

## Putting the Humanity Back in Human Resources

*By Jean Nam*

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Most businesses recognize that their people are their greatest asset. Without the people who do the work of the business, there is no business.

Increasingly, businesses also recognize the value of caring for those people and elevating their health and wellness as a core investment. Not because it's a "nice thing to do" – it's good business with a proven ROI.

That said, effective human resource programs must be authentic to the company culture and applied as a human investment, not just as a business expense. As companies everywhere are rethinking how and where they conduct business, they are also rethinking how to deliver meaningful benefits that prioritize the health and wellness of their people to demonstrate they are valued.

Even small and mid-sized companies are seizing opportunities to rethink their approach to caring for their people.

Sometimes, these are small gestures – like providing employees PTO days for wellness appointments. Other times, it is about making human health – in all its forms – a clear and defined priority. At PPM, that includes making the conscious decision to normalize caring for physical well-being and mental health as well.

Increasing access to and normalizing mental health is incredibly powerful yet not common in business.

In our firm, we offer the traditional EAP services that are standard with most business benefit packages, and also provide open office discussions for people to connect. On Thursdays, a therapist attends our virtual company meeting to discuss issues, such as the anxiety, that may be heightened for many in these uncertain times.

Too often, businesses look only at the physical well-being of employees. And yes, that is important. But the mental and emotional well-being of people is equally important. It is what

makes us human. We are seeing that now more than ever and are working to deliver support tools to reduce stress for individual employees.

## **Practical Steps for Mental Health**

Making tangible investments in mental health starts with small decisions that demonstrate a simple fact for employees: you are valued.

For example, we recognize that not everyone has an environment conducive to productivity while working from home. So, we provided a home office stipend to help employees create a workspace to make working from home more enjoyable. This may include ergonomic chairs, keyboards, or dual monitors.

What does a chair have to do with mental health?

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On its own, not a lot. But in context it shows that we care and value our people and want them to feel supported during their transition into a work-from-home reality. It’s a small investment with big impact.

Even with a relatively well-equipped home office, there are other realities of working from home that aren’t a part of a traditional office environment. Namely, caring for children or adult dependents. Because there is no one-size fits all solution, reimbursement for care that works for our employees has helped mitigate some of the stress that comes with caring for others. By helping employees care for others, we are caring for them. It’s about reducing stress and enhancing quality of life.

The real impact of small investments isn’t just about the practical productivity. It’s about making sure employees know they are valued – as people and as workers. They are seen as individuals with unique, individual needs and as their workplace we are invested in them as individuals.

Because if people don’t feel valued, it’s a sure first step to an unraveling culture that negatively impacts morale, productivity and yes, the bottom line.

## The Evolution of Human Resources

It used to be that HR was the place you went when you got in trouble or were getting fired. Being sent to human resources was the equivalent of being sent to the principal's office. Today, HR has evolved to embrace the HUMAN aspect of its role in business. Most HR professionals I know consider their company employees as their clients. Serving with empathy and compassion goes a long way in building relationships that can allow for individualized opportunities to develop programs that serve the unique needs of people. It's not always possible to implement every good idea aimed at serving employees. But starting with relationships and transparency provides a platform for building trust. And with that trust, people can feel heard and valued. And really, that's what humanity is all about.

### **About Jean**

*Jean Nam has more than 10 years of experience in human resources and has led human resources at PPM since 2018. Jean loves to travel with an adventurous palette and while she claims she cannot sing, she finds great joy in theater and musicals. Jean can be reached at*



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