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Creating Opportunities for Connection

Loneliness is no longer just a public health concern — it is an emerging business risk.

In 2023, former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy identified loneliness as a national epidemic.

Today, the World Health Organization estimates that [approximately one in six adults worldwide experiences significant loneliness.](#)

For working adults, the workplace is one of the primary social environments where connection is either reinforced or lost.

Why Does This Matter to HR Leaders?

Workplace loneliness is not simply about being alone. It reflects a perceived gap between desired and actual connection. It's the feeling of being unseen, unheard, or disconnected, even while surrounded by colleagues. Employees can feel isolated even in busy, high-performing teams.

Research shows workplace loneliness is associated with:

- Emotional exhaustion and psychological distress
- Reduced engagement and discretionary effort
- Lower productivity and impaired focus
- Reduced creativity
- Higher absenteeism
- Increased counterproductive behaviors
- Lower organizational commitment

Employees who feel isolated are less likely to contribute ideas, pursue advancement, or build strong peer relationships. The impact compounds quietly.

For organizations, the impact includes diminished cultural strength, uneven performance, and increased risk of turnover.

What's Driving the Disconnect?

Modern work environments often emphasize speed, output, and constant availability. Without intentional structures that foster belonging, even high-performing workplaces can unintentionally contribute to isolation.

In some cases, loneliness stems from team dynamics or personality differences. More often, it develops gradually when employees feel overlooked or undervalued. And unlike burnout, loneliness can be harder to spot.

How Can HR Respond?

Addressing workplace loneliness requires more than planning social events. It calls for intentional structure.

- **Measure what you can't see.**
Pulse surveys can include questions about belonging, connection, and feeling valued. Tools like loneliness scales or engagement diagnostics help identify trends early.
- **Design for daily interaction.**
Connection shouldn't rely on quarterly gatherings. Build small, consistent touchpoints into the workweek—team check-ins, cross-functional collaborations, shared problem-solving sessions.
- **Equip managers to notice the signs.**
Withdrawal from meetings, reduced participation, and minimal peer interaction can be subtle indicators. Manager training should include recognizing and responding to social isolation.
- **Make mentorship the norm, not the exception.**
Formal mentorship or peer partnerships can provide built-in connection points, particularly for newer employees or those in remote roles.
- **Normalize conversations about belonging.**
Employees are more likely to speak up when leaders model openness. Encouraging dialogue around inclusion and connection strengthens psychological safety.

Rethinking Connection at Work

Workplace loneliness is measurable, manageable, and preventable when addressed intentionally. Organizations that prioritize connection are not only supporting employee well-being — they are strengthening engagement, innovation, and long-term resilience.

Connection is no longer a “soft” benefit. It is a strategic business imperative.

Book Review | Reconnecting in a Remote Workplace

In [*Connection and Disconnection in Remote Teams: Tackling Loneliness Together at Work*](#), Bree Caggiati and Pilar Orti explore a pressing but often underexamined reality of modern work: the paradox of feeling disconnected in a world of constant digital communication.

As remote and hybrid work have become embedded in organizational life—particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic—the conversation has largely focused on productivity, flexibility, and tools. This book shifts the spotlight to something more fundamental: human connection. It asks not just whether people can work remotely, but whether they can truly *belong*.

Book Highlights

One of the book’s most refreshing contributions is its refusal to blame remote work itself for loneliness. Instead, the authors argue that context matters more than location. Organizational culture, leadership styles, workflow design, and communication norms shape disconnection.

Remote work can expose existing fractures—but it can also create opportunities for more intentional connection.

The authors avoid placing the burden solely on individuals to “reach out more” or on managers to “be more empathetic.” Instead, they show that connection is an ecosystem issue.

Loneliness is not treated as a soft or secondary concern. The book connects chronic disconnection to decreased wellbeing, lower engagement, reduced productivity, and increased turnover.

Rather than celebrating collaboration tools and AI uncritically, the book asks whether technology supports meaningful interaction or simply increases noise. Digital platforms can enable inclusion and flexibility, but they can also fragment attention and create superficial exchanges if poorly implemented.

A Key Takeaway

Connection at work doesn’t happen automatically—especially in remote environments. It must be intentionally designed, supported, and shared as a responsibility across the organization.

Loneliness is not simply about where we work, but about how work is structured, led, and experienced. Organizations that treat connection as infrastructure—not an afterthought—are better positioned to build resilient, engaged, and healthy teams.

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