

# “Poor Mental Health is the Single Biggest Issue Affecting Business Today”

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Shalini Khemka CBE, CEO and founder of E2E, an entrepreneurial community that supports business owners on their journey, discusses why employers should take a stronger stance in protecting the mental health of their employees, and some of the measures they can put into place.

Shalini said: “Employed individuals spend a third of their lives<sup>3</sup> at work, so it’s essential for employers to create a positive and supportive environment to take care of the mental health of their employees.

“A 2020 report by Deloitte<sup>1</sup> found that poor employee mental health costs UK employers £42bn – £45bn each year. This is an increase of about 6bn and 16% on the figures from its 2017 report.<sup>1</sup>

“This Mental Health Awareness week, businesses need to look at the mental wellbeing of their employees as an investment for the future. There are increasing pressures in day-to-day life, including inflation which has driven the cost-of-living crisis, geopolitical events and the aftermath of the pandemic. Combined with everyone’s unique personal circumstances, such as homelife, relationships and health concerns, the number of people suffering with mental health issues is on the rise. Nearly half ([46%](#)) of UK employers have seen an increase in the number of employees experiencing mental health issues, suggesting there’s a mental health crisis amongst workers in the UK that needs to be addressed. Alongside this, [57% of all working days lost to sickness each year are mental health related and 84% of employees do not feel able to disclose a mental health issue at work.](#)<sup>2</sup>

“The NHS is under increasing pressure and is struggling to cope. A recent study by the NHS Benchmarking Network found that referrals to adult community mental health services in 2023 rose by 11% on the

previous year – with 625,000 people referred to ‘generic’ community mental health teams alone. The NHS can no longer be relied upon to provide quick access to support for those that may be struggling, presenting individuals with another hurdle to overcome in their mental health journey.

“There are various ways in which this can be done, such as nominating and training Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA’s), which are qualified individuals within a workplace who can offer initial support and signpost someone who may be experiencing poor mental health to further help. Unfortunately, there is still a lot of stigma surrounding mental health, making it difficult for individuals to seek help – this may be particularly prevalent in corporate environments. MHFAs bridge this gap by providing employees with someone to talk to, promoting early intervention, and directing individuals to additional sources of support.

“Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) are also a great initiative to introduce into a workplace to reassure employees that they are cared for and there are resources available should they ever need them. Specifics of an EAP may vary, but they often include access to counselling services and GPs as well as financial and legal advice.”

“By implementing these support systems, mental health problems can be dealt with sooner, before they evolve into something more serious, or even avoided altogether.

“It’s also incredibly important to encourage a healthy work/life balance. Setting clear boundaries and modelling healthy habits like adequate sleep, a balanced diet, regular exercise, and utilising talking therapies can promote resilience and wellbeing. Employers should discourage employees from working out of hours and/or at weekends, and instead encourage them to prioritise their wellbeing and take time out for themselves to relax outside of work hours.

“By investing in the mental wellbeing of employees, business owners can create a happy and healthy workforce that is better equipped to produce fantastic results and support the future growth of the business in years to come.”

To find out more about E2E, please visit <https://www.e2exchange.com/>

1. Cost of mental health statistics taken from this report  
<https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/consulting/articles/mental-health-and-employers-refreshing-the-case-for-investment.html>
2. Statistics taken from [Mental Health at Work | Official Site](#)
3. Time spent at work taken from  
<https://www.gettysburg.edu/news/stories?id=79db7b34-630c-4f49-ad32-4ab9ea48e72b#:~:text=The%20average%20person%20will%20spend%2090%2C000%20hours%20at%20work%20over%20a%20lifetime.>