

# The Future *of* **WORKFORCE WELLBEING**

Where People & Systems Thrive Together



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# Traditional wellness programs are no longer enough.

**Organizations across the country are investing billions of dollars into workplace wellness initiatives, yet employee burnout continues to rise.**

This is especially true in health and human service professions where employees are routinely exposed to high emotional demands, workforce shortages, complex systems, and increasing pressure to do more with less.

**For years, workplace wellness efforts have focused primarily on the individual through health promotion:**

- encouraging physical, mental and financial self-care
- teaching stress management
- offering resilience trainings
- providing mental health resources

**These supports matter. But on their own, they are proving to not be enough.**

## The Future of Workplace Wellbeing

Recent research like the **Stanford Model of Occupational Wellbeing** suggests that **wellbeing is driven not just by individual resilience but by the interplay between three factors:**

- the individual
- workplace efficiencies
- a culture of wellness<sup>2</sup>





## Sustainable wellbeing requires a more balanced approach.

• In his **Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-being**, Surgeon General Vivek Murthy found that 84% of workers surveyed indicated that at least one workplace factor negatively impacted their mental health. In response, he proposed a framework illustrating how workplace environments and relationships influence core human needs, including safety, belonging, recognition, opportunity for growth, and ability to have a quality lifestyle. A central theme throughout the framework is the importance of voice and autonomy in fostering agency, engagement, and overall psychological well-being.<sup>17</sup>

### Schedule a Consultation

Every organization has unique challenges, pressures, and strengths. Consultations can support individuals, leadership teams, or entire organizations seeking a more proactive and strategic approach to workforce well-being.

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# The Case for Prioritizing Workplace Wellbeing

**Research consistently shows that poor wellbeing contributes to:**

- lower productivity
- increased absenteeism
- higher turnover
- greater disengagement
- increased workplace conflict
- more mistakes and errors
- worsening physical and mental health outcomes<sup>3,6,7,9,10,14</sup>

## The financial implications are also substantial.

• For a typical organization of 1,000 employees, burnout-related factors such as **disengagement, turnover, and overextension can result in approximately 5 million dollars in annual losses**. Additionally, it is estimated that employee turnover alone may cost organizations between six and nine months of that employee's salary to replace.<sup>19,20</sup>

The financial impact of chronic workplace stress has been recognized for more than a decade. In 2015, **Joel Goh** and colleagues estimated that **8% of annual healthcare costs were associated with workplace stressors**, highlighting the significant relationship between organizational conditions, employee well-being, and long-term health outcomes.<sup>10,11,15</sup>



## Compounding Cycle

And in many industries, workforce shortages are already placing additional pressure on the employees who remain. Over time, this creates a compounding cycle in which **chronic understaffing intensifies stress, accelerates burnout** among remaining employees, **and further contributes to retention challenges**.<sup>10</sup>

## The Solution

Research also shows that organizations that prioritize meeting the basic human needs as outlined by Murthy experience **measurable improvements in:**

- engagement
- retention
- productivity
- morale
- collaboration
- innovation
- employee health

**Focusing on employee wellbeing is not only a health initiative; it's a leadership and organizational sustainability strategy.**<sup>5,8,9,14,15,24</sup>

# Why Stress is the Enemy of Wellbeing

To achieve wellbeing, it is important to understand the body's stress response.

**The stress response is not inherently bad. It is a protective survival system designed to help us respond to challenges and threats.**

When the brain perceives danger, the body activates a coordinated physiological response often referred to as fight, flight, or freeze.

In short-term situations, this response is adaptive.

But the nervous system does not only respond to physical danger.

**It also responds to:**

- emotional pain
- overwhelm
- unpredictability
- excessive demands
- conflict
- lack of control
- chronic exposure to others' distress
- environments that feel unsafe or unsupported

When stress activation happens repeatedly without adequate recovery, the nervous system begins to remain in a prolonged state of strain. Over time, this contributes to a distinct occupational phenomenon, known as burnout.<sup>3,4,6,9,21</sup>





**The World Health Organization defines burnout as: “A syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.”**

**Burnout is characterized by three primary dimensions:**

- exhaustion
- cynicism or detachment
- reduced professional efficacy<sup>23</sup>

Contrary to common assumptions, burnout does not primarily affect disengaged employees. It often affects highly committed, deeply caring, and high-performing professionals.

**People who care the most are often the ones most vulnerable to depletion.**<sup>9,14</sup>

Burnout often develops gradually through accumulation. It is repeated exposure to small unresolved stressors over long periods of time that has the greatest impact on workplace wellbeing. This is particularly important in workplaces where demands consistently exceed available resources.

**Research shows that burnout increases when there is a mismatch between:**

- demands and resources
- effort and recovery
- responsibility and support
- expectations and capacity
- control and autonomy

**This mismatch can exist at both the organizational and individual levels. Which means effective burnout prevention must address both.**<sup>13</sup>





# Why Traditional Wellness Efforts Often Fail

Many wellness initiatives are built on good intention but an incomplete understanding of burnout.

**Organizations frequently respond to burnout by offering:**

- Physical, mental, and financial wellness trainings
- stress management workshops
- mindfulness resources
- employee assistance programs
- motivational messaging

These interventions can absolutely help. But on their own, they often fail to produce lasting changes.

## Why?

**Because they focus solely on building one's resilience to stress rather than resolving the environmental issues in the workplace causing stress.**

Effective wellbeing interventions not only strengthen individual resilience and support healthy habits but also develop wellness-centered leadership practices and promote ongoing evaluation of workplace systems, workflows, and operational efficiencies.<sup>2,5,8,9,18,24</sup>



## Knowledge alone rarely changes behavior.

Research on behavior change consistently shows that awareness, education, and attitude change have limited long-term impact when used in isolation.

## Knowing what to do is not the same as consistently doing it.

**Sustained behavior change is far more influenced by:**

- Creating Access – making the desired behavior easier
- Providing social support
- Making cultural norms visible behaviors

This is one of the most important lessons in helping others adopt healthy wellbeing habits.

**Creating a culture of wellness will be far more impactful than sending staff to one-off training and providing tips in a weekly newsletter.<sup>1</sup>**

**| People do not heal or grow in isolation.**

### **Workplace culture powerfully shapes:**

- Safety – both physically and psychologically
- Security – assurance that needs will be met
- Social Support – trusted relationships
- Belonging – the belief that you matter to and are equal to others
- Autonomy – choosing how your work is done
- Flexibility – access time and autonomy to meet life demands
- Dignity – receiving a livable wage and being involved in workplace decisions
- Meaning – connection to the mission and recognition and gratitude for contribution
- Learning – receiving training, education, mentoring, and reciprocal feedback
- Accomplishment – clear and equitable pathways for career advancement<sup>17</sup>

### **This is also why many employees become frustrated with traditional wellness efforts.<sup>15</sup>**

Employees are often encouraged to meditate, practice self-care, or become more resilient while continuing to operate within environments that remain chronically overwhelming, under-supported, or psychologically unsafe.

As a result, many employees experience wellness initiatives as disconnected from their actual daily experience.

### **One of the most important truths about workplace wellbeing is this: You cannot self-regulate your way out of a system that consistently dysregulates you.**

This does not mean individual coping skills are unimportant. They are essential.

#### **But sustainable wellbeing requires both:**

- individuals developing healthier ways of responding to stress
- An organizational culture that makes wellbeing easier to achieve, provides social support and makes wellness behaviors visible

### **Burnout prevention works best when wellbeing becomes embedded into the culture rather than added as another task.<sup>2</sup>**



# The BALANCE Framework

While the whole toolbox of wellbeing interventions is more than could possibly be included in this short e-book, the BALANCE framework is a very powerful starting point.

Workplace stress that impacts wellbeing develops gradually and often involves thought patterns, belief systems and emotional responses that have evolved over one's lifetime.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, recovery and prevention also occur through a gradual process that involves reflection, gaining insights, and engaging in problem solving.

**The BALANCE framework was designed to provide a practical, repeatable process for responding to stress in real time.**

**Many people can clearly identify:**

- what is stressing them
- what is not working
- what needs to change

The BALANCE framework provides a practical pathway for increasing awareness, strengthening emotional flexibility, improving coping, and creating more intentional responses to stress by clarifying the situations, stressors, or environmental triggers contributing to the distress.

**B**ehavior  
Recognizing automatic stress responses and behavioral patterns.

**A**ccept feelings  
Allowing emotions to be acknowledged rather than avoided or suppressed.

**L**imiting Beliefs  
Identifying thought patterns that increase stress, shame, helplessness, or perfectionism.

**A**ctivating Event  
Clarifying the situations, stressors, or environmental triggers contributing to distress.

**N**urture Self  
Responding intentionally to emotional, physical, relational, and psychological needs.

**C**onnections  
Strengthening meaningful support, communication, and healthy relationships.

**E**fficacy  
Taking intentional action to improve coping, boundaries, functioning, and effectiveness.

**The purpose of the framework is not perfection. It is consistency.**

Over time, repeated use of these skills helps individuals build greater

flexibility, awareness, resilience, and capacity for recovery.

Importantly, these individual practices also contribute to broader organizational change.

As people increase communication, reflection, collaboration, and psychological safety, they help create healthier workplace cultures.

## **Register for a 6-part Future of Workplace Wellbeing Series: A Roadmap for Creating Sustainable Wellbeing at Work**

**Burnout prevention requires more than self-care tips. Sustainable well-being happens when individuals and organizations work together to create healthier workplace cultures.**

**[Explore Upcoming Trainings →](#)**

# From Awareness to Culture Change

Wellbeing interventions cannot rely on one-time training or isolated wellness activities. Sustainable change requires a multi-level approach that integrates education, skill development, leadership engagement, social support, and organizational alignment.

**This process can be understood in three progressive levels.**

## Level 1: Awareness and Education

**The first level focuses on helping individuals and teams better understand:**

- The protective factors of workplace wellbeing
- The impact of stress on the body and nervous system regulation
- The skills for not only building resilience but resolving the sources of stress
- Creating a culture of connection

This stage creates shared language and foundational awareness.

But awareness alone is not enough.

**Without reinforcement and ongoing support, most people struggle to consistently apply new behaviors over time.**

## Level 2: Skill Building and Peer Support

The second level focuses on translating awareness into practice.

### **This includes:**

- Identifying key players
- Structured wellbeing mentorship
- Practical skill building
- Peer support programs
- Accountability structures
- Goal-oriented implementation

**At this stage, organizations begin creating internal capacity for sustainable wellbeing.**

This level is critical because social support is one of the strongest predictors of sustained behavior change. **People are significantly more likely to maintain healthy behaviors when they experience:**

- encouragement
- validation
- accountability
- connection
- shared learning





## Level 3: Wellbeing-Informed Organizations

The third level moves beyond isolated programming and into system-wide integration.

**At this stage, wellbeing becomes embedded into:**

- workplace culture
- onboarding
- supervision
- communication
- policy development
- organizational decision-making

**A wellbeing-informed organization may include:**

- Embedded organization-wide wellbeing education
- Leadership-specific training
- Peer support coaches and program
- Individual wellbeing and organizational readiness assessments
- Ongoing consultation
- Data-informed decision-making
- Strategic Initiatives
- Structured continual evaluation and quality assurance

**At this level, burnout prevention is no longer dependent solely on individual effort. The system itself begins supporting healthier functioning.**



Start Here

# Register for the 6-part Future of Workplace Wellbeing Series

A Roadmap for Creating Sustainable Wellbeing at Work

## Session 1

### **X Marks the Spot: Defining Workplace Wellbeing**

Participants will explore the U.S. Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing and Stanford University's Model of Occupational Wellbeing to develop a clear vision of what a wellbeing-centered workplace looks like. Participants will also complete a professional fulfillment and workplace wellbeing assessment to better understand their current starting point.

## Session 2

### **Mapping the Terrain: Understanding How Wellbeing Transformation Happens**

Participants will explore the latest research on sustainable behavior and culture change, including the three strongest determinants of transformation: access, social support, and visible norms. Participants will complete a workplace readiness assessment to identify strengths, opportunities, and priorities for creating a culture of wellbeing.





## Session 3

### Identifying the Roadblocks: Building Awareness of the Internal and External Barriers

Participants will learn how the nervous system responds to stress, how past experiences shape current reactions, and how chronic activation can interfere with wellbeing. Through the concept of neuroception, participants will develop greater awareness of the internal and external barriers that stand in the way of workplace wellbeing.

## Session 4

### Creating the Itinerary: Developing the Skills for Wellbeing

Participants will learn practical regulation skills that help interrupt the automatic survival response and restore access to the reasoning brain. Through regulation strategies, participants will learn how to operate within their window of optimal performance and create the conditions necessary for meaningful change.

## Session 5

### Start the Journey: Applying the Problem-Solving Framework

Participants will learn a seven step framework and apply it to real workplace and personal challenges. The focus shifts from simply tolerating stress to identifying solutions, removing barriers, and creating meaningful movement toward workplace wellbeing.

## Session 6

### **Sustaining the Journey: Strengthening Wellbeing Through Connection**

Participants will explore the role of authentic social connection in maintaining wellbeing and preventing isolation. Through peer support, reflective conversations, and relationship-building skills, participants will learn how to sustain workplace wellbeing over time and help create cultures where people can thrive together.

## Schedule a Consultation

Every organization has unique challenges, pressures, and strengths. A consultation provides an opportunity to explore:

- workforce stress and burnout concerns
- retention and culture challenges
- leadership support strategies
- wellness program development
- implementation planning for sustainable organizational change

Consultations can support individuals, leadership teams, or entire organizations seeking a more proactive and strategic approach to workforce well-being.

**Book a Consultation with Shari Morin-Degel, LPC**



# My Story: Shari Morin-Degel

## Wellness Program Director

I began my career with a strong belief in the power of helping relationships. Like many people entering the human service professions, I was motivated by purpose and a desire to make a meaningful difference in people's lives.

Much of my early work involved supporting children and families experiencing abuse, neglect, addiction, instability, and trauma. The emotional demands were significant.

**But what I understand more clearly now is that it was not only the work itself that contributed to burnout. It was also the environment surrounding the work.**

There was little formal support for addressing secondary traumatic stress. High workload demands were common, particularly during staff shortages and turnover. Workplace tensions often went unresolved. Like many helping professionals, we were expected to continue functioning at a high level regardless of the emotional or operational strain.

As I moved into leadership roles, I expected the source of my stress to change. In some ways it did, but the underlying challenges remained. I became responsible for staffing shortages, budgets, performance concerns, regulatory requirements, and the well-being of employees, often with limited authority or resources to address the root causes. What became increasingly clear was that burnout was not confined to frontline staff. Leaders were struggling too.

This realization fundamentally changed how I understood workplace well-being.

**Frontline staff and leaders may experience different stressors, but both are affected by the same organizational conditions.**





Both experience the consequences of chronic stress, and both perform at their best when they have the support, resources, and opportunities necessary to thrive.

Over time, trauma-informed care training helped me better understand not only the experiences of those we served, but also the cumulative impact of prolonged stress on the workforce itself. It also reinforced a lesson that has shaped my work ever since.

**Rather than asking who is responsible for promoting workplace wellbeing, a more productive question is: What conditions are preventing people from being successful?**

This shift in perspective laid the foundation for my belief that burnout prevention is a shared responsibility requiring both individual and organizational solutions.

**Book a Consultation with Shari Morin-Degel, LCPC**



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