

Mental Health Is Corporate Health: Why Every Leader Needs a Healing Community



Workplaces across the globe are investing more than ever in mental health support. From mindfulness apps to expanded EAPs and resilience training, the intent is clear: business leaders want to help their teams thrive.

Yet the results remain underwhelming.

Eighty percent of employees report that workplace stress impacts their well-being. One in five adults struggles with mental illness. And even in organizations offering robust benefits,

many employees don't access them—paralyzed by fear of stigma, career repercussions, or overwhelm. In short, we've built resources—but not trust.

That's why companies are serious about performance, retention, and long-term resilience need to shift their focus. Mental health resources aren't perks—they're infrastructure. And healing *community*—not just individual tools—is the foundation.

Dr. Carylynn Larson, a workplace psychologist and speaker specializing in high-stakes leadership, refers to this shift as the movement from surviving to thriving. In her keynote, *Break|Through: How Healing Communities Drive Corporate Success*, Dr. Larson makes a compelling case for the power of connection in corporate settings—not as a nice-to-have, but as a business imperative.

The Enduring Gap: Resources vs. Reality

Over the past 75+ years, a societal movement to normalize mental illness has (thankfully) propelled organizations to support the mental health of their people. Nearly 95% of companies plan to expand wellness programs by 2030, and 84% of millennials expect mental health benefits from their employers. But programs alone won't cut it.

A growing body of research confirms that stigma remains a powerful barrier to care. According to the American Psychiatric Association, many employees hesitate to admit they're struggling, despite evidence that early intervention improves outcomes and reduces costs. The resulting silence is costly: the WHO estimates that depression and anxiety result in 12 billion lost working days annually, costing the global economy \$1 trillion. Meanwhile, leaders feel lost, unsure how to engage without overstepping. What's needed now is a cultural transformation—one rooted in openness, vulnerability, and care—in healing community.



The Neuroscience of Community

Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad of Brigham Young University has found that strong social connections are as critical to physical health as avoiding smoking or high blood pressure. Similarly, Stanford researcher Dr. Emma Seppälä emphasizes the direct impact of emotional connectedness on workplace creativity and resilience.

Dr. Susan Pinker, author of *The Village Effect*, points out that face-to-face interactions are vital for cognition and longevity. And the late Dr. John Cacioppo's groundbreaking work in social neuroscience revealed that chronic loneliness has the same physiological impact as obesity or smoking.

Perhaps most powerfully, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy has championed the importance of connection in the workplace, highlighting loneliness and disconnection as public health concerns. His "Parting Prescription" for a connected life includes simple, yet transformative actions: be present, serve others, spend time with loved ones, and build shared rituals. These aren't just personal practices—they're cultural foundations.

Leaders Need Community, and Leaders Build Community

Dr. Larson's work with mission-driven leaders reveals a common paradox: individuals pushing for world-changing innovation often overlook the importance of community. In doing so, they neglect their own well-being—and that of their teams.

Larson describes leaders like "Dan," a high-performing tech executive translating scientific breakthroughs into life-saving innovations, who was once teetering on the edge of burnout. Dan's turning point came not from another productivity tool, but from human connection. Through coaching, he began pausing before reacting, listening more deeply, and grounding himself in his values. As his reactivity subsided, his team's engagement increased. Trust flourished, conversations deepened, and collaboration strengthened.

This isn't an isolated anecdote—it's a case study in what's possible when executives invest in relational well-being as part of their leadership model. It also echoes what many experts in neuroscience and organizational behavior have long affirmed: social connection is not a distraction from high performance—it's the driver of it.



The Recipe for a Healing Community

Dr. Larson’s “Recipe for a Healing Community” translates these insights into an easy formula for leaders—in title and beyond—in organizations everywhere. The framework helps leaders do three things:

1. Shift from Surviving to Thriving

It’s not enough to offer coping tools. Leaders must model what thriving looks like by taking care of their own well-being—openly. This invites others to do the same and removes shame from the equation.

2. Build Human-Centered, High-Performing Teams

High standards and high support can coexist. When leaders create psychological safety—where feedback is welcomed, emotions are respected, and diverse experiences are honored—teams outperform expectations.

3. Create a Culture of Care That Fuels Results

The goal isn’t just wellness. It’s aligned, strategic impact. Caring cultures are better at collaboration, innovation, and retention—not in spite of, but because of, their humanity.

These principles are closely aligned with the Lead in 3D (Me/We/World) leadership framework. The model helps leaders evaluate and align their energy, time, and attention across three domains: personal well-being (Me), team performance (We), and societal impact (World). Dr. Larson credits this structure with helping leaders maximize their influence without sacrificing their health or integrity.

In her own work, Dr. Larson has applied the Me/We/World mindset to a tool she developed for measuring the ROI of coaching. While initially set on building, marketing, and continuously improving the tool herself, the Me/We/World lens reminded her that meaningful change doesn’t have to be a solo effort. Leaders don’t need to carry everything alone—they can co-create solutions with others.

As she puts it: *“What if your greatest contribution isn’t what you finish—but what you invite others into?”*

Three Leadership Prompts for Mental Health

A few essential questions can reframe their approach from reactive to regenerative:

- What cultural norms are silently discouraging people from asking for help?
- How are leaders modeling a healthy balance between vulnerability and listening?

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- Where might healing—at the individual, team, or cultural level—unlock strategic momentum?

There's no shortage of tools or tactics to support mental health at work. But without a community that meets you where you are and makes it safe for you to use the resources available to you, even the best-designed programs will fall flat.

The good news? Healing is contagious. When one person shows up with empathy, presence, and courage, others follow. And that's when organizations don't just manage mental health—they promote it.

In today's competitive and chaotic world, the most successful companies won't be those that push harder. They'll be the ones that come together.

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