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our **perspectives**

Mindful Meetings: Prioritizing Mental Health at Your Event is a Necessity

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While May brings Mental Health Awareness Month, your association can (and should) support the mental health needs of your members and industry year-round.

Recent research has sounded the alarm: **90% of the public think there is a mental health crisis in the United States today**, with half of young adults and one-third of young adults reporting that they have felt anxious either always or often in the past year. There are also challenges to getting help, as **more than half of the 28 million U.S. adults with a mental illness are not receiving the mental health care they need**. This comes at a real cost, with the **National Alliance on Mental Illness** estimating \$300 billion per year in our country alone sacrificed to lost productivity.

Raising stress levels, anxiety, and burnout are rampant. Approximately **80% of employees experience stress**, while only 41% of employees believe their companies genuinely care about their well-being. Additionally, **52% of employees reported feeling burned out** in the past year because of their job, and 37% reported feeling so overwhelmed it made it difficult to do their job.

In a world where mental health is increasingly at risk, your association can proactively prioritize the well-being of members by designing events with mental health and wellness in mind. Here are five ideas that can positively impact mental health at your next event.

Setting intentions

Encourage attendees to reflect on what they hope to achieve, contribute, or learn to create clarity, purpose, and a sense of direction. Ask attendees to take a moment to connect their professional goals with their personal intentions. Build a caring and inclusive environment where people feel comfortable sharing intentions, seeking feedback, and supporting each other in achieving their goals.

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Wellness spaces

Events can be overwhelming, and having a space to recharge, meditate, or pray can help attendees decompress. Consider setting up a designated wellness space at your next event. A quiet, screen-free space with natural lighting, comfortable seating, and even plants or yoga mats gives attendees the option to step away without missing valuable content.

These spaces provide a place where attendees can connect with each other in a serene and casual environment. Whether through shared activities or conversations, these interactions can help build supportive relationships and a sense of belonging, which are essential for mental health.

Your association can also provide resources and information on self-care practices, mental health resources, and strategies for well-being. This empowers attendees to prioritize their mental health and provides them with tools they can continue to use long after the event has ended.

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Thoughtful programming

Incorporate wellness activities so people with similar needs or interests can network in a relaxed setting at your event. Consider an early morning or late afternoon yoga session, chair massages, or guided meditation.

Provide opportunities to normalize conversations around well-being and mental health by including workshops, panels, or talks in your agenda. Create safe spaces where people can engage in discussions about mental health without fear of judgement.

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Mindful movement

Exercise improves self-esteem and cognitive function while reducing anxiety, depression, and negative emotions. In fact, among those who exercise, the number of poor mental health days has been shown to **drop by more than 40%**.

When selecting an event location, choose facilities that offer a fitness center or pool. Venues near parks, beaches, or bike and walking paths also provide options to exercise or enjoy the outdoors.

You can also consider scheduling regular wellness breaks where attendees can participate in brief physical activities, such as stretching, yoga, or tai chi to recharge and focus. Incorporate a neighborhood walk or group hike to help attendees reconnect with nature and experience more of the local area outside convention walls.

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Fueling success

Nutrient-rich foods can improve the ability to focus, while preservatives and additives may increase hyperactivity and depression. Minimize or avoid highly processed foods, sugary snacks, and unhealthy beverages. Instead, set everyone up for success with options that include fresh fruits and vegetables, fiber, nuts, foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, and hydration stations. Accommodate attendee dietary restrictions and offer vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, or dairy-free options. Label menu items clearly to help attendees make informed choices.

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By incorporating thoughtful practices into event planning, leaders can create environments that enhance mental wellness for members. Doing so will help ensure your association gatherings are more than just professional milestones – they are sanctuaries of support and resilience.

Annie Davidson is a Corporate Marketing Manager at Smithbucklin. Annie helps to oversee all internal communications for Smithbucklin employees and specializes in developing DEI-focused communications plans.

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