

On the Agenda



Facilitator's Guide

Overview

Introduction

This overview manual is designed to assist in using the *On the Agenda* series of PowerPoint™ presentations which engage employees in discussions about improving workplace mental health.

In addition to this overview, there are 13 specific manuals related to the 13 presentation discussions. Each discussion is related to one of these workplace psychosocial factors:

1. Psychological Support
2. Organizational Culture
3. Clear Leadership & Expectations
4. Civility & Respect
5. Psychological Competencies & Requirements
6. Growth & Development
7. Recognition & Reward
8. Involvement & Influence
9. Workload Management
10. Engagement
11. Balance
12. Psychological Protection
13. Protection of Physical Safety

These discussions are intended to lead to practical strategies to address workplace factors that impact employee psychological health and safety. *On the Agenda* can be used as a supplemental resource to *Guarding Minds @ Work™* after the survey or audit has been completed, or on its own if you wish to address workplace mental health in general. These sessions can be part of team building, organizational improvement, managing change, opening up conversations about workplace issues, or part of a continual improvement process.

What Guarding Minds @ Work offers

What *Guarding Minds @ Work* (GM@W) offers is a way to zero in on the areas that indicate a risk to psychological safety or mental health in your workplace.

GM@W is a set of resources for employers to assess and address the 13 psychosocial factors that have been found to have an important impact on workplace psychological health and safety, the health of employees, and the organizational bottom line.

GM@W can be used as a survey or audit tool for your organization to measure the psychological health and safety of your workplace, determine areas for needed improvement and develop action plans and strategies to improve and maintain the overall psychological health of your organization. The advantage of using GM@W is that you are able to identify specific areas that present significant risk to the psychological health and safety of your staff. But *On the Agenda* can also be a starting point for those not yet ready to implement the full GM@W program.

Using the manuals

Each manual will walk you through one of the 13 presentations of *On the Agenda* and will give you suggestions on how to facilitate a discussion with your employees. For each session, the manuals provide suggestions on how to:

- Introduce the topic
- Engage your audiences
- Discuss the options
- Keep the strategies reasonable
- Develop a plan of action

They also include information directly from *GM@W* that provides you with background information as well as valuable ideas and strategies. You may end up doing just one or you may wish to go through all 13. One way to begin is with the Introduction to help your employees understand the intent of the process. From there you can choose from among the remaining 13 according to your needs.

Dealing with challenges

We know that facilitation can be challenging, particularly when the content you are presenting can make for some sticky and difficult conversations. At the end of this guide we provide you with some tips and strategies for addressing different reactions (negativity, unrealistic expectations, lack of participation) with the learning material; as well as information on how to facilitate engaging and successful discussions.

For each session, this manual provides suggestions on how to introduce the topic, how to engage your audience (your fellow employees), and how to follow up to ensure your audience absorbed the material.

Congratulations on choosing to put workplace mental health on your agenda!

On the Agenda

Dealing with Challenges

You've decided to put mental health *On the Agenda* at your workplace....

Now what?

First of all, congratulations! By committing yourself to putting psychological health and safety *On the Agenda* at your workplace, you are helping to foster a healthier workplace and prevent psychological harm. You recognize that employees will experience mental health issues such as depression, stress, and anxiety, but can be supported to weather these times and continue to lead productive lives and contribute to our workforce. Moreover, you have the ability to minimize some of these workplace processes that can exacerbate stress and mental health problems; and finally, you can personally provide your employees with a role model for addressing workplace wellness.

Having made the commitment to facilitate *On the Agenda*, this section of the supervisor's manual is intended to help you communicate your information in an engaging and meaningful manner. We recognize that facilitation is not something that comes easily for everybody. So, we offer some tips and strategies to help you out.

Here are a few things for you to consider when facilitating:

- **A hands-on experience:** It is important to remember, that most people learn better by doing than by being told what to do. And if, for safety or other reasons, having the participants do the activity themselves isn't possible, go for the next-best option – demonstrate.
- **Being Heard:** While you are the person facilitating, it is important to let others have the floor as well. Ask a lot of questions and seek to ensure that the audience is hearing what you are saying. More importantly, make sure that you're listening – and that your audience sees that you're listening – by restating the question, answer or idea that is said by employees in the audience in your own words. Be sure to ask the audience (or whoever made a comment) if you understood their words correctly. If they say no, invite them to restate their question or comment. Remember that when nervous, we may not say what we mean to say the first time – give the participant the option of revising his or her words.
- **Relevance:** We all learn best when we feel the subject is relevant to us. Find ways of making connections between the topic you are presenting and your employees' lives. For example, highlighting that we all have days or periods in our lives where we feel distressed or are going through something difficult maybe something to remind your employees. This maybe helpful for them when they are thinking about working with someone who is distressed, as they can think about how they might be in that employee's shoes at some time in their life.
- **Opportunities to succeed:** In designing and implementing your group activities and asking questions, try to include everyone in the group. Help each employee get the opportunity to practice a concept, add to the discussion, or get an activity right and give them reinforcement for a job well done. If an employee struggles with an activity let them know any positive that was displayed in their behaviour and then try giving a suggestion. Try sandwiching constructive criticism in the form of a suggested alternative between praise for effort, ideas, creativity or participation.
- **Simple language:** You starting to get a grasp of the mental health language in the workplace, but to other employees who haven't had any exposure to these concepts, this language can sound like jargon and create barriers to understanding. Avoid using overly technical terms and, when you can't avoid them, make sure you define them in a way that the 'new minds' can grasp.

On the Agenda

Some other tips for success:

- **Unrealistic expectations:** All organizations must meet certain business objectives in order to remain viable. Unemployment results when organizations are no longer viable. Unemployment is not good for mental health. So when working on strategies that may have a positive effect on psychological health and safety, we must also take into account how those strategies impact the viability of the organization. Do they support people to do good work or impede them? By setting the parameters up front in terms of the resources and time available for the strategies you are developing, you help manage expectations. Many of the evidence-based strategies recommended cost little more than the time to agree to adopt them. They involve a commitment to interacting in a healthier way or to adjusting a process slightly with no change in outcomes. When faced with a request for something that is not possible due to cost, you might say, “What is the ultimate objective of this idea?” and when that is established, to ask “How could we do this within our budget?” Often if we get to the underlying need or objective, we can brainstorm alternative strategies.
- **Negativity or cynicism:** If your organization has had problems in the past it may be that your employees have a hard time believing that involvement in this process will result in a significant or lasting improvement. If you are aware of this, it could be best to acknowledge this feeling up front and ask for agreement that in spite of what has gone before, your group wants something different for their work experience. If you can accept responsibility for what has not been perfect in the past (even if it was not all your fault) and sincerely state your desire to change things in the future, you may find you soften the resistance. When someone presents a negative statement, you may want to ask, “How could we do that differently?”, “What would you think might work better?”, “How can we do this in a healthier way?”
- **Know your audience:** This can be as simple as getting a list of names and setting up a seating plan so you can address each employee by name. Even better, find out from the employees before your presentation how they learn best, their likes and dislikes and any particular challenges they present. And make sure your audience knows you – write your name on the blackboard or somewhere equally visible. A good idea is always to complete an ice-breaker activity. Ideas for ice-breaking activities can be found online.
- **Show your interest in the topic:** Your employees will know if you’re interested, or whether you are just going through the motions. And if they sense you’re just going through the motions, they won’t even bother doing that much.
- **Stay focused:** You’re not going to cover the entire issue of workplace psychological health and safety in your presentation, and it wouldn’t be a good idea to even try. The point of the putting mental health *On the Agenda* is to do just that – get it on the agenda and get people talking.
- **Keep an eye on the clock:** Employees will leave for their break time whether you are finished or not. Be ready to cut something if your presentation ends up taking longer than you planned. Conversely, everything could go so smoothly that you are left with extra time. Have something in your back pocket that you can use to extend their learning – and the time – if it’s needed.

What if I can't answer their questions?

Relax! –That's okay! Admitting you don't know something and discussing how you might go about finding the answer can be an important lesson for your employees. And if you promise to find the answer and get back to them – make sure you do! Even if you still can't find the answer, passing their question along to someone who might know the answer is better than doing nothing. Let the employee know that you have or have not found what they are looking for and if that is the case, who you passed their question along to and how they can follow up. An alternative approach is to assign finding the answer to one of the employees in your group and have them present it when you next meet as a group.

What if I make a mistake?

One innovative organization actually holds monthly mistake meetings. The meeting begins with the leader talking about the biggest mistakes he or she has made in the past month and what they did or are doing to fix the problem. Each team member then takes their turn, following the same format. The rationale behind this process is that when the leader is assumed to never make a mistake, employees are more likely to hide their mistakes. This can lead to problems being hidden or made worse by not being addressed early on. By making mistakes a part of everyone's experience, you also share solutions and strategies to overcome challenges on a regular basis. So...if you make a mistake, use it as an opportunity to engage your staff in a conversation about the many ways we can fix our mistakes.

So if you are ready to begin, choose the specific *On the Agenda* presentation and the related manual to review. You can download them both from www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/ota. When you feel comfortable with the material, call your team together and let them know that you can put workplace psychological health and safety *On the Agenda*. Remember that the process of bringing your team together is the first step to a psychologically healthy and safe workplace. The next step is engaging them in developing solutions that are cost effective and result in improved productivity. The process can be as important as the outcome!