

Health Views Webinar – Building a Mindset of Mental Fitness in Your Workforce

Announcer: Welcome to the Kaiser Permanente Health Views for Business webinar series. Today's webinar is Building a Mindset of Mental Fitness in Your Workforce. Your microphones are muted, but we encourage you to ask questions via the Q&A feature located at the bottom of your screen where it says, "Enter a Question." We will be answering questions throughout the webinar. We've added closed captioning for the webinar.

To activate the closed captioning, go to the menu in the upper right-hand corner of your screen and click closed captioning, and that's located at the bottom of the menu. The closed captioning box can be repositioned on your screen using the drag feature. Following the conclusion of the webinar, a very brief survey will appear on your screen. Please take a minute to complete the survey, as we'd love to hear your feedback. And now here's our moderator, Dr. Deb Friesen.

Deb: Hello, and thank you for joining Health Views for Business. My name is Dr. Deb Friesen, and I am your moderator. I'm an internal medicine physician with Kaiser Permanente. This webinar is part of a continuing series of quarterly webinars that we host to talk about some of the challenges that businesses face every day as it relates to employee health. We aim to have quality conversations that discuss important issues, offer industry best practices, and provide strategies that you can apply to your workforce.

In honor of Mental Health Awareness Month, we are diving into what mental fitness is and how prioritizing mental fitness can contribute to a healthier, more engaged workforce while reducing healthcare costs. 92% of employees have experienced a mental health challenge that impacted their work, 92%, and 81% of workers say they'll look for workplaces that support mental health in the future. There has never been a better time for employers to champion a mental fitness movement.

So today, we want to do two things: focus on how prioritizing mental fitness can help fuel productivity, reduce absenteeism, and boost employee engagement, resulting in a more efficient and dynamic workforce, and we're going to share real-world examples of how you can incorporate mental fitness into your workforce, including leveraging tools and resources that you already have. Let me introduce you to our panelists.

Jacqueline, or Jacki Harp, is the Southeast Regional Director at REI Co-op, a specialty outdoor retailer and the nation's largest consumer cooperative. In her 20 years of retail and outdoor education experience, Jacki has led teams through variable business climates and facilitated training on building a leadership brand, leading with resiliency, and coaching teams for improved performance. As an experienced DEI practitioner, Jacki loves to integrate diverse thoughts, backgrounds, and lived experiences into guided dialogue that brings teams closer together. Jacki is a certified Southern Appalachian Naturalist with expertise in southern Appalachian ecology and serves as board president for Lookout Mountain Conservancy. A Chattanooga native and parent of two, Jacki spends her free time searching for the best swimming spots, cooking with her kids, and backpacking.

Scott Floyd is Senior Director of Global Benefits for Cisco Systems, where he leads a team of over 55 people, including market responsibility for the Americas, Europe, Middle East, Africa, Asia Pacific, and Greater China. He directs strategy, design oversight, and delivery of high-touch, personalized benefits programs in more than 95 countries, as well as oversees the fiduciary regulatory programs and participates in enterprise key committees. For personal wellbeing, Scott is a passionate trail runner and may be found on Mount Diablo trails, rain or shine.

Carrie Owen Plietz is the president of Kaiser Foundation Health Plan and Hospitals of Northern California. In this role, Carrie oversees all of Kaiser Permanente's care delivery and health plan operations in Northern California. As the area's largest nonprofit health plan, Kaiser Permanente provides care for more than 4.5 million members through its 21 hospitals and 264 medical offices in Northern California. If you look her up on LinkedIn, you'll see that she describes herself as a healthcare leader and, right after that, wellness, self-care, and kindness advocate. She enjoys and actually loves hiking with her children. And recently, as we were just getting on, talking about having done that this weekend.

So welcome, everybody. So mental fitness is a term that's kind of new to everybody, so I wanted to take this time to take a little bit of clarification up front and define what it is. I think we can akin it to our physical health. We know when we're physically healthy, but we're not always physically fit. Mental fitness can be defined as having and maintaining a state of wellbeing and cultivating an awareness of how we think, behave, and feel. And just as physical fitness provides us with an increased ability to respond to life in all its richness, mental fitness helps in the same way. Just as we have to invest in our physical fitness, mental fitness is a proactive way to maintain mental wellbeing.

Jacki, I'm going to start with you. You know, we all came through the pandemic together, so much stress, COVID, returning to work. What were you seeing in your workforce that encouraged you to elevate ways to support your employee's mental wellbeing around that time?

Jacki: Thank you. Such an important question. At REI, we are a retailer, and so we employ folks at many different life stages, full-time, part-time, leadership roles, retirees, students, and so lots of people who are going through different things in their life at the time. But what we were observing is a consistent thread is that we had many, many employees that were seeking community and space to talk about the stress they were experiencing around their health, to talk about what was showing up in the civic landscape that they were observing that was concerning to them, to hold space to talk about race relations and violence and how that could be concerning, particularly for our employees that identify as a person of color. And so for the first time, we really had employees coming to their leaders and asking for a different level of support around mental health because of what they were experiencing outside of work.

And so some of the things that became really important for us to enable in my organization were, first, an elevation of programs that were already intact, so things like EAP, employee assistance programs, that allowed folks to be in close connection with a mental health provider. That could be telehealth, that could be in-person health. But suddenly, those resources became very sought after, and we wanted to seek ways to

both enhance them and make sure that information was very easily available so that people could seek out the professional help that they needed.

The other piece that became really important was less around professional support in a medical or psychiatric space and more just around giving space to employees who were seeking community. And they really wanted acknowledgement that we don't set this version of ourselves down when we walk through our doors at work or we log onto a screen, right? They wanted this ability to bring their whole self to work, and that included challenges or other identities that were showing up in the non-work landscape that they needed to talk about.

And so one capability that we stood up that has become so crucial around a culture of belonging in the years since 2020 were, in my organization, we call them inclusion networks, they are also known across other organizations as an employee resource group, employee network, in some cases, they're called a business network. And for those of you that might not be familiar with this, an employee resource group or an inclusion group is a voluntary group of employees who share common interests, identities, or life experiences, and they're usually organized around backgrounds or identities, and they really provide an opportunity for employees to network, to bond over shared life experiences, and ultimately create a more inclusive workspace. And those inclusion groups were so critical for our employees that really needed space to just talk to other people who may be processing similar stress or similar trauma and to not feel like they were alone there. Particularly in an environment where we felt so physically isolated from our communities, that offered a work-related space that could enable more, what's the word I'm looking for, more mental fitness, I suppose.

Deb: Yeah, Jacki, a question just came in, and I think it's related, which is, there was so much grief that happened around COVID, and that's another thing that we brought to work with us. Was that part of the conversation that you were having with your company and your teams?

Jacki: Absolutely, and so in some cases, that could be very specific personal grief, people that lost loved ones from COVID, right? And so they are processing that, so those became very personal experiences. And then just like a set of kind of cultural grief and folks that are uncertain around, how can I talk about what I'm observing in the news that is very challenging and scary to process and I need some space to do so? And that is where certainly that dialogue and inclusion groups became very critical.

We created just a regular touch point for each affinity group to, with leaders that had some prep time and some prompts to guide what really amounted to just very meditative conversation. So it didn't necessarily need to be a space for folks to fully recount a trauma, but perhaps just be guided through a really calming exercise around breathing or a virtual presentation around, I'm going to take a walk in a really quiet wooded space, and virtually, you can come along with me. And so just holding some quiet space, again, for people to be together. And then continuing to refer people back to some of those more professional resources that, at REI, we do, and I'm sure in many of the employers represented today.

We offer some fully supported, fully covered telehealth and in-person therapy benefits, regardless of whether or not an employee is covered by the company-provided

insurance plan. So this is completely separate, and that was a very important benefit to stand up in order for people to have qualified professionals supporting them in a space of grief and mental health processing. And really, I think it was a remarkable, remarkable benefit for many people who needed that space.

Deb: Thank you, Carrie, you have a really unique position in that you are caring for people who care for people, and really their wellbeing does spill over. So what does that look like in your role, and how do you address employee wellbeing?

Carrie: Yeah, thank you, Deb. And let me just say it's honor to be here with everybody on the call, and I'm so glad we're talking about this 'cause I think one of the greatest opportunities that we do have is creating, as Jacki was saying, creating safe space to have these conversations and also recognizing how incredibly important it is not just as human beings to make sure you're empathetic and connect with people, but it's also, you know, it also makes sense for the bottom line of all the employers who are joining too, right?

We know that 47% of employees are more engaged overall if they feel like there is a focus on their wellbeing. We know that they're, what, 20% more positive about their employment if there's a wellbeing program, and I think the last one was somewhere between 60 to 70% of employees are saying that they would leave an organization if they don't feel like they are supported in their wellbeing. So it just makes sense overall.

And so as you know, in healthcare, I mean, the pandemic, none of us escaped without some version of trauma and varieties of PTSD. I spent a great deal of time when I first joined KP rounding in all the COVID ICUs, and this was before the vaccine. And so it was caregivers, as you were saying, the reason why they go into healthcare, and as you well know, Deb, because you're one of them, go into healthcare to help people because they just have this beautiful, gracious heart and they want to just save people's lives and they felt helpless during the pandemic. And that's not something they recover from quickly.

So I love how Jacki was saying, you know, there's obviously EAP, and we went to 24/7 EAP, and we still have 24/7 employee assistance programs. But it's also recognizing that everybody is on the spectrum of their grief and loss and trauma. Some fully recognize it, fully working at it every single day, and others are saying, "No, I'm totally fine," and yet they are so not fine.

So I loved having different options, whether those as individuals who are absolutely going to reach out to EAP or those that maybe it's downloading the Calm app, and it's a few moments of meditative thinking or helping to sleep better, listening to Matthew McConaughey, which is my go-to for sleep. Then you've got Headspace, also.

The pandemic had a some amazing silver linings, and one of them is, I think, the stigma around mental health has dropped a bit, and there's such a plethora of resources that are now available to reach people where they are, where they want to be reached. And I would say just making sure people know of all the resources that are there, Calm, Headspace, myStrength, seeking therapy, that that's a good healthy thing.

And then also recognizing there's EAP. I also love that Jacki mentioned the resource groups. We also have business resource groups within Kaiser Permanente. We have 10

official, but I'll tell you our affinity groups have really exploded as well. Creating a space where people feel that they can be their true authentic selves and that further sense of belonging has been a phenomenal godsend for the organization and connecting people from, I don't cover the same real estate that Scott does, but I do cover 3,000 miles between Northern California to DC, so having people connecting across the entire country, talking about a shared experience that they are, in fact, not alone, I think, is wonderful. So those are just a few things, Deb.

Deb: Thank you for that. And, you know, as we're thinking about the importance of this, I've got a couple statistics to share with everybody. There was a report out in 2023 by Mental Health America, and it collected data from the third and fourth quarters of 2020, and it showed that 21% of adults are experiencing a mental health illness, one in five people.

So I do think that it's something that we've talked about more, that we've tried to reduce the stigma on, and even when people identify and understand that they need some help, we also have data from June 2022 that people live in mental health deserts, as well. More than 152 million people live in mental health workforce shortage areas. Really just means that there are just not enough health workers to go around.

Which is why, again, I think it's so important when we think about creating that culture of safety, psychological safety, belonging. But you know, it's not just helping people, it's actually good for the bottom line. And Scott, I know that you've seen some financial impact when you think about prioritizing mental health. How do you even begin to think about and measure that?

Scott: Yeah, terrific question. I've enjoyed this conversation so far. There's so many voices we need to be tuned into, and as we think about our people and their voices, as you shared Jacki, and then, Carrie, as you think about just that direct outreach.

We also need to listen to the business. And one of the ways that we connect it is we got to anchor it back to the fact that this is associated with our business strategy. The ways we help connect it is we have a powerful purpose. Cisco's purpose is to power a more inclusive future for all. That gets into the heart of our business around security and connectedness and observability, but it translates just as quickly to the kind of business we are and how we'll show up for our people. And so this isn't qualitative fluffy things. When it comes to the mental health of our workforce, people are what make the difference. People are what get those results and who we are overall as a business. So we see it through a couple different ways.

One is that mental fitness itself, I love how you equated it, Dr. Friesen, to other areas, that we need to be tuning into all elements of our health, and we need to be holistic. So likewise, when we think about it, we think about the continuum of care that's available, and we want to focus in prevention.

We also want to make things available for lower acuity conditions, just as well as when things get more complex. Both occur, and one thing we know too is that mental health is not static. We may be good today, and things change rapidly tomorrow. So we engage partners with solutions that can help with lower acuity that's very approachable.

One of our partners, Vida, provides a coaching platform where you may start and do an inventory of where you are and learn you're in a different space. And so we can support you for not just those mental health pieces, but other complex elements of your care and get to that before you have to fall into other areas of care that might be more costly, complex, and drawn out. If we can do that, we can make that impact.

What the business wants to hear in that is, okay, is that resulting in us retaining individuals? Are we spending less time on recruiting because we're getting there, reduced training? Yes, we know that we can. If we keep people healthy, mental fitness in check and in place and knowing that it will change, it's crucial. I love the data we've already shared that 80-plus percent of our people are on the hunt for things to help them. And I think people are in a different place since some of the impacts of what we went through in 2020 and beyond. And it was pretty surprising to hear that between 60 and 75% of employees, all the way up to the C-suite, the stat's actually higher than the C-suite level, up to 75% may consider quitting their job. And you're seeing it in the news. Some people are starting to say, "I need to prioritize myself," and it could be that something should have been done longer before.

And so with that in mind, I would also like to kind of double down and say we need to tune into the data. And at Cisco, we dug in and saw that one of the most at-risk parts of the workforce is middle managers, especially if they are a caregiver in their personal life. They might be in that sandwich generation. They may have young children, aging parents. Those individuals we need to especially tune into. They are critical in delivering at the peak of their career, and it's often disproportionately female. And so we want to change that dialogue and engage all of our workforce, but especially those that are at greatest risk. And what's the data also telling us?

One fascinating study that's come out recently out of Dr. Jan-Emmanuel at Oxford University is that they are finding that we've talked a lot about sustainable organizations tune into employee engagement. They've moved that word to wellbeing, and here's why. When you look holistically, what they're seeing is that if you look at organizations and they studied Indeed data and looked at a lot of different employees, and what they found was that if you are an organization where you're tuned into the climate of your teams, people feel that they have individuals who care for them, that they are in tune with friends, they're getting feedback at work about the impact in their achievement, that when that is tuned into and their total wellbeing and the culture is engaged, those organizations, you should build a mutual fund around them, and some are, 'cause they are outperforming any other organizations that's not tuned into wellbeing. So the S&P sustainability index changed it and put wellbeing in there, and organizations that tune into that are now noticing and reporting that data.

Deb: I find that striking, the sustainable index now incorporates wellbeing. It is so important to the success of a company. And I'm going to just bring a question from Q&A, and again, everybody who's watching, please do put in your questions. And you've kind of answered this already, Scott, but I just want you to go there and emphasize it. The question is, does mental health affect employee morale?

Scott: Oh, yes, 100%. You know where you often see it is in that authentic conversation, those human moments with your team, through a check-in, through that one-on-one,

which you start tuning into as the total, whole person. People need to be seen and heard, and often, while there's a lot of attention to the individual to speak up and we need to create the space for that, as leaders, we need to slow down and really tune in and open our ears, as the adage goes, two ears, one mouth, use accordingly. And when you listen, you see that that is having an impact on people, and we need to increasingly tune in.

Deb: You know, when I was going through my training, I heard a quote, I recently found out it's actually attributable to Theodore Roosevelt, but I was told that nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care. And I think that that really goes beyond medicine, but into all of our business lives as well.

So one of the things that we're talking about is how we, as leaders, go back. How do we understand how to show up? When we look again at some of the data, the North American Mental Institute, NAMI, talks about looking at if people are trained as managers and bosses, 7 in 10 leaders at the manager level and above haven't received training when it comes to how to facilitate mental health discussions and support employees. What's more, only half say their company even provides wellbeing and mental health training and resources.

So Carrie, I'm going to come back to you. Again, how do leaders start to incorporate mental fitness into their workplace? How do you train the trainer?

Carrie: Yeah, Deb, I think it's a great question, and I think, first, it's recognizing what Scott just highlighted, which is it's imperative. It is imperative as part of being a good leader and a good organization and a top organization, it is a must, it is not a nicety.

There are a couple of basic, basic things that I think are incredibly helpful, but I'll tell you, I grew up in the generation of suck it up. I don't know if anybody else can relate to that, but, you know, never let them see you sweat, suck it up, you know, be one person at work, and be another person when you're at home. And so over time, I have learned, so just being super transparent, the power of true engagement and really tapping into the true authentic selves, and not just me, but the people that I'm privileged to lead, because in order for them to be their absolute best for our patients that we are privileged to serve, they have to be at their best. I don't think anybody wants to see a grumpy doctor, anybody? Like, raise your hand if you want to go see a grumpy doctor or have a nurse who's having a bad day. So my point is made, but a few things to take away, I have three things.

One of them is just lead by example. As workplace leaders, support your employees' mental fitness. Also, say when you're not having a great day. Where is that humility? Where is that transparency in saying, "Hey, you know, my energy is maybe at a four today, so I'm going to work through it, but just give me a little bit more grace today"? it's amazing because then it creates that additional space for psychological safety for your team members who, then, those leaders will take it to their next level within the organization.

Also, as far as leading by example, I practice gratitude every single day. I believe it is an absolute significant of my role. So every morning, I start writing in a gratitude journal, and I'm a very busy person, just like everybody else on this call, but I would tell you that

that is a ground-setting requirement for me to ensure that I show up to be the best leader I can be for my team, which is, in fact, my main job every day. It's a great way to start the day. It also can spark joy because then you start giving gratitude to others, and they are in a much better mood. And have you ever had those thank you notes that come back to you when you've written a thank you note? I'm like, "No, no, no, I just wrote you a thank you note," but then they said send you a thank you note for thanking them, I love it. So we started, in Northern California, it's called NCAL Kudos. And so for any organization out there, super easy online thank you cards that are set and ready to go, it takes two seconds, it's over email, but it's something that's a little bit more. It's an electronic card that shows up for our teammates. So it's something just a little bit additional beyond the normal just email thank you.

The other one is promoting work-life harmony. I am not a believer in work-life balance, because in my mind, that means work is over here, life is over here, and it sticks whoever's in the middle in this constant perpetual need to have everything perfect, and life just does not work that way. So my belief is it's all about, how do you integrate them so they work in the best harmony for both parts of who we are? And psychologically, balance just doesn't make any sense. And I was a dancer, so I should be wrapped around the whole balance thing, but I'm not.

Lastly is encourage and celebrate fun. I think we take ourselves way too seriously, and we have a very important job saving lives every day. And you can have fun and celebrate joy every single day. So create space for it, create a space for having a belly laugh in the middle of a meeting. You will get more out of your team, you will get more engagement, you will have greater wellbeing just by having celebrations of success, celebrating milestones, friendly competitions, especially Northern California, we've got Golden State Warriors and the Kings, though none of them are in the playoffs, but fun celebrations, you know, seek every single opportunity. So those are just promote work-life harmony, celebrate, have fun, and lead by example.

Deb: Love that. Thank you. I don't want to see a grumpy doctor even in the mirror, so I know where you're coming from on that one. And I actually received, one time, a Kudos, and my gosh, I floated on that thing for three days. So what a difference it really does make for us to recognize each other. But you know, even as meaningful as these activities are that we can do to show our appreciation, sometimes it actually takes something systemic or systematic. We have to take a step back and actually look at who we are from a benefits perspective. And I know, Scott, your company has actually revisited your benefits. You are, again, dealing with employees and supporting them literally all over the world, and there's got to be a lot of different needs in there. How do you look at your benefit portfolio when it comes to supporting all of these different folks?

Scott: Yeah, great question. I quickly have to say, though, too, Carrie, thank you for what you shared because I think what's neat about this conversation is, Carrie, with just the scope and scale of your role, making that very approachable, because regardless of where your role is in the organization, those practices matter, and it just made them so approachable. I know for me, it's that learner's mindset, and knowing that we've all been there, we've had to learn, grow, make a mistake, tap into a coach, and keep growing, and so I love the practices you shared.

But I love this question, Dr. Friesen, because I do think that, right now, what we're seeing is that we have to go back and revisit what we're doing. The world is so dynamic, there's so many things pulling at us, and so when you think of it that way, there's disruption, and then also when you think, when you're running a global business, you have to meet employees where they are. And it gets really complicated when you get outside of, you know, for all of us that might be on this call US-based, you may be aware that when you get outside the globe, there's parts of the world where you can't talk about mental health. There are benefits and programs that we're not even allowed to put into a contract, based on the rules within a country. But how do you make a brave step?

Part of it comes through revisiting your programs that may support, globally, the fact that all leaders need resilience training. We have partners, like Rethink, that are helping us deliver that in countries where there aren't resources even available. So we're providing and stretching in resilience training. We're reaching out to support parents with children with developmental disabilities that have limited resources. Even in this topic of neurodiversity and becoming more inclusive organizations for our neurodiverse and neurodivergent professionals, we need support for the individual and for the managers. Managers need to approach conversations differently. So we've needed to support those resources.

And then the big one we're really driving to in a lot of countries is a bold conversation about women's health, supporting our organization with programs that support where they may need to step away, acknowledge and, again, key points in their career where they need to be supported through menopause, through unique needs in pelvic health, and other areas like that that we need to have just as open conversation in these other topics.

So the other things we've done is we've lifted limits on some of our programs to increase the access to mental health resources and mental fitness. So some of it's the acknowledgement, some of it is practically making the resources available.

And one bold story I'll share right now that affects global organizations is think about the Middle East conflict right now. We have amazing, wonderful employees that are on both sides of this topic right now, and we're having to move boldly into that conversation because what we're learning is we're not communicating perfectly about it, we're not reaching them equally. So we've gone in and we've revised programs, we've worked with all of our partners to expand both access to services, added time to volunteering and other programs. But I've really seen our leaders step in and engage those populations directly and listen and tune in and be willing to adjust and figure out how to support. So I think that's just been what's really critical.

And then one other thing we've recently done, kind of in the innovation space here, is we've just released a tool that, before, we were surveying maybe on, like, a quarterly basis in employee engagement, we've taken mental health tools and with a pilot population of about 12,000 people around the globe. We've dropped in some support tools that are in our daily tool for instant messaging and working with each other, that with one to two clicks, can tune into, how are you feeling today, and then match

resources and make it even quicker to reach resources. So just a few areas that we're trying to make a difference and an impact.

Deb: Thank you. So I'm hearing from all of you and many more, I'm sure, in the audience that have these amazing tools, all these resources that can help with mental health fitness, and sometimes the challenge isn't the benefits or the tools, it's actually making people aware.

We have probably five, six, seven, eight questions, Jacki, since you mentioned employee resource groups. There's a lot of interest about what those are and how they get set up, how do they help disseminate information? So if you wouldn't mind talking about your employee resource groups, one is about how do you do that across multiple locations, such as REI, as well? So help us understand the employee resource groups a little bit more, both formation and use, to disseminate information and support your employees.

Jacki: Absolutely, so we take a two-pronged approach when we think about employee resource, when we think about dissemination of information in general, particularly as it relates to benefit offerings.

One is a more collective, kind of group-oriented approach, and employee resource groups are a phenomenal tool there. And then, of course, the other one is more of a one-on-one approach and really leveraging our people leaders, and so I'll talk about both of those. When you think about standing up employee resource groups, they are a fairly, they're a common entity in large organizations, Fortune 500 companies, right, and even at REI, we're not a Fortune 500 company, but we are a large organization, you know, managing and leading teams across 200 physical spaces. And so a couple of things to think about, if your organization does not have employee resource groups today, if you are working in a large organization, it is important to identify, and you can utilize workforce data to understand, what are underrepresented populations in my workforce that likely would be seeking community and, without that outlet, retention will be a risk?

So at REI, we have five employee resource groups. We started with four, we added a fifth. It's really important to start small in this space so that you can leverage good, leverage for good impact. And so starting small and really getting targeted, and so that guidance would apply to large or small organizations, that will allow you to set up good working norms and governance and just some very actionable goals around what you would want employee resource groups to accomplish for you. And so, you know, if you're a small organization, I'd say focus on one essential need. Employee resource groups, they can educate, advocate, they can create community, but you don't have to do everything at once. And so if you are determining, in a smaller organization, that an employee resource group might help with things like recruitment strategies or in the case of what you've been talking about today, they can help to build community for safer conversations around mental health difficulties or things that are alarming in communities and folks want to come together. So there are resources available for organizations that are smaller, fewer than 50 employees, where you can connect with employee resource groups across multiple organizations and create that sense of

community collectively. So maybe it is more difficult just with you, but there are some great platforms that connect you to other small companies.

And then, of course, in a larger organization, really important that you utilize your workforce representation data to understand, where do I start here? What community of people, perhaps, am I not hearing from because representation is low, and how can I create space for them? I've seen a number of things pop up in the chat related to things like neurodivergent populations, and so there are some great resources available here that can be supported through employee resource groups to help disseminate what benefits are available today and make those more accessible to your employees. I love that Scott mentioned Rethink. We also utilize Rethink at REI, and their platform certainly supports a number of things related to differently abled people in the physical space, neurodivergent spaces. It also involves resources for parents and how to celebrate the holidays with families with special needs. How do you think about fostering executive function skills for folks that may need help filtering distractions and control impulses? And just candidly, that's probably a skill that we all could benefit from, regardless of whether or not we are, you know, diagnosed as neurodivergent because of the world that we live in today, so prone to distractions. And so they've got some really, really wonderful benefits available that, again, could scale across an organization, no matter what the size.

Some other benefits that we utilize and we utilize our employee resource groups to help with disseminating information are things like retirement and financial planning. One of the number one contributors to stress and overall, you know, difficulty with mental health is around financial wellness. And so in particular, with our women's employee resource group, offering those resources around career, financial, retirement planning, institutionally, those are not things that we, there are certain populations that felt like, "Gosh, I wasn't raised to talk about, how do I manage my own finances, how do I plan for retirement?" And so this can help to bridge some of that. Employee resource groups can help bridge some of the gap between that conversation that is really important and connecting those employees to benefits that exist today.

The other thing that I think is critical in this space, certainly employee resource groups or inclusion groups for a collective impact, but also equipping your people leaders with just great information around what benefits are available. I recall just a personal example, I have two amazing children, my daughter has Down syndrome, and so I had a lot of questions around how to navigate my leave, around how to navigate my child's medical care, and what resources were available to me to support that person, you know, my child's health wellbeing as they grew up. And my manager wasn't sure where to start. That was not their lived experience, they didn't know where to help. And so we have learned together over the years, but that has also helped to illuminate the importance of your managers even just having a very, like, a one-page suite of offerings in terms of the comprehensive benefits that any employee might want access to at a given time. And so making that information accessible so leaders can integrate that into one-on-one conversations, so that that can be easily integrated into new employee onboarding, that dialogue is consumable.

We host wellness checks with our employees so, of course, we have one-on-ones, performance conversations. Part of that touch base is also a wellness dialogue where

we are very intentional about, this month in our wellness conversations, here are five benefits that it's worthwhile to integrate. And that could be a financial planning webinar, that could be, we utilize a Quit For Life program, which is a smoking cessation program. Maybe you integrate that. It's not going to be a one-size-fits-all, but making sure your leaders, that they are also educated so that when their teams come to them, it's a trusted source of information, they have a good place to start.

Deb: And I love what you said about linking messages together because we're always feeling like we've got this barrage of information coming, how do we sort through it? What rises to the top? And some of it just doesn't rise if it's not applicable. Scott, you have some interesting ways that you have provided messaging to your employees as well. Can you give some examples of that?

Scott: Yeah, I think some of the powerful messaging, I would even tie back to what Jacki just shared, first of all, it's just really showing a lot of sponsorship for those inclusive communities, those EROs, ERGs are some of the different ways you've heard about it, and really showing that support for the organization and making sure we champion that.

Jacki, I just want to thank you for sharing, personally, about your own child. I know for me, I'm a member of our special children's network with having a spectrum child, and I've learned from them, and they are adding to. That additive side of those organizations goes well beyond what the organization can provide, and it actually creates a powerful synergy in the organization. There's a working together, if you will, when you cultivate those groups and incorporate them into the organization.

The other thing that I would say too, and I'll play a little bit off Carrie, what you shared about just the ongoing challenge of, is it work-life balance, or what would that look like? Because one of the things that we're really seeking to do is really have powerful messages that we sometimes have referred to in a strategy that our people leaders shared, we call our people deal, which is all of you at this organization, like Cisco, give so much to this organization, what should you expect back from us? And one of the things that I felt when I came into the organization is we put a value on the time available to our people. And I think when we talk about offerings, whether the organization is smaller or larger, one thing that is a gift today is time. It's precious, it seems fleeting, we're all trying to be productive. We actually need to come back to basics. Like, in our case, what we did is we took some strong stands on areas like volunteering. We've always had a strong amount of commitment there, but we locked in something we expanded through 2020 and '21 around what we call Time to Give. So we now provide, globally, two weeks of paid time for volunteering. And it was a bold play, but it was something where we just said, this is going to be good for the organization, it's going to be good for the community, but it's actually going to be good for our collective wellbeing and that sense of purpose and doing things together with others, whether it's on our own in a very personalized way or with others from our workplace.

We also take time to shut down, and we make a strong commitment to what we would almost call creating a collective quiet in the organization. And what's really interesting is there was another study, I'm going to cite another Oxford study, not that I'm, like, always to this, but I've loved these articles, that actually said, you know, a lot of the different offerings investments we make in some of the programs, the return on investment isn't

always as clear, but it really stands out that in volunteering and in time away from work, those programs continue to produce results and wellbeing and in our capacity to create mental fitness. And so that gift of time, connecting with others.

We've also gone on to add what we call Days For Me, four days per year, often set on a Monday, often when, like, kids are at school and so forth for those that have them, but we've just said, we're just going to quiet down the organization for that day, collectively. And those, we get consistent feedback that is so appreciated by employees, and I think a big part of this is we've got to be able to turn it off. And one fun thing that I know some people have done, I can't recall, Carrie, if you had touched on this, but you're seeing more playful out-of-office messages. It actually makes a difference when someone says, "I'm off with my child today," "I'm at the beach," "I'm on a trail." And so, "I'm sure your message is important, I'm going to get back to you." Being brave and bold about that, people will respect that. And so I'm seeing people explore that more, and we need to be able to support that. And again, one of the first place that comes into the climate creator on many teams is that leader. Have your people's back. Let them be off, cover for them. Put someone else in charge. Model it yourself. If you don't set the tone, no one's going to follow it. But this is one of the more powerful things we can be doing for our people.

Carrie: Yeah. Deb, do you mind if I just add on to that? I thought that, Scott,

Deb: Come on in.

Carrie: you're so right. And I have been doing that out of office, and I also, for those of you, and this is one thing you could absolutely do today is put on your email, if you're going to be out of the office, just say, also it'd be, I can't remember exactly how I phrased it, we could put it in the notes, but, "Please use email judiciously so it can help me manage my inbox upon my return." You know, do you really need to send the email to the person?

The other thing is have a thing at the bottom of my email saying, it's a wellbeing note. "I'm sending this email at a time that's convenient for me. Please do not expect that you need to respond immediately." Especially as being a leader within the organization, sometimes we create this expectation that, you know, when I happen to just finish dinner, between kids, doing something, and I send off an email at seven o'clock at night, I don't want anybody else to feel absolutely stressed out that they have to respond right away. That's not a good environment to have. So I always put that as a note too. So thanks for bringing that up, Scott.

Deb: I love that.

Scott: Thank you, Carrie.

Deb: Some questions in the chat that I want to get to, so some questions relating again to maybe selling this to senior leadership, that it's important, that this isn't just performative. How do you actually know that this is making a difference, that it's providing equitable access and solutioning for people? And then related to that, how do you reach people that kind of just come in, do their shift, and go home? They're not on computers, they're actually performing a task, maybe they're hourly. So how do you create that culture that is truly equitable? How do you get leadership buy-in, and how do you reach that frontline person? And Scott, I'm going to start with you because I suspect

that you have looked at measuring that impact for your senior leadership and have also thought about how you get this out to everybody worldwide.

Scott: Yeah, yeah, thank you, and that I'm pleased, you know, our organization has had a strong data-oriented view and has been collecting the data for a while, but the great thing that I think is helpful to all of us is some of this empirical data and studies that's coming out, when I shared, like, the change in the S&P, sustainability index, or the many, many studies in this space that are starting to really help us out. But I also think, you know, we just need to tap in and start reaching out more too. I shared an innovation that we're doing that's in our daily chat tool that we use WebEx at Cisco and this app that we have now that's supporting us, and we're actually using that to provide data to the individual. But actually, we're going to use this also to help continue to add to our story to leadership.

And what was great is in the partnership with Thrive Global that we've used for this app that we're using, we tapped into some other work they were doing, and they shared that AI and other resources are starting to help in some unique environments. And one example they shared is they've got a contact center application that's starting to monitor calls. And in an AI-based way, if it notices that the stress is high and the pressure is high in that contact center experience, it will more quickly prompt a break to that contact center representative. A very structured environment, we know, but it's going to use data to say, you could use a step away from the desk, you've had an abnormal amount of more difficult calls. That's the way we can also see technology and some technologies like AI that are driving a different conversation can help us actually bring the data back to say, we need to support people that are humans and that they are on the front line of care, but they may need themselves to be tuned in with to provide a little more space to make sure their energy mental fitness is at its best. So we're thrilled by that kind of innovation.

Deb: Jacki or Carrie, want to join in at all around influencing leadership and getting to the front line?

Carrie: Jacki, do you want to go first?

Jacki Sure, I'm happy to just provide a point of view on visibility for frontline employees because we have a, the largest part of our employee population are hourly, part-time, or what we consider part-time plus, folks working 32 hours or less. And so a couple of different approaches here are critical.

Certainly acknowledging, right, there are going to be people that come in, they want to do great work, and they want to go home for the day. A holding space for that type of employment experience is also a version of supporting mental wellness and not necessarily needing to impose a different type of expectation, right? That for some folks, that is a version of work-life balance.

But some of the things that we've talked about, which is that making sure your leaders are equipped with really just good information points so that as they have check-ins with those employees, they can provide great information. Also, taking a multi-pronged, both digital and analog, approach around the dissemination of information is very important.

There's data out there that shows that it takes 27 different communication points for someone to retain a message. And so when you think about sharing, you know, a benefit or an upcoming webinar or an event in a, you know, for an affinity group, all things that are really beneficial to build community and support mental health. Hourly employees in particular are going to need to receive that information, it's going to need to be accessible in lots of different forms. And so making sure you have an aligned communication point of view around, do we have a poster that we can put right over the time clock in a break room? Do we have an employee app? You know, of course, some of the traditional mechanisms, like quick Microsoft Teams posts or email, et cetera, some of these things are available, but really just aligning on having a similar message that is going to just build that sense of importance for an employee, so it's not a quick flash. Over time, as folks get enough a consistent message from their leader, from that poster, from someone telling them in new employee orientation, "Hey, here's where you can go outside and take a walk on your break," or "Here is a place that you can find that is quiet where you can eat your lunch," that will continue to reinforce this culture that you believe that mental fitness is really important in your workforce.

Deb: Awesome, thank you. Carrie, what would you share?

Carrie: Yeah, I would just add, 'cause there's a, I mean, I think you guys covered so much of it, but I love, Jacki, your point about communicate, communicate, communicate, do it multiple different ways. One of the things we started during the pandemic was both video, and then we did a podcast, and we launched a podcast called "Live Well and Thrive." It's available to anybody, whether you're in KP or not, so if you want to look at it on Apple, but it was something that we heard from the frontline caregivers that they wanted something to listen to, and they didn't just want to hear from me or a top-down type message. They wanted to hear from their peers and from experts outside the organization talking about wellbeing.

So we launched a series, and we do it every two weeks or so, but we've hit on grief, and we've hit on resiliency, and we've hit on death, and a lot of good fun stuff at the same time too, so it's not all downers. But it's, you know, quick 15 minutes, but for our front line, that has been one of the most, I think, well received ones that we've gotten some feedback on. So keep trying different things. That's how continuous improvement really works. Different audiences, different people, keep the conversation going.

Deb: Love that. This has been a fabulous conversation. I'm going to give you each a chance, though, to think about what one piece of advice, if you could only give one, that people would walk away with, one piece of advice or recommendation for them to take away today. And I'm going to go in order, Carrie, Scott and Jacki. So Carrie, what piece of advice would you give?

Carrie: The pressure, the pressure. I would say use the old adage of you have to put your oxygen mask on first before you can put it on somebody else that you love and care about. You cannot pour from an empty cup. So please take care of yourself health-wise, physically, and mentally. So get your mammogram, get your fit testing, do the things that are right for you, and then you can take care of others.

Deb: Love that. Scott?

Scott: You know, recently, I was at a conference that was talking about what we need, especially in the age of AI. And what they came back to is, now more than ever, we all need deeply human leaders, deeply human connections, and that's actually going to be the differentiator, 'cause AI could perpetuate all kinds of things at speed, it's going to help and change our lives, but what we need more than ever as people is deeply human and authentic connection. And so I'll just say that I've seen this model well with our leaders in our organization, I think it really has contributed to Cisco's best-place-to-work stature, authentic conversation, bold sharing about mental health, physical health challenges, wins, losses, changes. Straight talk and just being with people matters more than ever.

One of the greatest gifts, I know I recently posted something even on LinkedIn to say, I need to double down on really deep listening, I need to listen with empathy, and I need to really check in with other people's perspectives. And it's just something I want to continue to unleash, and it's going to require some self-discipline, but it's rooted in caring for one another. And look, we've all known for some time, a lot of us are in that business organizational performance through our people. This is about performance and results. You got to be with people, starts with the next conversation we have after this meeting.

Deb: Love that, reminds me of a phrase I heard during the pandemic, continuous partial attention. And we need to move to at least episodic total attention to find that listening, I think. Jacki, what would you recommend, or what piece of advice would you give?

Jacki: I think the only thing I would add here is to really think about both the benefits that you offer as an employer to support this conversation around mental fitness. And does your culture enable that conversation? If I never shared with my team, "Gosh, you all, the kids were up late last night, I'm tired this morning, be patient with me today," if I've never shared that, if that's not a cultural norm as a leader, that you could never expect that your employees will reciprocate that sharing. So some of it is around making sure the culture enables these types of conversations, making sure your suite of benefits has something that is ready for your employees and that your communication methods support, and that will also help with buy-in around senior leaders.

The quickest way to shut down a program is if employees do not engage in it. But if there is regular engagement, if you're seeing clicks, if you're seeing participation, if you're seeing people reference it, that is a great way to have great data points to showcase that this is a meaningful benefit to our employees. So thinking about if I put up a poster for, you know, an inclusion group conversation for my Black or African American employees, when there's no QR code on it, I could not have expected people to actually be able to dial in for an hourly workforce, right? You have to set up the resource, enable the culture, and then make sure that people can access it in a way that works for them.

Deb: I want to thank you all for such an insightful conversation. I learned a lot of things, and I think the biggest thing is really about bringing our whole selves to our workplace, creating community, and that's how we actually drive engagement, which drives the bottom line as well. And thank you to everyone that joined today. I hope that you found

this conversation to be valuable. If you'd like to listen again or share with others, it was recorded, and it'll be shared via email in the next week.

Please join us in August for our next webinar. We're going to be having an important discussion about optimizing workforce and business performance by addressing musculoskeletal health.

And finally, we'd really appreciate it if you take just a minute to complete our short-five question survey that's going to appear on your screen right after this. Thank you again for attending today, and I hope that you will join us again.

End of: Health Views Webinar – Building a Mindset of Mental Fitness in Your Workforce

Video Duration: 1:00:51