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Imagine what it would be like working in an organization where everyone takes responsibility for the wellbeing of themselves and others. Some of you may be thinking *What a great place to work!* Others may be thinking *Not in the real world!*

The current focus of many organizations on employee well-being is characterized by wellness programs, employee assistance programs, or other programs put in place to support employees with issues that are affecting their wellbeing. While there is evidence that such programs have a positive effect on employees and provide some return on investment, the emphasis on organizational responsibility rather than individual responsibility for employee wellbeing, creates a culture which overlooks the impact of individual interactions on employee wellbeing at work.

An employee's experience at work generally falls somewhere along a scale of feeling nurtured and supported, to feeling exploited and alienated. People who feel nurtured and psychologically well perform better than those who feel exploited. While employees may be aware of, and appreciative of support programs which they can turn to if needed, their presence does little to impact the employee experience of work on a day-to-day basis. It's the daily interactions between colleagues, supervisors and managers which tend to determine where on the scale an employee's experience falls. Consider your own experiences at work and the factors that have contributed to positive feelings about your work place.

So what can be done to shift the balance of employee experience to 'nurtured and supported', and subsequently improve employee performance and engagement?

Essentially, asking the right questions can have a dramatic difference on an employee's experience at work. Consider for a moment your typical line manager, supervising a group of employees. There is likely to be a performance management plan in place which involves regular meetings between each employee and the line manager. This one-to-one format is an ideal setting to establish or reinforce the message that the employee is supported and appreciated at work. The agenda typically includes a review of expectations and related performance, and setting expectations or goals for the next period. There may also be discussions about potential changes on the horizon or updates on situations in the workplace. The missing piece is often **attentiveness** - considering the thoughts and feelings of the person you are talking to, and genuinely listening to and acknowledging their thoughts and feelings. Managers tend to find attentiveness difficult as they are often more concerned about putting their point across rather than considering the thoughts and feelings of the employee(s) they are talking to. Or they may be hesitant about conversations which invite a more personal level of interaction in the workplace, and are worried about what the employee may say and how to deal with that. However; taking the time to ask how an employee is doing, or feeling, or coping; asking what the employee's personal or professional goals are and if they can help or support the employee in anyway; or listening to an employee's concerns or frustrations at work, can lay the foundation for a more nurturing environment and reduce feelings of exploitation.



Small steps such as this to build trust, commitment and a nurturing environment can positively change an employee's experience at work, and ultimately their feeling of wellbeing. When was the last time you took individual responsibility for a colleague's wellbeing in the workplace? It's a powerful way to make a difference to your work place, but as simple as asking the right questions.