Four ways to create a more inclusive and empathetic workplace

Coping with the global pandemic has prompted many companies to re-evaluate their leadership styles and rethink how they manage their workforce. A critical question management teams are asking:

How can we support our people during times of crisis and change?

PwC alum Gian Power delved into this question and others during a recent webcast with other firm alumni in which he explained how the power of storytelling can build better business leaders and teams.

Gian spoke from experience: In 2015, his father tragically died during a business trip in India. A PwC associate based in the UK at the time, he took three months off to lead an international investigation in search of his father. When Gian returned to PwC, he knew he wouldn’t be able to do his best work unless he prioritized his mental health.

“I realized that if I was going to be successful in anything I do, I needed to look after myself.”

Making self-care a priority didn’t come naturally to Gian, given the familial expectations he had to navigate as a fatherless, only son in an Indian family. However, in the months that followed, he visited his therapist regularly and found ways to cope with his grief, which included meditation, exercise and getting quality sleep.

Also, Gian shared what he was going through with trusted colleagues—two of whom went above and beyond to give him the support he needed.

“If it wasn’t for two of my colleagues, I don’t know if I would be here,” he said.

“By sharing your story, you can change the corporate landscape,” said Gian, founder of TLC Lions, which collaborates with companies to create more empathetic, inclusive and productive workplaces.
The leadership styles that his colleagues demonstrated during that time led Gian to rethink how managers can help bring out the best from their people. It also inspired him to think about what kind of leader he wanted to be. Here are some key lessons Gian learned about supporting a team during times of crises and change:

**Check-in regularly**

Your day may be filled with deadlines and meetings, and the pressures of the workday may feel overwhelming. Despite the demands of your job, check in with your team regularly and ask: “How are you?” Ask it twice. This could be as simple as carving a few minutes before or after a meeting to touch base with people.

**Listen to understand rather than to respond**

One of the most critical components supporting mental health is to allow people to be seen and heard. Create a safe space for your team. Instead of hearing them out with your ears, pay attention to their tone and body language. Feel their words.

**Ask about non-negotiables**

When we talk about self-care, the term means different things depending whom you ask. Some may prioritize time for yoga and meditation or a longer lunch that includes a short walk. Others may need time to care for a relative, or uninterrupted evenings for family dinners. The key is to have a conversation with your team and ask what’s one non-negotiable for their well-being that the business could work around.

**Encourage storytelling to help drive empathy**

Ever had a moment when you felt like you were truly clicking with someone you were speaking to and vice versa? A neuroscientist found that storytelling can foster deeper social connections, where a speaker can transport listeners into their experiences and make them live their memories. As a result, storytelling can invoke empathy and create more inclusive workplaces.

Storytelling has the power to shape workplace cultures. Encourage your teams to tell their own stories and help create a space where everyone can feel they’re accepted and that they belong.