

WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

Tips for Sharing Your Story



As a leader within your organization, you have the power to set your company's tone of compassion and caring for employees experiencing mental health challenges. In Ginger's **2021 Annual Mental Health Report**, an overwhelming majority of CEOs (96%) reported that they had personally received mental health support over the past year.

Sharing your own story can offer profound benefits to your workforce by:

- **Combating stigma**
- **Normalizing mental health challenges**
- **Empowering employees to seek help**

Nine out of 10 employees appreciate when their leaders share stories of seeking support. And, a majority of CEOs agreed that talking about their own mental health challenges made them feel like a better leader.

You can share your own journey with mental health challenges like anxiety or depression, or share how a family member or loved one's mental health journey may have impacted you. (Remember to be sensitive about identifying details if sharing a story about a friend or family member—you should ask permission before sharing aspects of another person's experiences).

If you're ready to share—and it's okay if you aren't—find a messaging outlet that feels safe, and follow the tips below.

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

- 1. Identify your goals in story-sharing.** What message do you want employees to take away from your story? Are you trying to overcome workplace stigma by normalizing experiences? Are you asking employees to check in with each other or to ask for help? Are you encouraging balance and flexibility for your organization? Identifying your goal in advance can help you build a successful narrative that leads to your desired outcome.

CRAFT YOUR STORY

- 2. Share your journey.** What is your unique experience with mental health? While your journey may include moments of struggle or crisis, an effective story also homes in on moments of positive change to inspire hope. Consider the following outline to build your story:

- Describe the challenges you were experiencing. Keep this part of your story brief and light on detail.
- Share how stigma impacted your mental health journey and what helped you overcome it.
- Talk about the moment when you asked for help and how it felt after you got the support you needed. Share examples of effective intervention or treatment efforts.
- Offer positive coping strategies you've learned and how you use them.
- Share how you are doing now and what you do to take care of your mental health going forward.

- 3. Connect your story to organizational action.** How did your story personally inspire you to care about workplace mental health for your employees? Share with your employees the culture you aspire to see at your organization and what actions you are taking as an employer to help make this vision a reality. This is a critical moment to share the resources available at your organization and a powerful opportunity to announce new company action to improve workplace mental health.

- 4. Share an employee call to action.** Make the audience the hero of your story. How can your employees make a difference moving forward? Inspire them to create change within your organization by prioritizing self-care, having open conversations about mental health and checking in with one another. End with a call to action, such as:

- Recognize warning signs of a mental health crisis and check in.
- Sign up for a training offered by your company.

- Ask for help when you need it.
- Use our company resources.
- Take steps to prioritize your mental health at work.

USE SAFE MESSAGING TO EMPOWER ACTION

5. Use safe, inclusive language. Your story should normalize mental health struggles without glorifying unsafe or unhealthy behaviors. **Unsafe messages** include:

- Graphic or overly personal details about harmful behaviors such as the method or location of a suicide attempt, sharing suicide letters or specific details about disordered eating habits or substance use.
- Portraying dangerous or harmful behaviors as common or acceptable.
- Messaging that villainizes or blames others for suicide, addiction or self-harm.
- Language that conveys that someone experiencing mental health challenges is “selfish” or that their actions are a “betrayal.”
- Suggesting that treatment doesn’t work or should be avoided.
- Simplistic explanations for mental health challenges and harmful behaviors.
- Conveying that mental health issues happen “out of nowhere.”
- Stereotyping specific groups as responsible for, or a primary source of, specific mental health behaviors.

6. Educate about warning signs and effective intervention strategies.

Your story is an opportunity to educate your audience. Consider what type of mental health challenge(s) you are presenting and weave in opportunities to share key warning signs for specific mental health crises. When you are sharing stories of positive intervention or treatment, emphasize data or research that backs the efficacy of these actions.

Common symptoms people may experience as a result of a mental health challenge include:

- Signs of fatigue or exhaustion
- Lack of focus, concentration, or motivation
- Loss of appetite or sudden changes in weight
- Irritability
- Withdrawal
- Reduced productivity or increased mistakes on the job
- Breakdown of routines or workplace systems

Warning signs that point to urgent mental distress—including talk of **suicide**, warning signs of **alcohol or drug misuse**, signs of **disordered eating** or signs of **domestic misuse**—may signal the need for a more serious crisis intervention.

PREPARE FOR FOLLOW UP

7. Know that your employees may reach out. Be prepared to continue the conversation with your employees after you make your story known. Your employees may want to thank you, check in on how you are doing or even share their own story with you. Use these moments to:

- Share appreciation for employees who check in and participate in your organization's culture of caring.
- Ask for feedback and ensure your employees are connected with the right support or treatment resources.
- Expand on opportunities to connect with your employees about workplace stressors that may be impacting their mental health.

Remember, it's also okay to establish boundaries for continuing the conversation about your own story. Personal disclosures can be emotionally taxing, and it's okay to take breaks.

8. Have resources ready. Know what your company offers to support employee mental health and be prepared to share. Consider having educational materials on hand that promote your company's resources, along with community and national support services. If you believe any employee is in crisis, you should be ready to connect that individual to a trained, 24/7 crisis counselor below.

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES IN CRISIS

The **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** offers 24-hour, toll-free, confidential support for people in distress.

Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or text TALK to 741741

Spanish: 1-888-628-9454

TTY: 1-800-799-4889

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

The **SAMHSA National Helpline** is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

Call 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

TTY: 1-800-487-4889

Online Treatment Locator

ADDITIONAL TOOLS & RESOURCES

- **American Psychological Association**
Inclusive Language Guidelines
- **Health Action Alliance**
Workplace Mental Health Playbook
- **National Association on Mental Illness**
Seven Steps to Telling Your Story
- **National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention**
Framework for Successful Messaging
- **TED**
Nancy Duarte: *The Secret Structure of Great Talks*

HEALTH ACTION ALLIANCE ORGANIZING PARTNERS

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