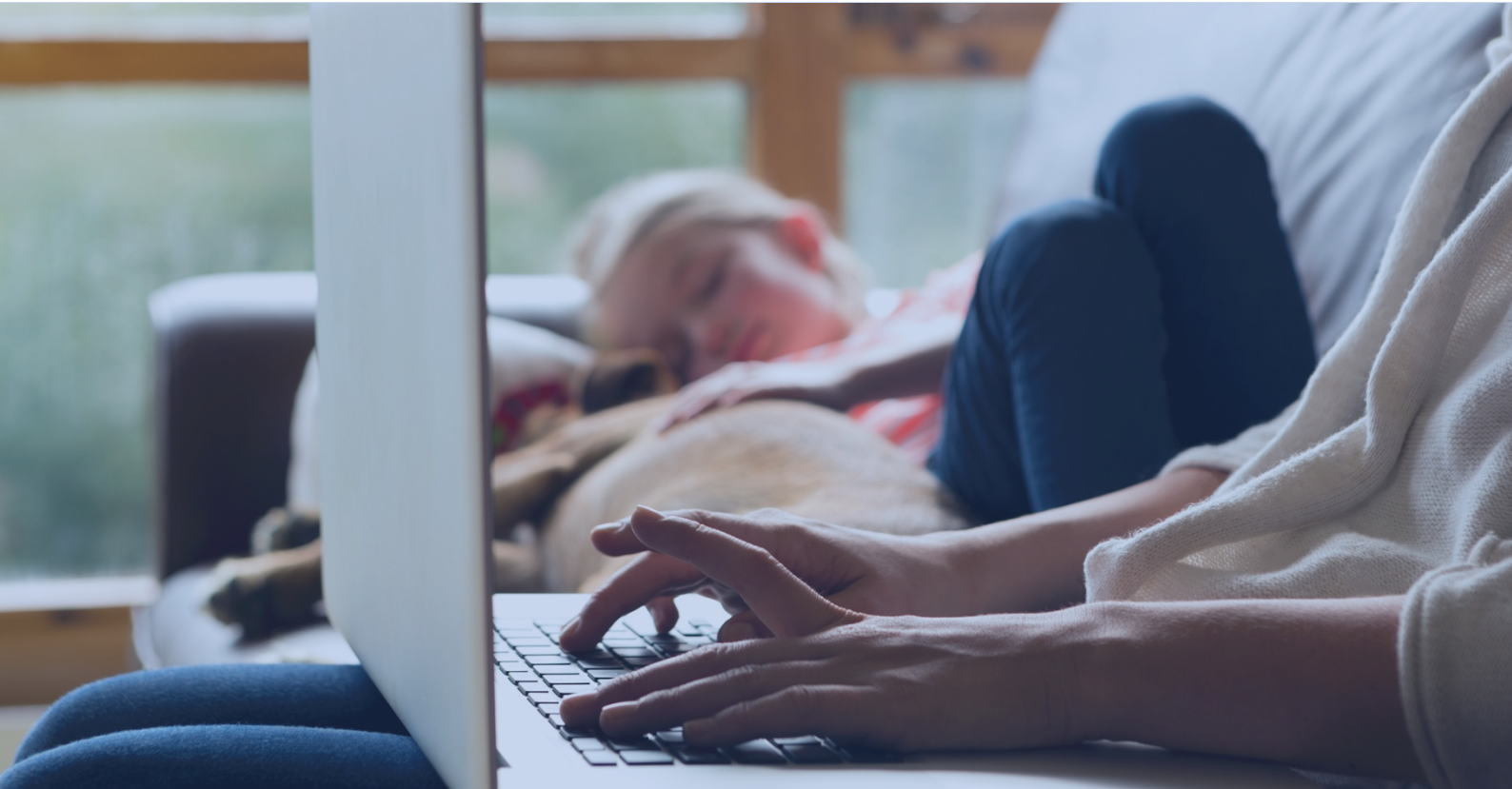


Employee (+ Family) First

THOUGHT PAPER

Written by **Mainak Maheshwari**



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This article is prompted by a recent incident – ironically just after publishing my last article in which I had called for firms to look at ways to help take care of the mental well-being of its employees. A week back I received a message from a client (one of the biggest entities in its field!) that as a part of their “cost rationalization” exercise, they are putting a pause to all the ongoing senior executive coaching arrangements.

But this is not what the article is about.

Given my connection with the coachees, one of them from the same firm reached out asking if I could continue with our planned session as she believed it would help her. During our conversation, she revealed that though technology had made work from home seamless, she found herself increasingly distracted and anxious at odd times; worried about how to take care of her family members – especially the kids and parents. With WFH, the boundaries between work and professional timings have blurred leading to individuals being unable to completely concentrate on either....exacerbating existing anxieties and frustrations!

Quite a few of us are in the same boat.

So how can companies take care of their employees?

1. Coach and support leaders and managers to be compassionate, empathetic, and practice active listening

The coachee shared her dilemma with me because she perceived me as accessible and someone to whom she felt comfortable saying “Hey, I am not okay” or “Hey, I am having issues at home” or “Hey, I can’t take a call at this time” without the fear of being judged.

Accessibility is the foundation of open and compassionate leadership. When leaders say: “Please expect my kid on the Zoom call with me” or “You might expect a shout-out from my mom”, they encourage employees to be forthcoming about their problems.

2. Adopt empathy and flexibility in policies instead of a one-size-fits-all approach.

HR and managers can be trained and empowered to be flexible while resolving unique issues as they surface through this crisis. Managers with adept decision-making abilities and powers can take timely actions without delays related to lengthy discussions and approvals.

Some changes that can be considered are:

- a) **Assuring employees that performance will be based on output instead of logged-in hours and tweaking the performance appraisal system and goals accordingly.**
- b) **Offering flexi hours for ease in taking care of family members and making time to de-stress.**
- c) **Limiting the number of calls and meetings to ones that are necessary.**
- d) **Respecting employee need for privacy by allowing them to not switch on the video during calls.**

3. Business and HR leaders need to change their attitude towards the mental well-being of not just the employees but their families too.

This can be done by over-hauling existing workplace culture and policies around mental health and related benefits to make them more empathetic, flexible, and inclusive.

Most companies include spouses and kids in the medical cover provided. But is it enough?

Not nearly.

Organizations could lessen employee vulnerability through:

- a) **Extending medical cover and mental health benefits to include their parents if not done already.**
- b) **Enhancing the medical cover with a possible rise in medical expenses.**
- c) **Bringing family members under the ambit of digital counseling.**
- d) **Create opportunities for digital social interactions.** One of my clients is already sharing some fun activities for the kids every 2-3 days and planning to run a 2-week summer fun workshop for the kids.

To summarize:

The Ginger 2020 Workforce Attitudes Towards Mental Health states that 70% of employees were less productive because of COVID-19 related stress and a whopping 93% believe that companies that survive COVID-19 will be those who support their employees’ mental well-being.

Clearly, bringing about a cultural change where the family is treated as important as the employee, asking for help is perceived as a strength rather than weakness and boundaries between work and personal time are respected, not only an ethical obligation but a matter of survival.

About the author



Mainak brings over 24 years of experience spanning business and HR roles across geographies. This has given him a unique understanding of the link between HR and business strategy. He also holds a patent for HR capability development.

Mainak's experience includes human capital strategy, culture, talent development (performance, leadership development, career pathing, competency, learning, engagement, diversity) and talent acquisition (including on-boarding and background check). He has also implemented HRIS platform and HR metrics to improve performance.

Recently he has been helping start-ups set up efficient and effective HR teams and processes. In addition, Mainak is a recognized Executive Coach and Leadership Development expert.

Mainak's previous work experience includes stints/projects with Accenture (Consulting and HR), Hewitt Associates, AbsolutData, Heidrick & Struggles, Evalueserve, Sterlite Technologies and Upstox.

Mainak Maheshwari is the Director for Talent Advisory services at PeopleAsset.

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