GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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I Thought Mental Health Days Were Ridiculous … Until I Needed One

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I figured it was coming, but when it finally happened to me I was surprised by my reaction. Text from an employee: “Hey taking a mental health day C U tomorrow.”

You probably already have an opinion on “mental health days” and I don’t imagine you want me to change your mind. But I want to explain why I changed mine.

I come from the school of tough love, where the only proper response is “Suck it up and do your best.” You think you have problems? Well, so does everybody else who’s ever walked this planet. The answer isn’t to coddle yourself; what you need is a kick in the backside. Grit is the best predictor of success.

Last week, I read an article that claimed “Gen Z and young Millennial workers are missing the equivalent of one day’s work every week due to mental health concerns.” This is a real and looming crisis—a cratering of confidence. How do we explain this? How do we prepare for this? How do we manage this?

Maybe just don’t hire people who talk about “mental health days”?

I don’t believe jobs are more stressful today than they were yesterday. If anything, they’re getting a lot easier, but also less personal, less tangible, less touchable. Maybe solving abstract problems doesn’t allow you to resolve the stress? Data entry leaves you drained; pulling weeds is therapeutic. “Wanna see how I improve the world?” Yank!

What’s all the fuss about stress and anxiety? There are only two possible options. The problem that’s causing you anxiety is either a real problem or it’s simply imaginary. You either need to solve it or you need to forget about it. The act of worrying doesn’t help you solve problems or forget about them, so don’t do it.

As a business owner, it’s honestly difficult to take complaints about stress and anxiety seriously, especially in the green industry. Have you seen the plants lately? You’ve got “horticultural therapy” every single workday! And listen—if an entry-level position stresses you out, what hope is there you’ll ever be able to advance your career?

Easy for me to say! I’ve been blessed. My faith, family and farm have kept me tethered, loved and well-rooted. I can’t take much credit for that; I can only be grateful. I’ve never suffered from depression or anxiety. I’m a bit like Alfred E. Neuman. My motto could be, “What, me worry?”

So I thought “mental health days” were ridiculous nonsense … until I suddenly needed one.

I can’t explain what happened. Maybe one day I will understand. About two weeks ago, I suddenly felt like a different person. I can’t focus. I feel like I’m in a fog. I feel deep remorse over past mistakes. I’m struggling to do normal routine things like reply to emails! I don’t want to be at work! This is not like me at all! Who is this guy?

My wife tells me it’s a mid-life crisis—”No sweat, it happens to everyone,” she said. “Just don’t go get a girlfriend!”

I share this because I want you to know I was wrong. I get it now. Some days you just aren’t yourself and sometimes those bad days may drag into seasons. It’s vitally important to realize just how much pain some people around us are experiencing and we have no idea. You can never truly know what another person is thinking or feeling. Tread carefully.

Most of the time, employees do need to “suck it up” and just get the job done. But employers need to invest in the right people for the long term. Only the boss can decide who the right people are to invest in. The answer cannot be “everybody” or else it will become “nobody.” **GT**

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