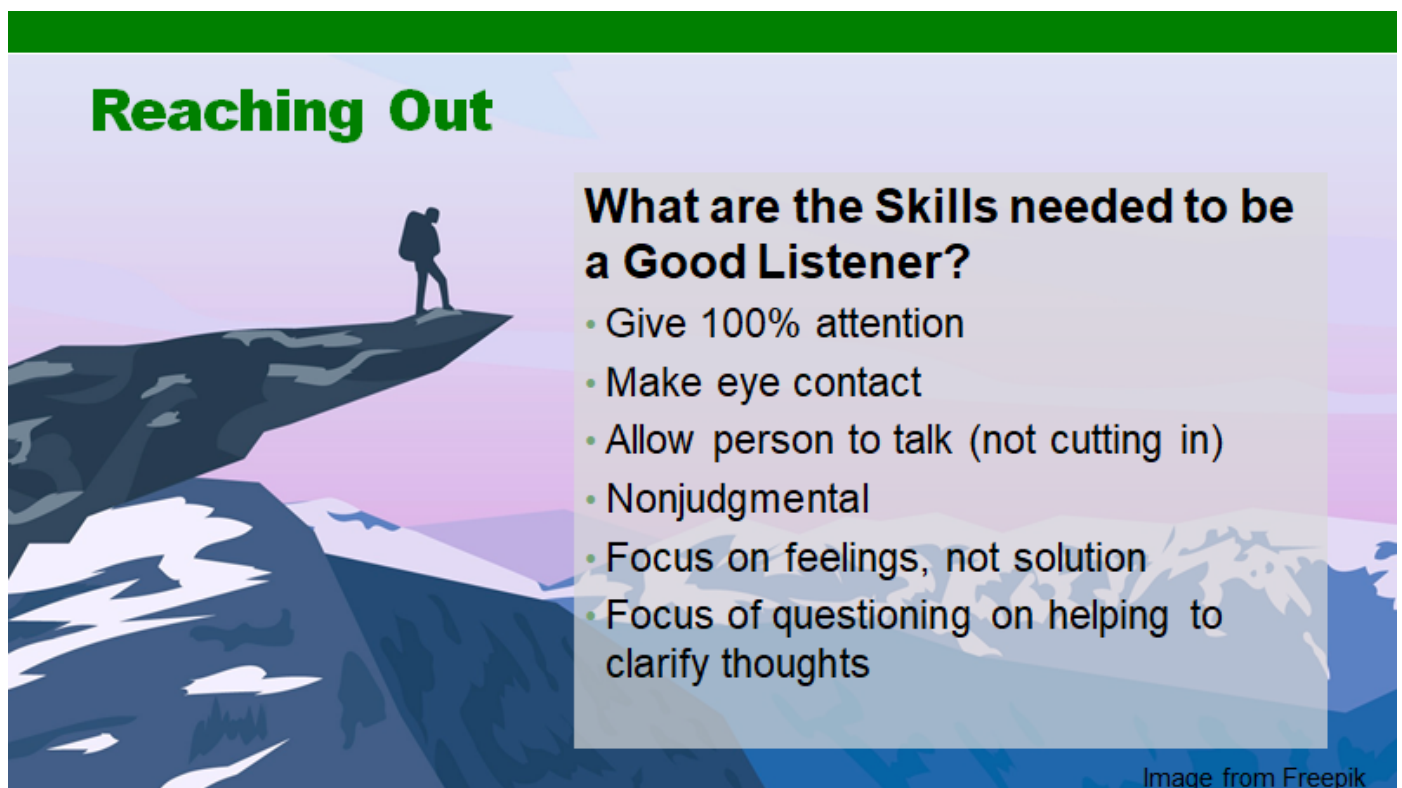
Why is this happening? Does it mean that they are not good and therefore cannot find their strengths? That is not true! We often focus on becoming better so much that we forget to appreciate the strengths that we already have. Knowing the strengths is equally important in our development.

I believe that parents and teachers want children to do their best. However, focusing on just the skills and behavior that require improvement can translate into a message that they are not good enough. These children grow up to become adults like us.

The beliefs that they are "not good enough" can reduce confidence and contribute to excessive stress and anxiety at work. In order for us to change that internal belief in people, environment plays a part. Therefore, appreciation is important.

When you can, try to affirm the people around you. It can be for simple things as long as you show your appreciation and affirm them of their strengths. It could be saying thank you for helping you with a project or an event, or being a team player by getting lunch for everyone. All of us need others to remind us of our strengths. Remember, to catch others doing good, it will help build and maintain the support in the workplace.

Reaching Out

What are the Skills needed to be a Good Listener?
- Give 100% attention
- Make eye contact
- Allow person to talk (not cutting in)
- Nonjudgmental
- Focus on feelings, not solution
- Focus of questioning on helping to clarify thoughts

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How do you reach out?

You can provide support by being a good listener.

What are some of the skills needed to be a good listener?

One, give 100% attention. Make sure that you put down your phone - all the message can wait. If someone needs to talk to you, make sure you give 100% attention.

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Maintain eye contact with them to show that you are listening and giving your undivided attention. This also helps you to notice non-verbals. Their facial and body language during the conversation can tell you what the words cannot describe.

When you ask someone if they are okay, their "ok" may be different things based on their body language. If they say "okay" with their head down, you know that it is not okay. Non-verbals are important so make sure that you always maintain eye contact and be present as they talk.

Allow the person to talk. We can be too enthusiastic in wanting to help someone. Sometimes this translates into cutting in, offering help, and giving advice. While some advice are good, the purpose of the conversation is to reach out and for the person to share with you the difficulties they are experiencing.

It is not easy to share something personal, intimate and perhaps something that they deem as a failure. It is already very difficult for them to start sharing so do not cut in but allow them to talk.

Be non-judgemental. Do not be too quick to judge. Be very careful with the words that you use. Remember, do not blame them. Blame makes people put up a defense.

Always focus on the feelings. It is not necessary to jump into solution-focus conversation. It is likely that they have considered a lot of solutions already. What they might need at the moment, is just to know that someone is there to understand and support them.

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What you can do is to help clarify some thoughts, especially if they feel overwhelmed. So instead of asking, "Have you tried doing this and this and this," which is offering solution, you can check in by asking, "What have you tried," and "what happened after that?"

Helping them to clarify, can help them reduce the negative beliefs that they have such as, "I'm a failure" or "there is nothing that I can do to make it better". By clarifying, it can help to explore different ways to address the issues or consider seeing the issue from a different perspective.

These are the skills for all conversation and not just for when someone has issues. If you follow this for all your conversations, it will become natural. People will feel that they can approach you.

Remember the aim is not to solve their issue. You are just there to support. It is not an expectation for you to take that issue away.

Reaching Out
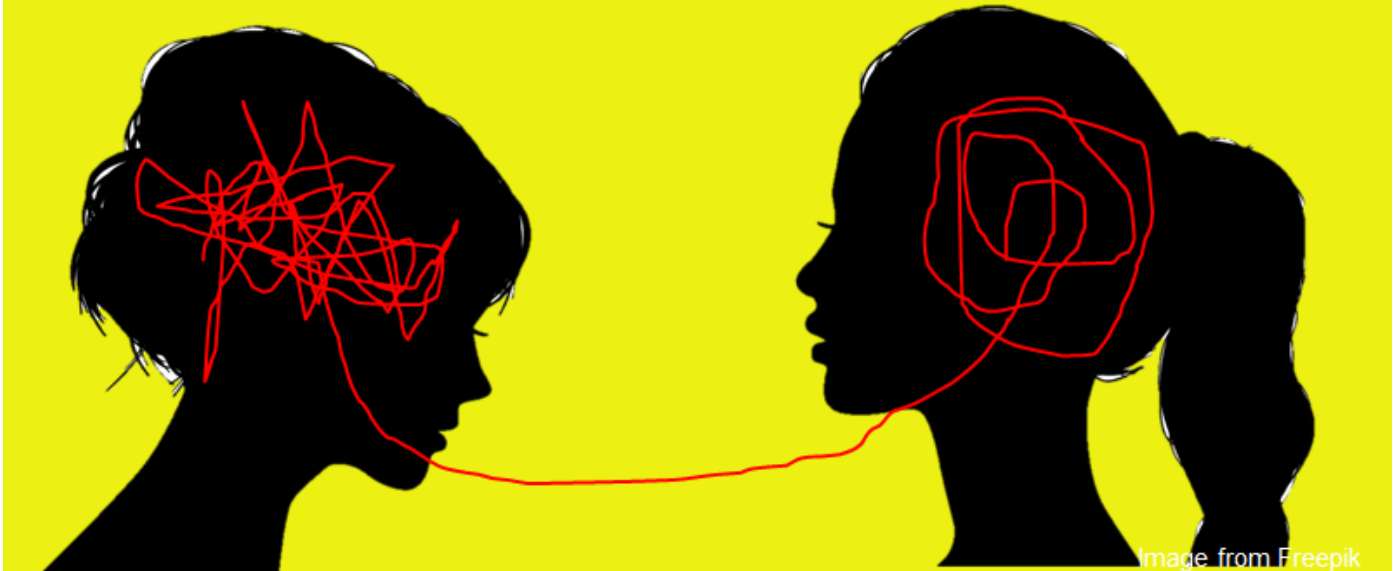
Just by listening and providing a listening ear can help the person feel that he/she is not alone and helpless. When they are able to speak to someone, it helps to provide some clarity to their problem. Just by knowing that someone is there for them can give them enough energy to continue and find their own solution.