Mental Health in the Workplace

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From the basement work cubicle to the c-suite corner office, mental health problems are everywhere in the workplace. Hiding in plain sight, people generally suffer in secrecy and in silence. This past Tuesday, October 10th, was [World Mental Health Day 2017](#) – and its focus this year was on mental health in the workplace – clearly an idea whose time has come.

[Photo Credit](#)

As a global society, we need to do more than gasp when we read about [Goldman Sach's Sarushreshth Gupta's suicide at age 22](#), or [CEO António Horta-Osório's public revelation that his heroic efforts to restore Lloyds Bank fortunes almost shattered his mental health](#). The truth is that mental health issues are commonplace – even in the workplace. And for the most part, employers are totally unprepared.

For company leaders, here's the bottom line:

1. Mental illness is the leading cause of presenteeism and absenteesim at work. Six in 10 people say poor mental health has impacted their concentration at work – meaning that they are physically present but seriously underperforming. And then there are millions of work days that turn into sick days each year due to mental health problems – 70 million in the UK, 32 million in France, 18 million in Germany. One in ten employees have taken time off work for depression. [As we try to look the other way, the reality is that mental illness is associated with the great disadvantage for employees and employers](#).

2. One in five employees will have a mental health condition over the course of their careers that impacts performance and requires time away from work. And workers have partners, parents and children who also may have mental health conditions requiring extra attention at some point. Addressing employee mental health needs comes with a cost – but ignoring mental health in the workplace is not an option; the costs triple and quadruple when we turn a blind eye – which doesn't make any cents.

3. Just $1 of investment in treatment for depression and anxiety leads to a return of $4 in better health and ability to work. Effective treatments exist for common mental disorders. And early intervention improves prognosis.

4. Millions and billions and trillions. Each year in the U.S., mental illness accounts for the loss of 217 million workdays and costs $193.2 billion in lost earnings. And the [World Economic Forum](#) estimates that the

cumulative global impact of mental disorders in terms of lost economic output will amount to $16.3 trillion between 2011 and 2030.

5. Employers can be agents of change. Stigma, discrimination and prejudice exacerbate already challenging circumstances for individuals with mental illness. Employers can develop policies that support employees by 'normalizing' mental illnesses as health conditions that carry no shame. Employers can facilitate access to care and adopt effective work re-entry programs for individuals with mental health problems. Employers who want to maximize work productivity need to know that they will have greater success when they spend some time and resources on addressing mental health at the office.

"Love and work… work and love… what else is there really?" Commonly attributed to Sigmund Freud, this sentiment is affirmed time and again by surveys and studies documenting that, above all else, people pursue and find meaning in love and work. World Mental Health Day 2017 calls on each of us to ensure that this is true for all of us – even those with mental illness.