

Attitude of gratitude: focusing on staff health and wellbeing during Covid-19

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One of State Library of Queensland's health responses to COVID-19 was to form a staff Health & Wellbeing Team. The development of the Team was informed by data from two staff surveys circulated during the COVID-19 pandemic which indicated that some staff were feeling disconnected and disengaged from the workplace. The team was formed with the aim of devising ideas and initiatives to look after staff wellbeing at a time when feelings of vulnerability were high and the effects of up to six months working from home were starting to take their toll.

The team of 12 staff members, who volunteered their time, immediately got to work implementing initiatives to increase staff wellbeing and sense of togetherness. Activities included a month of virtual morning teas in September where staff would meet over Microsoft Teams and catch up just like we used to do in the tea rooms at work. We also implemented a Wellness Buddy initiative where staff are encouraged to reach out to a team member and have a face-to-face or virtual chat about their wellbeing. The initiative continues and is designed to support staff who are feeling isolated or who may prefer one on one support rather than something like a virtual morning tea.

Happiness theorist, Sonja Lyubomirsky (2010) has stated that gratitude is linked to happiness. We also ask staff to send gratitude e-cards, Teams praise or to leave a post-it note on someone's desk with a message of appreciation. All these initiatives are designed to increase connectedness and a feeling of us being part of one State Library.

Some other initiatives we introduced during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic were virtual lunch time walks where everyone joined together and shared their walking experience on Zoom. We also created a Spotify playlist to get people in the mood for exercising as exercise is also linked to happiness (Chen et al., 2020). The playlist is filled with the Health & Wellbeing Team's favourite tunes to get moving! And we shared wellness tips from diet and exercise to meditation and mindfulness through a weekly staff newsletter.

Now that most of our staff are back onsite the Health & Wellbeing Team are still focusing on gratitude and on new initiatives like offering staff yoga and decorating our tea room noticeboards with information about wellness to keep people informed and ensure wellbeing is a priority for everyone. We have been careful not to tread

too fine a line between promoting staff wellbeing and creating a culture of toxic positivity. We want people to feel supported when they are down and not like they have to come to work with a smile plastered on their face. Toxic positivity at work affects employee morale and means employees feel like they can't be authentic about their emotions or their mental health (Wong, 2020). This is the opposite of what we are aiming to achieve.

The initiatives we use are inclusive and give everyone, whether introvert or extrovert, digital native or technophobe, an opportunity to participate in something that suits them. We had 60 people attend our virtual morning teas, 20 people attend the virtual walks and we have so far sent out over 15 wellness tips to help staff maintain a healthy lifestyle. Data from the annual Working for Queensland public service survey indicates that 80% of staff are now feeling connected to and positive about their jobs. This is compared to 63% feeling engaged with the organisation in 2019. There is a greater sense of staff morale and a feeling of us 'all being in this together'. As staff move back onsite and some also work from home, the Health and Wellbeing Team are there to support them in making this transition. We play a vital role in protecting the mental health of our colleagues and our workplace as a whole.

References

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