

## **Well@Work Podcast Season 3, Episode 5: Leadership Practices to Boost Employee Retention**

Welcome to the Well@Work podcast from the University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children. This podcast is brought to you by a grant from SAMHSA through the Kentucky Department of Behavioral Health to the Center on Trauma and Children. On this episode, Emily Smith shares some strategies that leaders and supervisors can use to boost employee retention and build a healthy working environment for all workers.

Hi, I'm Emily Smith with the University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children. The current challenges of staffing go beyond ensuring there are sufficient workers. The COVID pandemic did lead to a greater enrollment in health care and behavioral health programs nationally, but these early career workers have not yet gained the experience that comes with practice. And many organizations continue to struggle to retain more experienced workers, many who experienced increased stress and trauma during the COVID pandemic. In a scoping review on the strategies and barriers of nursing retention, authors listed poor working environment and relationships between leaders and nurses as major factors contributing to retention. Research also shows that leaders of child welfare organizations who build a positive environment at work that prioritizes worker safety and staff trust can improve employee job satisfaction. Leaders who can create a healthy work environment that is safe and supportive can help. And creating a work culture that promotes staff choice and voice, transparency, and other transformational leadership principles can lead to lower turnover rates. In this podcast, I'll share some strategies that leaders and supervisors can use to boost employee retention and build a healthy work environment for all.

To begin, let's consider the case of Rachel. Rachel was recently promoted to a management position in a community mental health center after less than a year with the organization and about four years as a clinician. Because they are so short staffed, Rachel was asked to continue to see clients as she goes through training for the new position. Rachel's direct supervisor is also new to the organization, but has offered her support as Rachel begins to learn how to manage team members. In their first month together, 25% of their staff left the organization; to find out why, Rachel and her supervisor worked with HR to identify the most common reason listed for leaving. Almost all staff reported a poor working environment to be the cause, something that Rachel also hears from her colleagues. To create a healthier workplace, Rachel and her supervisor have decided to make some changes in the hopes of reducing turnover. Here are some of the ways they plan to do that.

**Tip 1: ensure safety.** Creating a safe workplace is more than placing wet floor signs after cleaning up, it also means that the workplace is free from threats, discriminatory practices, aggression, and violence. Experiencing trauma or secondary trauma are occupational hazards for care providers, clients and patients may also have experienced trauma, ensure

staff and client safety is trauma informed. Acknowledge the prevalence of trauma, learn to recognize the signs and symptoms, and respond with policies and procedures that reduce the possibility of re-traumatizing others. Look for strategies to promote physical and psychological safety in previous Well@Work podcasts, find a link in the episode notes.

Tip 2: transparency builds trust. Being transparent with staff promotes fairness, equity, consistency, reliability, and it builds trust. Explain policies changes, roles, and goals with staff in a group setting. Make decisions based on group input, giving no greater weight to any one voice. Communicate leadership decisions with the staff collectively, be open to individual concerns, and know when to take a public conversation somewhere private.

Tip 3: everyone benefits from social support. Unlike contestants in a reality show who may turn to the camera and say “I didn't come here to make friends,” work can be a lonely place without friendly working relationships. Peer support can build resilience and reduce work stress, it increases hope, establishes safety, and makes work more fun. New staff members can benefit from a peer coaching program. Pairing new workers with more experienced ones can help them to integrate into the organization more quickly. Mentors and supervisors can play a part too, new leaders benefit from the guidance and advice that mentors offer, which builds leadership skills.

Tip 4: know how to collaborate. Partnerships with colleagues builds trust and encourages collaboration, which can inspire innovation. Ensure your team knows that you recognize the important role they play in providing quality care to patients and clients. Interprofessional collaboration can improve patient care and outcomes too, and may reduce the possibility of treatment errors. It can also improve problem-solving skills and increase job satisfaction.

Tip 5: empower staff voice and choice. One of the most powerful drivers of job satisfaction is the control over decision making. The COVID pandemic reduced the sense of control for many, choices we once freely made were limited, and these include the ability to influence our work life. Feeling more in control over working conditions can reduce work stress, improve motivation, and encourage growth, all key factors in feeling satisfied with work. Organizational structure may not allow leaders to make big decisions about pay, policy, or protocol, but you may be able to offer staff the opportunity to create their ideal working schedule, weigh in on important decisions, or comment and voice concerns. Remember, it takes courage to speak up, so be a courageous leader and support those who do.

Being a strong leader takes work, investing in your leadership skills is also an investment in your team, building a healthy workplace. Which can help you and your colleagues to stay Well@Work.

Thank you for listening to this episode of the podcast, follow the link in the video description for more resources on our Well@Work website. And of course, stay tuned for more episodes on topics that will keep you Well@Work.