



Guilt-free garments
Local fashion designer to sell all-natural clothing line at Galleria-area store.

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GOING WITH THE FLOW:

Automaker orders unique hydrogen fueling systems from Air Liquide/PAGE 2A



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Gems and java brew together in daily grind

Jonathan and Segev Zadok are balancing their time as family jewelers and coffee grinders.

The brothers and friend Preetish Nijhawan are opening a second European-style coffee shop on July 12.

The latest Coffee Groundz at 2503

HOUSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

Strictly Houston. Strictly Business.

Treating depression important issue for company bottom line

Clinical depression has become one of America's most costly illnesses.

Left untreated, depression can cost the U.S. economy more than \$43.7 billion in work absenteeism, with more than 200 million days lost from work each year. Illnesses such as depression and anxiety most often affect people in their prime working years and can last a lifetime if not properly treated.

It is time to take a serious look at the role mental health plays in business, and how early recognition, intervention and support can influence the overall well-being and productivity of employees, as well as a business' bottom line.

It is easy to see how issues such as a divorce, illness of a child or death of a parent can create emotional difficulties that interfere with an employee's ability to function effectively. A person's mental health affects how he thinks, feels and acts in life and in the workplace. It directly influences how people handle stress, relate to one another and make decisions.

CLINICAL DEPRESSION

Symptoms of depression can include:

- Impaired concentration.

- Lack of interest in things previously enjoyed.
- Fatigue.
- Decreased energy and impaired sleep.
- Sad moods.

Any of these symptoms can easily decrease an employee's productivity and yet may not be recognized as symptoms that can be easily treated.

Treatment for mental illness can correct these symptoms. For example, clin-



EMPLOYEE
MENTAL
HEALTH

GERALD
DESUBE

Companies that offer their employees meaningful mental health benefits not only reduce absenteeism, but may also have fewer disability claims and improved safety records.

ical research indicates that optimal treatment for depression is a combination of medication and counseling. With a mere three months of treatment, nearly 80 percent of people report significant improvement in their emotional well-being.

SEEKING HELP

Unfortunately, many people in the business world with diagnosable mental illnesses do not seek treatment. The

myths that define mental illness as a personal weakness or character defect rather than a real illness share some of the blame. However, possibly the most significant reason an individual does not seek treatment is the lack of availability of mental health benefits through their employer.

Sixty-one percent of Houstonians have a family member or friend who has been diagnosed with a mental illness. Nevertheless, only 16 public corporations in Houston have voluntarily equalized their mental health benefits with other health insurance coverage. Companies that offer their employees meaningful mental health benefits not only reduce absenteeism, but may also have fewer disability claims and improved safety records.

Many are concerned about using their employee health benefits to obtain treatment for mental illness out of fear that their bosses or colleagues will learn about the problem and use it against them. This is simply not the case. Most employers want their employees to get treatment so that they can function effectively at work. Taking the most sufficient steps to help employees find an answer to mental illness is more than just health benefits. It's also changing a company's work environment.

EMPLOYER SUPPORT

An employer can support employees who may be dealing with a mental

health problem by making reasonable accommodations that can improve job performance. Counseling, time off accompanied with a healthy transition back to work, encouragement, a non-judging environment and flexible work schedule are all ways to accommodate an employee's mental health issues. It is also prohibited by law to discriminate based on disability; therefore, employers must make reasonable adjustments.

An estimated 26 percent of Texans aged 18 and older and about one in four adults suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder in any given year. It is just good business sense to address a work force's mental health issues. More than 90 percent of employees agree that their mental health and personal problems spill over into their professional lives and have a direct impact on their job performance. Employers and employees both benefit from attention given to staff members' mental health needs. It is important for all businesses to take note of the prevalence and consequence of good mental health in the workplace. ■

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