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THINGS

Move past the employee assistance program and reduce internal pressures to nurture mental health.

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By Sandy Torchia, Quartz (TNS)

How do leaders role model prioritizing emotional and mental wellbeing for our teams? It's a question I ask myself often in my role with talent and culture at KPMG US.

The past two years have had a profound effect on our collective mental health. The

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we have seen a similar trend at KPMG US. Throughout the pandemic, we leveraged our continuous listening surveys to check in with our people and better understand where they needed support. We expanded our benefits tied to our employee assistance program (EAP), including increasing the number of free counseling sessions and how they can receive these sessions (in-person, virtual, or text/web chat) and enhancing our Work/Life Coaching Program. This internal coaching program:

- Helps our people develop strategies to manage their professional responsibilities more effectively and identify opportunities to grow their careers in the short- and long-term.
- Provides them with up to five hours of confidential one-on-one work/life coaching.
- The coach helps address various topics such as navigating through transitions and the impacts these events could have on personal life and career; identifying patterns in their personal and professional behaviors and potential limitations; and communicating with clients, colleagues, and significant others— amongst many more.
- Individuals can include their managers or significant others in these conversations if they would like to.

We hosted several events to increase awareness of these offerings and share personal stories about our peoples' mental health journeys, recognizing that EAPs [are typically underutilized](#) due to a lack of awareness as well as stigma around using these services.

Most recently, we piloted a wellbeing program for our partners to help them learn the skills they need to role model wellbeing and create an unparalleled people experience. The program includes a self-assessment for partners to determine their

current state of wellbeing, identification of areas they want to improve, and guidance

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out counseling and training for relationship issues, grief/loss, and trauma, to name a few—demonstrating that the program is flexible enough to meet the evolving needs of our people.

In addition to EAP, we also offer other mindfulness resources, including:

- The MyStrength program, offered through [Resources for Living](#), is a web-based and mobile app tool that can help strengthen the mind and body by improving emotional health and helping overcome depression, anxiety, stress, substance misuse, or chronic pain.
- Mindfulness with [PurposeBlue](#) offers a variety of mindfulness and meditation resources to help build and maintain a mindfulness practice. This includes audio/video guided training and guides for dealing with chronic diagnosis and pain, rebalancing and resetting energy in overwhelming or uncertain times, calming the mind and body for resilience through deep and mindful breathing, and more.

Evaluating future offerings

While we are glad to see that our employees are comfortable leveraging the EAP for a range of issues, we must continue to create an environment where we can comfortably discuss and respond to these concerns and take preemptive steps to address issues closely tied to mental wellbeing.

Our approach is multifaceted to fully support our employees and leaders.

This includes leaning into direct feedback from continuous listening surveys that ask how our people are feeling and what's important to them. Recently, based on feedback we got from parents at the firm, we not only launched the wellbeing program for partners but also expanded access to our mental health resources by

adding [Brightline](#), which provides virtual mental health support for children ages 18

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with anxiety in children, and more. These local discussions, in combination with our larger firmwide events around World Mental Health Day, Mental Health Awareness Month, and other important moments of recognition, keep the dialogue going, driving understanding and decreasing feelings of isolation or stigma. Our KPMG Network of Women (KNOW) BRG is hosting a four-part virtual series on self-care for thriving at work. The latest session focuses on self-advocacy and accountability, including tips on creating healthy boundaries and voicing your needs. This session was attended by around 400 people, with 100% of those surveyed saying that they would recommend it to a colleague.

Reducing pressures in the system

To summarize what our Chair and CEO Paul Knopp [stated last year](#): we have to make the complicated more simple. To date, this has translated into intentional steps to reduce burnout and improve work-life balance, including:

- **A “Flex with Purpose” hybrid work model:** For our business, we believe that a blend of fully remote, hybrid, and on-site teams will deepen connections among current and potential employees and leaders. We call it [Flex with Purpose](#), and the approach has infused energy and a stronger sense of intentionality into the times when our people come together.
- **A place to gather:** Since its opening, nearly 26,000 KPMG employees have visited Lakehouse, our cultural home in Orlando. In 2022 alone, Lakehouse hosted 11 programs for our interns, seven for new managers, and 65 orientations for new joiners. Lakehouse has become central to meaningful interaction in KPMG’s hybrid world.
- **Promote service:** Additionally, this year, KPMG US celebrated our firm’s [125th anniversary](#) with a Community Impact Day in August that saw more than 22,000 professionals put in 60,158 volunteer hours in the communities where they live,

work, and play. Ninety KPMG US offices engaged in this collaborative, collective

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...of connection and understanding. When we encourage employees to share everything about themselves with their co-workers, opportunities to recognize and engage interests, experiences, and priorities outside of work help to forge stronger connections and a sense of inclusivity. We encourage people to self-identify, provide paid time off for voting or volunteering, and institute a broader recognition and understanding of religious holidays.

The issue is complex and multifaceted, and we are continually reviewing and evolving our approach. Keeping the lines of communication open—with our leaders, people, and stakeholders—is critical to that effort and to driving progress on this issue more broadly.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sandy Torchia is vice chair of talent and culture at **KPMG US** and is responsible for leading all aspects of their people strategy. She collaborates closely with the leadership team to develop to implement initiatives that advance the firm's strategy by unlocking the power of its more than 35,000 professionals, improving employee and partner experiences, and strengthening culture.

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