Employees are ultimately responsible for their individual wellbeing, but leaders also play a key role in their ability to thrive. To foster an environment that encourages performance and happiness at work, respect the basic needs of your employees; help teams to build defenses against the pressures of modern work life, and foster a psychologically safe work environment.

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You have a role to play in the wellness of your employees

Based on "Good Bosses Create More Wellness than Wellness Plans Do" by **Emma SEPPALA** (*Harvard Business Review*, April 2016); "Help Your Team Manage Stress, Anxiety, and Burnout" by **Rich FERNADEZ** (*Harvard Business Review*, January 2016); "6 Things Great Leaders Do Differently" by **Travis BRADBERRY** (Forbes, January 2016).

1 / RESPECT THE BASIC NEEDS OF YOUR TEAMS

Wellness at work is particularly linked to the satisfaction of two fundamental human needs: a sense of working toward a collective goal that transcends individual daily tasks, and a feeling of belonging within a group.

Give direction and empowerment

The feeling of a job well done (and well-recognized) is a powerful factor of individual well-being. Each employee must know the value of his or her personal contribution within the overall process.
• Regularly refer to the company's main objectives in order to give a sense of larger meaning to individual tasks.
• Ask each employee to give a monthly presentation about his or her work within the company, explaining the concrete ways in which it is of importance to the goals of the team as a whole. You can also personally present to other departments about how the work of your team is of importance to the overall goals of the company.
• Don't micromanage: Limit your involvement in the projects of your staff to only what is actually needed to support them in completing their work.

• Celebrate success: encourage individuals to take pride in being part of the team by marking the completion of important projects with celebratory social moments.

Nurture social bonds

Work is not only a place to satisfy one's personal quest for success, it is also a way to meet the basic human need for belonging. As such, encouraging social relationships and collaboration is key to well-being.
• Wherever possible, encourage the organization of workspaces according to the projects that are underway: invite your staff to move around regularly as needed while their projects evolve. Physical proximity is more unifying and more efficient than virtual relationships.
• Schedule regular conversations: offer your teams the opportunity to meet once or twice a week about the projects they are working on right now. These short meetings permit people to express their needs, ask for help, and so on. For these conversations, stay sincere and avoid micromanaging.
• Promote solidarity: make sure your staff-members help •••

... each other, and give regular reminders that the tasks of each individual do not necessarily need to be limited to their job description.

2 / COMBAT ORGANIZATIONAL PRESSURES

An employee is disturbed on average every three minutes in the workplace and spends about a third of the day playing catch-up because of these interruptions[1]. It is your responsibility to minimize these organizational disruptions.

Help your team to organize their time better

Lack of time is the main obstacle to the performance of most people. How can you help your staff regain control of their schedule?
• Clearly define priorities: to perform, your employees need to clearly identify their priorities and focus their attention, energy, and time on what matters. For example, by stating clearly that client requests are always a priority (and sticking to that), you create a context within which employees can organize and prioritize their daily tasks.
• Encourage them to say "no": once priorities are established and accepted by your employees, you must invite them to turn down tasks that do not fit within these established parameters. Your challenge is to stop treating all your requests as emergencies. Lee Cojan, an expert on leadership and personal effectiveness, recommends using a code to prioritize emails. All emails you send to your staff could mention in the subject: 911 (response required within 24 hours), 611 (response required within three days), or 411 (for information purposes only)[2].

Provide an interruption-free oasis

Constant requests are a serious and consistent cause of professional burnout. In order to allow your employees to concentrate on their tasks (at work) and on recharging (outside of work):
• Limit requests: each employee should be able to adapt his level of concentration to the task at hand. The start-up Luxafor invented a small device to be fixed on one's computer that permits the user to indicate to others whether they want to be disturbed or not: green light when an employee is available for outside requests; red light when he needs to concentrate. Beyond the tool itself (which could be replaced by a coloured Post-It note), the device has the advantage of reminding everyone that it is perfectly legitimate to seal oneself off in a bubble sometimes to work.
• Help your employees to disconnect: close to 20% of French workers check their professional email at least once per day on vacation! To avoid this, do not make requests of employees who are on leave (or outside of work hours) unless there are exceptional circumstances. Also, default to means of contact that are less intrusive (email or SMS) and allow employee to respond in their own time.

3 / CREATE A REASSURING AND SAFE PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Although external stressors can be unpredictable, you are responsible for addressing internal company stressors. How do you ensure a psychologically safe work environment for your teams?

Develop a sense of trust

Stress and feelings of exterior threats or discomforts will be drastically diminished if you manage to create a "circle of trust" with your teams.
• Regularly communicate the positioning of the organization and its values, and ensure that the most immediate objectives are understood and adopted by all. Keep in mind what each individual's goals are.
• Take the time to listen to what your employees have to say.
• Participate in the development of individual skills: encourage team members to acquire new knowledge and expertise, set small (short- and medium-term) challenges to encourage employees to venture outside of their comfort zones.
• Increase feedback given during regular meetings (evaluations, interviews, weekly issues, and so on) and/or informal discussions. Do not withhold negative (constructive) feedback for fear of conflict or interfering with the mood of the team. What is unspoken creates far more tension than clear explanations.
• Recognize effort: say thank you, celebrate not only successes, but also the efforts that do not yield the expected results.

Be straightforward and clear about wellbeing

In the collective unconscious, a company where wellness is a primary focus is often automatically considered a chaotic company. In practice, straightforward, fair rules are actually reassuring and clearly contribute to the healthy development of teams.
• Set the rules of the game: at Netflix, there are no rules regarding days off. All employees can request as many vacation days as they want in a year, or decide to arrive to the office at 11:00 AM and leave at 2:00 PM without making up the time. This apparent freedom, however, is subject to a constraint: these absences cannot impact projects (as evaluated by managers) or colleagues' workloads (which also play a key role in individual evaluations).
• Avoid ambiguity: ambivalent messages waste time and disrupt momentum. By being clear in your requests and remaining consistent in your expectations, you will create a psychologically safe working environment for your teams that is conducive to taking initiative.

1. See "Distracted? Learn how to (re)focus" (*Business Digest* no 241, November 2013).
2. "The 3 Parts of an Efficient, Time-Saving Email" by Lee Colan (*Inc*, October 2014).