

# Combatting Loneliness in the Age of Connectivity

*The Impact of loneliness and Isolation on Employers and their employees.*

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**‘People crave connection and intimacy in all realms of their lives, including at work. It’s a critical source of empathy and tolerance –the glue that keeps relationships, projects, and organizations together.’**

Tim Leberecht, *In the Age of Loneliness, Connections at Work Matter*

# Agenda

- **Social Isolation & Loneliness**
- **Impact on health, productivity and employers**
- **How the workplace can contribute to social isolation & loneliness**
- **Companies that are reducing the problem**
- **Ideas, solutions**

# Social Isolation and Loneliness

**Social Isolation** has objective, quantifiable markers – living alone, having few social ties or social contacts or support.



**Loneliness** is more subjective – It is something we perceive the absence of meaningful relationships with others. A lack of ‘intimacy’



[Can Loneliness Kill You?](#)

# Social Isolation

**Social connections have a profound influence on risk for mortality and are associated with a 30% increase risk of early death**

**Other consequences according to the American Psychiatric Association:**

- **Greater risk of cardiovascular disease**
- **Compromised immunity**
- **Increase risk of depression**
- **Avoiding getting help for substance use issues/problems**



# Loneliness

**Loneliness affects more than one-third of American Adults.**

In a study by Achor, Rosen Kellerman, Reece & Robichaux, they found that some professions were lonelier than others.

Their list of the loneliest workers:

- **Single & Childless**
- **Doctors & Lawyers**
- **Non-heterosexual**
- **Non- religious**
- **Government workers**



# A Public Health Concern

**Vivek H. Murthy, in late 2014 said ‘emotional well-being and loneliness’ were on his list of BIG public Health worries.**

**Dr. Murthy feels the workplace is one of the ‘primary places where loneliness can get better – or worse’.**

*“Our social connections are in fact largely influenced by the institutions and settings where we spend the majority of our time – that includes the workplace”*

*Vivek H. Murthy, MD*

# The Impact on Employers

Lack of social support can create 'mental sluggishness' which:

- Impairs productivity
- Stifles creativity
- Hinders decision-making

Which directly impacts an organization's revenue, spending and organizational performance

## **Workplace practices that may be adding to the problem**

- **Employees working remotely or teleworking – this can add to the challenge of employees connecting with each other and developing a sense of belonging**
- **Employee workloads that are large leaving little time or ability to interact with co-workers on a social level**

## **Workplace practices that may be adding to the problem**

- **Some professions involve more autonomous work and less shared work with co-workers**
- **Sharing personal information or parts of your life outside of work (including emotions, beliefs, experiences) are often discouraged therefore getting to know co-workers beyond work can be difficult**
- **Some people are shy, introverted and feel 'different' from others in an organization**

## **Workplace practices that may be adding to the problem**

- **Not having an adequate or inviting spaces for lunch or employee interaction**
- **Acknowledging diversity in the workplace and developing efforts to help employees to better understand and value those differences**
- **Supporting and encouraging fun interactions between employees and/or opportunities to work together**

# **Top Four Things Impacting Employee Engagement\***

- 1. Employees feeling that they belong at their company**
- 2. Employees feeling satisfied with how decisions are made at their company**
- 3. Employees feeling respected at their company**
- 4. Employees experiencing open and honest two-way communication**

\*Culture Amp Blog - <https://blog.cultureamp.com/2018-diversity-inclusion-report>

# Communication is Key

**“When people feel that they don’t know what’s going on, their level of trust drops and their sense of isolation gets worse.”**

Stewart Butterfield, CEO of Slack (co-founder of Flickr)

# What Can Employers Do?

- **Measure and track perceptions of inclusion and belonging**
- **Create opportunities for employees to learn more about each other**
- **Offer places where employees can meet for lunch or connect**
- **Encourage employees to get to know each other and help each other**
- **Reach out to teleworkers**

# What Can Employers Do?

- **Rotate meeting times if you have workers in different time zones**
- **Promote active debate but foster courtesy and respect.**
- **Foster environments where listening is valued and questions are encouraged**
- **Make strengthening social connections part of an organization's strategic plan**
- **Be creative re: how employees can get to know each other**

# Resources and Ideas

*The UnLonely Film Festival and Conference in New York* - <https://artandhealing.org/unloneliness-with-eileen-rockefeller/>

Dedicated to telling the stories of the public health epidemic of loneliness and isolation. Films from our first festival are already making a difference with individuals and communities in need, raising awareness and bringing us together to find ways to help.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/nilofer\\_merchant\\_got\\_a\\_meeting\\_take\\_a\\_walk](https://www.ted.com/talks/nilofer_merchant_got_a_meeting_take_a_walk) A TED talk by Nilofer Merchant suggests that next time you have a one-on-one meeting make it into a 'walking meeting'. It is healthy way to learn to interact with someone and the experience, for a variety of reasons, expands thinking, and promotes connections

<http://www.gurteen.com/gurteen/gurteen.nsf/id/randomised-coffee-trials> A Randomised Coffee Trial or RCT is used to connect people in an organization at random and give them time to meet and have coffee (tea, or whatever), and talk about whatever they wish – get to know people in an organization that you might never meet otherwise.  
<https://www.sparkcollaboration.com/> view the video about how RCT can work

<http://surpriseindustries.com/> Surprises are 'the most authentic, intimate emotions because they catch us off guard'. This company offers tips, experiments, and even a 'surprise academy' that teaches participants and companies how to introduce more surprises in their lives.

# Resources and Ideas

[http://reveconsulting.com/a\\_serious\\_look\\_at\\_play/](http://reveconsulting.com/a_serious_look_at_play/) - Humans learn through play. Consider playfulness as a deliberate strategy in everything from the design of the office environment to the processes used to tackle projects. Being in a consistently high stress mode hinders creativity and smothers any inclination for play.



# Resources and Ideas

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuWsHyuLD\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuWsHyuLD_E) Short video that explains how loneliness can impact your health

<https://hbr.org/2017/09/loneliness-and-the-digital-workplace> - an article about technology's role in building connections in the workplace

<https://www.bakusa.com/our-story/> - A company that conducts regular town hall-style meetings as part of their communication with staff.

<https://www.merck.com/about/how-we-operate/diversity/home.html> - The company last September observed its second annual Global Diversity & Inclusion Experience Month. It celebrated the differences among its 69,000 employees in more than 140 countries.

# Resources and Ideas

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/diversity-inclusion-belonging-measuring-how-employees-nina-mcqueen/>

The importance of getting feedback from employees re: engagement, support and enjoyment in working at LinkedIn

Some questions asked: I feel comfortable being myself at work; I go out of my way to help others feel like they belong at LinkedIn; Someone I work closely with cares about me as a person

<https://blog.cultureamp.com/2018-diversity-inclusion-report>

A survey was designed to be the gold standard for measuring across 7 constructs of inclusion

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QUESTIONS

