

# BECOME A MENTAL HEALTH LEADER ALLY

A CEO's role includes being the organization's culture setter.<sup>1</sup> Leadership is just as important and vital when it comes to creating a mentally healthy workplace. Eight in ten employees don't seek treatment, because of fear and shame.<sup>2</sup> Leaders have the unique opportunity to create safety around the topic of mental health and dismantle stigma in their workplace through leading by example.

## 1. START WITH YOUR WHY.

Why does creating a mentally healthy culture matter to you? Create a personal mission statement. (Example: *Creating a mentally healthy workplace culture matters to me as a leader because I have experienced challenges with anxiety and burnout before, and I want my business to be one where my employees feel safe, happy, and healthy working in.*)

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## 2. BE VULNERABLE, AND MODEL HEALTHY BEHAVIORS.

Be honest about the challenges you are experiencing or have experienced personally. Remember them when sharing your own story. Two examples include the CEO of Buffer<sup>3</sup> and the founder of Alley.<sup>4</sup> Joel Gascoigne, cofounder and CEO of social media software company Buffer, took a leave of absence due to burnout, which led to his building a culture in which employees could bring their full selves to work. When thinking about what to share, ask yourself, "What does my story affirm about mental health?" Make sure that that affirmation is hopeful. Employees will model what leadership does. Practice and commit to healthy working norms.

What is one story you can share about how you are managing your own mental health?

(Ensure that this story is both honest and hopeful.)

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### 3. TALK OPENLY, CONSISTENTLY AND PROACTIVELY ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH.

*(Examples: Use the words “mental health”; share resources; be mindful about language, e.g., avoid “Today has been crazy” or “I’m so bipolar/OCD”)*

What are some specific ways you will commit to starting and continuing the conversation around mental health as a leader in your workplace? *(Examples: I will send a company email sharing a personal story and detailing my company’s available resources to support mental health; I will implement a company-wide mental health training for leadership and managers)*

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### 4. THINK HOLISTICALLY ABOUT WORKPLACE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POOR MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES, AND ENACT SOLUTIONS BEYOND MENTAL HEALTH DAYS AND BENEFITS.

Think about culture through leadership, managers, employees, policies, practices (i.e., daily working norms), benefits and accountability (i.e., ownership of mental health strategy, goals and outcomes).

If you think about your company culture as a whole, what cultural forces and norms may be exacerbating mental health stigmas at your organization? (Examples: A cultural norm of encouraging working long and late hours, answering emails after working hours, team members not taking time off despite vacation policy)

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Where can you have the greatest impact, given your role as a leader, and what is a change you want to make toward creating a mentally healthy culture? (Example: My greatest impact is as a culture setter and as someone encouraging healthy workplace policies, practices and resources.)

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1. [hbr.org/2019/10/research-people-want-their-employers-to-talk-about-mental-health](https://hbr.org/2019/10/research-people-want-their-employers-to-talk-about-mental-health)
2. [nami.org/Get-Involved/Pledge-to-Be-StigmaFree/StigmaFree-Company](https://nami.org/Get-Involved/Pledge-to-Be-StigmaFree/StigmaFree-Company)
3. [www.mindsharepartners.org/post/how-one-ceo-used-his-experience-with-burnout-to-better-support-his-employees-mental-health](https://www.mindsharepartners.org/post/how-one-ceo-used-his-experience-with-burnout-to-better-support-his-employees-mental-health)
4. [www.fastcompany.com/90269284/ceos-and-entrepreneurs-we-need-to-talk-about-your-mental-health](https://www.fastcompany.com/90269284/ceos-and-entrepreneurs-we-need-to-talk-about-your-mental-health)