

How to Elevate your Remote or Hybrid Team's Performance, Commitment and Happiness!

Ginny Santos,
Founder and CEO at Neolé Inc.



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PART I:

Post-Pandemic Trends

The Rise of Hybrid Work

More organizations than ever before are choosing to make hybrid, remote or flexible work the new normal. For some companies, “hybrid work” means that people are allowed to go back into the office, but many prefer to work from home. It can also be structured to require all employees to work a particular hybrid work schedule and come into the office a set number of days per week. Still, many employees like working from home and have become accustomed to it over the course of the pandemic. Many don’t want to put up with a long commute, incur gas expenses or have to hire a dog walker just so that they can go sit in a cubicle or in an open-space concept where it’s hard to focus and get stuff done. This is especially true if meetings are still largely online.

Gallup research revealed 58% of managers say they will allow more remote work. The same research indicates that employees with hybrid jobs – in which they can work from home some of the time but still perform work on-site -- have the highest degree of engagement. On the flip side, organizations that have transitioned to being fully remote are worried about employee disengagement. Productivity has suffered both for those who are still treading water after two years of juggling it all remotely, and for those who are coming back to the office. Leaders are trying to find ways to build a new normal that works for both their people, and the bottom line.

Leaders are struggling to find new ways to keep their teams engaged, productive, collaborative and ultimately, happy. What’s making this even harder are the following two trends in the labour market.¹



Quiet Quitting



Quiet quitting has become a popular approach for remote and hybrid workers to avoid burnout. “Quiet Quitting” has nothing to do with anyone quitting their job; they are quitting “the idea of going above and beyond,” said Zaid Khan in the TikTok video, which has since gotten over 3 million views. The idea is to keep your job by meeting the basic

requirements, not putting any extra effort into it, and not allowing work stress to seep into your personal life. Employees who have embraced Quiet Quitting want to refocus and prioritize time with family, friends and pets, and reserve their energy for hobbies, travel and fun. In fact there is a whole movement of advocates for Quiet Quitting who are role modeling ways to do the bare minimum at work while still collecting a pay cheque for as long as possible before being laid off. It’s the pinnacle of disengagement.

**Does Quiet Quitting make people any happier?
No. But it is one way of approaching self-care for people
who are experiencing burnout, chronic stress or a growing
disinterest in their jobs.**

The Great Resignation

Since 2020, there has been a growing number of resignations as people re-evaluated the impact that work had on their lives and their health in the midst of a pandemic. Many left their jobs by choosing early retirement, while others switched to part time work or reduced the length of their work weeks. Many made the courageous decision to completely switch professions in an attempt to find work with more meaning or that is better aligned with their interests

and values. Many took a financial loss and have switched to jobs with lower remuneration. **There has been a clear shift in what people value and how they choose to spend their working years.**

Both the trends of Quiet Quitting and The Great Resignation indicate a marked cultural shift from the early- and mid-2010s, when being career-driven was something to be proud of. At that time, people prioritized work above everything else. It was generally believed that such efforts made employees more desirable to managers and helped people climb the corporate ladder faster. This was thought to result in growth and success in three key areas: status, finances, and job satisfaction. But this was not sustainable, and a global pandemic has shone a light on the negative impact and tradeoffs of this way of working on a person's health, happiness and personal relationships.

The Rise of Mental Health Concerns

Today, the sad truth is **more and more people are feeling burnt out.** The pandemic-induced lockdowns increased the number of people suffering from social isolation, which has had an enormous impact on mental health. The pandemic also strained relationships and divided family members and friends. In fact, burnout has become an official occupational syndrome recognized by the World Health Organization.

There has been a major increase in the number of adults reporting symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression and insomnia, compared with before the pandemic.² According to the U.S. Census Bureau, during the COVID-19 pandemic Americans were more than three times as likely to report symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder – or both – compared with 2019 estimates.³ Even now that there is a relative return to normal, people are struggling with the uncertainty of hybrid work



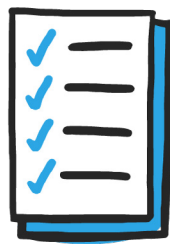
arrangements and a possible return to the office on a full-time basis. Further disruptions to now-established routines can feel impossible. In addition, many leaders have the stress and responsibility of caring for aging parents and/or their children, all while managing their stressed-out teams. As if that isn't enough, the broader economic and societal challenges and the uncertainty of the future weighs heavily on people and adds to everyone's stress levels.

A Shift in Values

There has been a noticeable shift in the types of rewards and perks that motivate employees. This is especially true for millennials who have long been identified as valuing purpose and mission-driven organizations above stability and pay. But today, values have also shifted for the older generations. Whereas receiving a bonus, a pay increase, a promotion, or shares in a company may have once motivated employees to be loyal to a company and work at their best, what actually drives performance and loyalty in the post-pandemic workplace are things like:



having a team you
enjoy working with



doing work that feels
meaningful and
purposeful



getting to engage in
problem solving



flexibility and
autonomy



having opportunities
to learn and grow



having work life
balance



PART II:

High Performance vs Work Life Balance

The post-pandemic trends of Quiet Quitting and The Great Resignation highlight people's desire to find balance and values-alignment in today's work world. But we know that none of those trends are the ultimate solution. Quitting your job or just staying in it and coasting don't bring people the work life balance and happiness they truly desire. They may be closer to work life balance, but they lack the pride of working at one's best and having a strong sense of purpose and belonging. For organizations, this is of course detrimental, as you either have dead weight on the team or are constantly dealing with turnover.

Organizations want high performers and employees want work/life balance. The two seem to be in opposition, but in reality, they are not.

The concept of work life balance assumes that work and life are two separate things, and that people want to have an equal amount of time and energy for each of these "separate" activities. It assumes that people who put more time and energy into work are more likely to be high performing at work at the expense of their personal lives. Those who put more time and energy into their personal lives (as seen by the Quiet Quitting movement) are more likely to be satisfied with their personal accomplishments at the expense of their career growth. Since neither of these options is ideal, the goal is to achieve what we refer to as "work life balance."

But what if the idea of work life balance is a misguided dream? Even if you manage to separate work from the rest of life and bring the two into "balance," will you then be happy?

What people truly want when they refer to work life balance is not actually to bring two seemingly opposite types of activities into balance. What they truly want is a holistic sense of wellbeing (keep reading, as we explore this concept further in part IV). And the irony is that high performance is actually more attainable AND SUSTAINABLE when both employees and leaders are able to prioritize their wellbeing.



Your team is likely made of people with specific roles and complementary talents and skills, but are they aligned with and committed to a common purpose? Are they consistently showing high levels of collaboration and innovation? Are they producing superior results, and maintaining healthy work relationships? If you answered yes to all of the above, your team is doing really well and has mastered high⁴ performance. However, most leaders with hybrid or remote teams post-pandemic, are unsure of how well their teams are actually doing. The good news is that **teams who work remotely or have settled into flexible work arrangements have a unique opportunity to develop wellbeing practices that were not possible in the traditional workplace.**

A Fine Balance

Organizations often focus on ways to increase performance, either through who they hire, by investing in training and development or through rigorous performance management. This was traditionally the key to having a high-performing team but what worked in the past is no longer the best approach or even practical for a hybrid team. The secret to a high performing team in the hybrid workplace is not hiring or training people to become high performers; it's developing a series of practices, habits and rituals that increase individual and team wellbeing so that every member of the team is able to sustain high performance and collaboration while being equally happy with work and life!

When analyzing 100 million global interviews, the authors of Wellbeing at Work came to this conclusion:



“Gallup’s analytics and academic research show that there is a reciprocal relationship between work and life overall – that is, people take their work experience home and their home experience to work. Organizations demand a person’s full energy at work. It is both the individual’s and the organization’s best interest for people to thrive in all aspects of their life.”⁵



“The workplace culture is even more important than the benefits provided.”

There are in fact two key factors that directly impact the sustainability of employee engagement and performance:

1. *The full team's commitment to creating a healthy workplace culture:* Workplace culture plays a big role in employee wellbeing. The culture is even more important than the benefits provided. **A workplace culture that makes wellbeing a priority will be more successful in reducing absenteeism, Quiet Quitting and turnover.** Workplaces that have not created a culture that fosters wellbeing will experience all three of these challenges, and run the risk of losing their high-performing team members.
2. *Individual commitment to practicing healthy habits:* Each person's personal approach to their own health and wellbeing is equally important. Individual lifestyle practices and the maintenance of work life boundaries are critical – especially in remote and hybrid work contexts.

“Individual lifestyle practices and the maintenance of work life boundaries are critical.”



You can actually map the team’s commitment and individual commitment to wellbeing and better understand the impact of both. For example, organizations that have invested in programs to support staff wellbeing without paying attention to the workplace culture may be wasting resources. The problem is even worse if leaders don’t encourage individuals to make space for healthy habits and self-care. Workplaces where there is both low individual and team commitment to wellbeing should watch for signs of burnout in their employees. On the flipside, high-performing teams are made possible when the team is highly committed to creating a healthy workplace culture and individuals are highly committed to their own health and wellbeing. (See Figure 1)

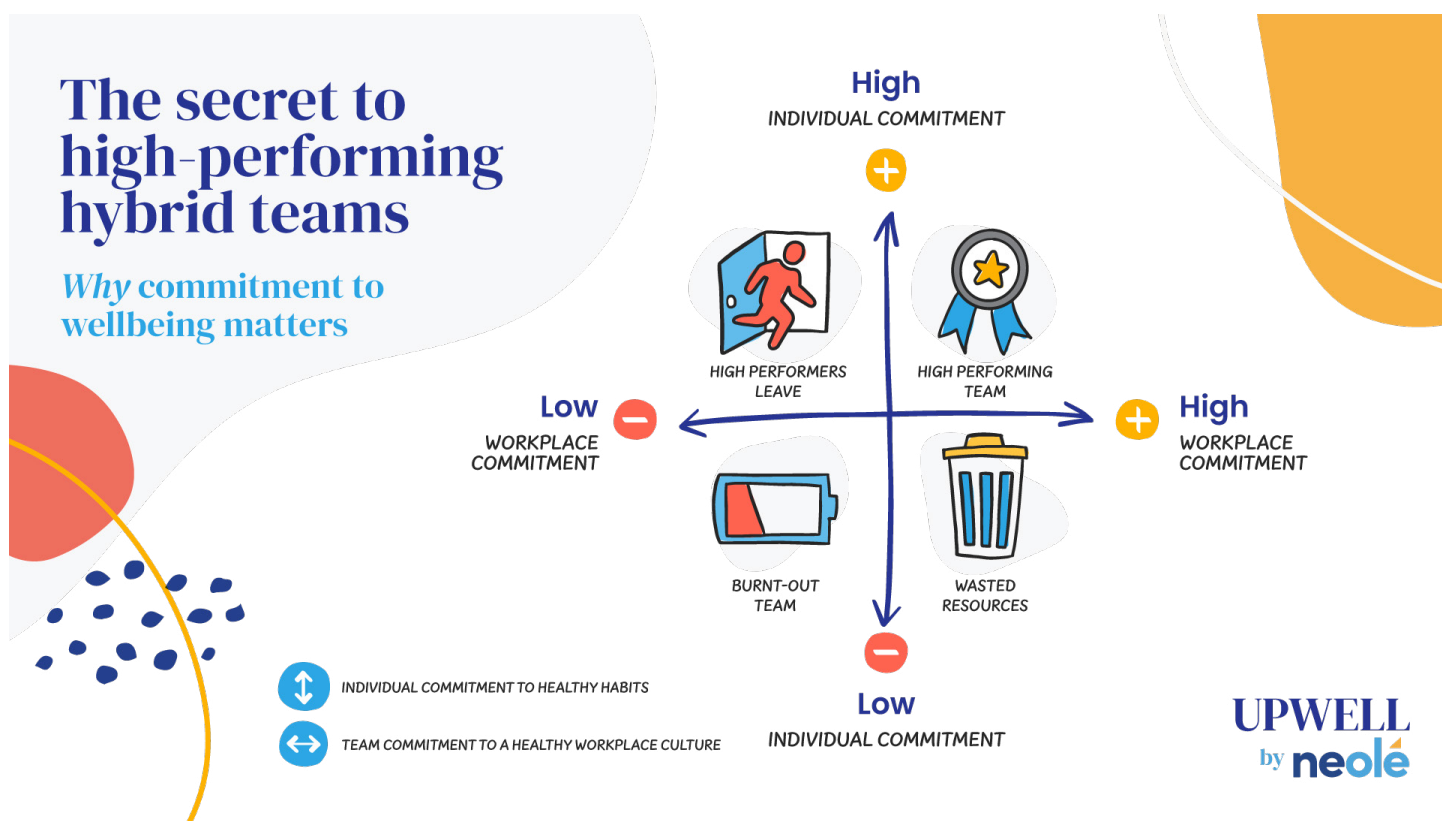
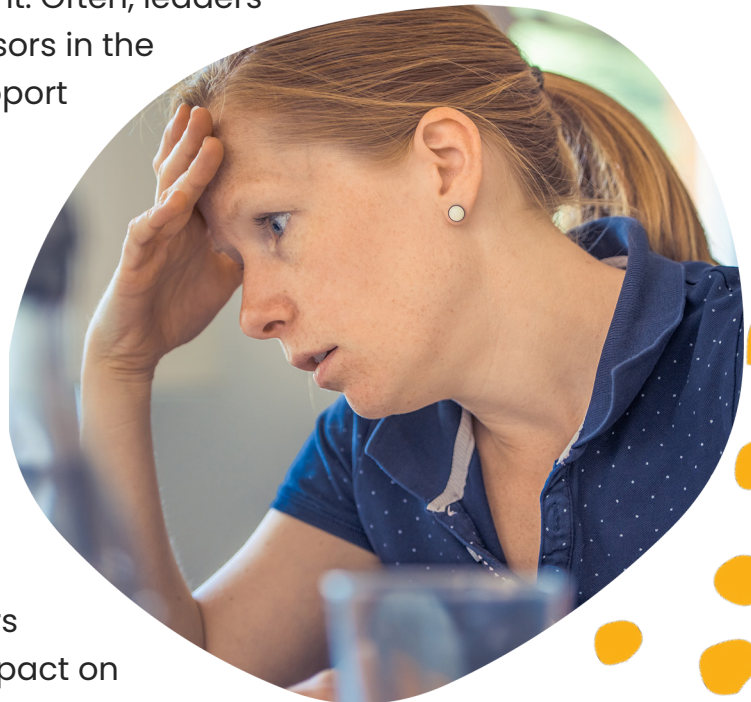


Figure 1: Why your team culture matters

Leaders are shouldering the burdens of their teams

While team members are struggling with their wellbeing, the team leader may be struggling to an even greater extent. Often, leaders are protecting their teams from stressors in the organization or taking on more to support their employees. This takes a toll.

It's a two-way street, of course. Leaders, just like their teams, are feeling overwhelmed and tired, and are having a hard time dealing with workplace stresses. If a team is disengaged, check in with the team leader; 70% of the variance in team engagement is determined solely by the manager.⁶ Simply put, how leaders themselves are doing has a direct impact on their team's engagement.



Leaders who feel a personal responsibility for their team's wellbeing and sometimes even prioritize their team's wellbeing above their own, might be feeling inadequate and overstretched. Compounding this can be stress, nutrient deficiencies, poor sleep, and lack of exercise, which can contribute to brain fog, impaired executive function, and deteriorating physical and mental health. As a result of all of this, leaders can themselves become distracted and disengaged.

Leaders whose workload is unmanageable and are feeling burnt out may find it difficult to delegate responsibilities to people who are working remotely and are already overworked. Many want to shield their team and not pass down stress. However, the result is that leaders often take on the stress of their employees, as well as their own.

Many leaders today are members of the sandwich generation, with responsibilities for both children, aging parents and other family members. Older female leaders often face even greater challenges, including physical ones such as personally dealing with symptoms of menopause, as well as structural inequities in their workplaces and industries. In fact, menopause contributes to over 20% of women quitting or considering leaving their jobs.⁷ Getting closer to retirement, leaders may also feel like time is running out for them to do the things that fulfill them in their career. Those who are considering leaving or planning an early retirement must also take into account the costs of a reduced pension or losing their pension entirely. In the wake of a global pandemic, many are faced with significant economic pressures and heightened responsibilities.

Holding up the mirror

Leaders who reflect on their own commitment to wellbeing and how they handle setting and maintaining boundaries are already on the right track. The three examples below are based on the experiences of three real people who are in leadership roles and manage hybrid or remote teams. As you read their stories, ask yourself:



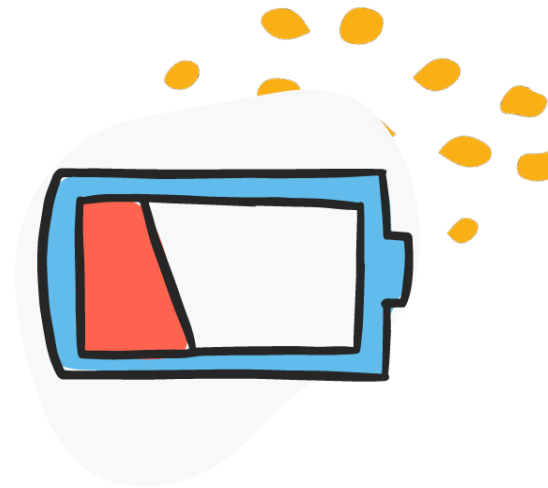
- Which approach to wellbeing most closely mirrors my own? In what ways?
- What can I incorporate into my own practice of boundary setting, and what can I avoid?
- How could I better support the whole team's wellbeing?

Cathy

Cathy is on the verge of complete burnout ([bottom-left quadrant in Figure 1](#)). She is planning to take a sick leave as soon as possible, but she keeps postponing her sick leave because she is worried about the impact it will have on her boss and her team.

Cathy has a great relationship with her boss, but her boss has just discovered she has a brain tumor and is scheduled to go through intensive treatment very soon. And so, Cathy doesn't feel like this is the right time for her to go on sick leave because her boss has to go on sick leave whether she wants to or not.

Cathy also worries about the impact taking sick leave would have on her team. Her team has lost a few of their people. As they haven't been replaced yet, the workload is really intense. Her organization has not acknowledged this or stepped in, and there is an expectation that the team can just pick up all the slack. She's worried that if she takes sick leave, her team's workload will only get worse. Cathy is clearly the type of person that puts other people's wellbeing ahead of her own.



Roshan

Roshan works at a large global company managing a team of 150 software engineers spread across the world. His boss was recently on sick leave due to a stroke.

He is very good at having clear boundaries. As an example, when one of his team members called him at 8pm, Roshan answered the phone in case it was an emergency. As the person started explaining what they needed, Roshan quickly interrupted: "Look, this can wait until tomorrow. Let's do it tomorrow at 8am. I don't work after six unless it's an emergency. She replied, "It's actually 2am for me!".

Roshan is the kind of person that values wellbeing and takes care of his own wellbeing ahead of others. He also expects his team to do the same, although



it could be argued that he needs to co-create a team culture that supports everyone's wellbeing. His team could benefit from an agreement on how and when the team communicates across multiple time zones, what tools are used, and how to support each other in respecting boundaries. Roshan's workplace might not provide the tools or have a culture that respects boundaries, so he might have some work to do with his

leadership team to foster a healthy workplace culture. In

fact, since the organization lacks a healthy work culture, Roshan admitted in a private conversation that he is not very committed to the long term success of his company and already has one foot out the door ([approaching the top-left quadrant in Figure 1](#)).

Pilar

Pilar is in an executive-level position. During the pandemic, she has been taking care of her three kids, as well as living with and providing care for her dad who has dementia. She has excelled in her executive-level position while also managing the stress of juggling many family responsibilities at home.

But the question is, is she truly doing well, and if so, what's her secret?

She IS doing well, not just because she knows how to balance her own needs with the needs of others, but the real secret to her success is that she's in a workplace that truly supports wellbeing practices and work life balance ([top-right quadrant in Figure 1](#)). Pilar's workplace encourages her to work flexible hours, enabling her to take care of her family and caregiving responsibilities, and also to lead by example – setting boundaries, and focusing her time on work when she is not split between too many responsibilities. Even in an executive-level role, the organization has made it clear that their people are at the epicenter of its success. She has the support of the team and organization to make wellbeing a priority in order to sustain her performance.



What it all means

As you can see from these stories, when a workplace prioritizes and supports the wellbeing of its employees, individuals are better able to balance both personal and work issues without burning out. But when the workplace considers wellbeing an individual matter, then people are forced to do it all alone. For many, this becomes just one more thing on an insurmountable to-do list.

On the opposite hand, when an individual is not committed to their own wellbeing, no matter what resources are in place to support their wellbeing, the organization might be wasting resources without seeing any return in investment (no improvement in performance). For example, a workplace that only offers programs that are reactive rather than proactive (e.g., paid access to therapists, generous sick leave, etc.) but doesn't support employees in developing and sticking to healthy practices and preventing illness or burnout, are pouring money down the drain ([lower R quadrant](#)).

Many leaders make the mistake of thinking that wellbeing is the individual's responsibility. After all, leaders can't force team members to eat healthily, get enough sleep, see a therapist and go to the gym twice a week! But the truth is, our individual choices are greatly influenced by the people around us and our workplace culture. If our workplace culture is one that encourages skipping lunch and checking email late into the evening, leaders will eventually see the resignation of their highest performers. True high performers can only maintain their own standards of performance by taking care of their bodies and brains. Offering wellness programs and health benefits without creating a workplace culture that supports boundary setting, healthy habits and self-care, is a waste of resources. Workplace culture plays a big role in either encouraging or discouraging wellbeing practices. A culture of self-care helps to reach people who haven't made their own commitments to personal wellbeing and who feel alone in the wellbeing journey.

What's needed is a balance of individual commitment to healthy habits along with the team's commitment to a healthy workplace culture. The wellbeing of each and every member of your team is essential for the successful performance of the team as a whole.





PART III:

The Signs that Workplace Wellbeing is Dwindling

When discussing workplace wellbeing, it helps to know what it looks like when a team lacks a healthy workplace culture. The following examples are based on a compilation of research, conversations and snippets of true stories. As you read these worst case scenarios, ask yourself:

Do I see any signs of this on my team?

When the workplace culture does not support wellbeing, individuals feel overloaded with work. Mostly, they love working from home, but find that achieving work life balance is challenging. They also feel isolated, disconnected from the rest of their team, and under-appreciated by the team and leadership. In fact, team members are starting to wonder whether organizational leaders are really interested in the team or their own jobs, as people seem somewhat disengaged. Zoom fatigue set in long ago, and team members feel that their schedules are out of their control. There are too many ineffective and pointless meetings and not enough time for thinking or doing the work. When they need input from another team member or another department, they hesitate to reach out because they've never even met that person. It feels like cold calling someone within the organization!

Some people on the team feel stressed and stretched too thin. They wonder if they might be experiencing anxiety, and are afraid to bring it up to their team leader. Leaders have not opened up about their own challenges and feelings and don't seem to welcome frank talk. Team members know they can access the employee health benefits and that therapy might help them deal with anxiety. Still, that doesn't turn the tap off for all these meetings and extra work – and honestly self-care just feels like one more thing on their plate. There are few, if any, conversations about burnout; no one has the language to talk about it, and no one knows what to do about it anyway. The attitude of the team has definitely taken a negative turn and relationships between team members are breaking down.

Stress is taking its toll on the physical and emotional wellbeing of the team. People are getting ill more frequently as their immune systems break down under the load. Team members who never missed a day are now absent frequently or taking stress leave. Presenteeism—working while unwell but with greatly reduced productivity—is also an issue. One team member finds herself so unfocused that thinking is like wading through a swamp. This makes her more depressed as she recalls being so much more passionate and productive not that long ago. Deadlines on the team are missed, and the quality of the work begins to drop.

As the situation escalates, team members show signs of disengagement. They seem exhausted, apathetic and complacent, and when presented with new ideas and opportunities, they are hypercritical to the point of rudeness.. It's harder to improve business outcomes and work towards organizational and team goals if team members are disengaged. The worst part is that disengagement and negativity tend to be contagious. With a compounding impact, the team as a whole is sliding towards disengagement.

Wellbeing is not a priority for the organization. High performing team members look to leave for companies that care more about employee wellbeing. As a result, the turnover rate for the organization begins to increase.

Does any of this sound familiar? If so, you are not alone. In fact, 37% of employees who started a new job during COVID-19 left their previous job for reasons related to their personal wellbeing.⁸ Despite the notion that work life balance is inherent in hybrid workplaces, the reality is that there is a lot of work to make hybrid workplaces healthy and to truly support high performance.



The Staggering Costs of Undervaluing Wellbeing

The opposite of workplace wellbeing is essentially burnout, absenteeism, increased costs, wasted resources, and resignations.

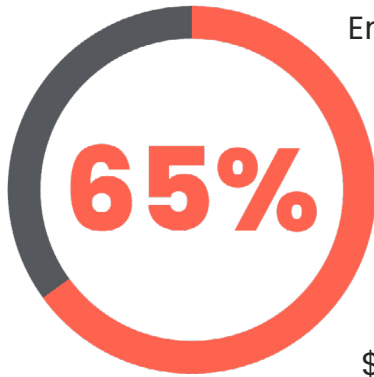
The costs to organizations that are not committed to employee wellbeing are staggering. Take the costs of mental health in the workplace as an example. In Canada, thirty out of one thousand employees miss work for mental health reasons each week.⁹ And it's not due to the COVID-19 pandemic only; before the pandemic, the annual economic cost of poor mental health in the workplace was estimated to be \$50 billion CAD, while the annual indirect cost related to lost productivity was \$6 billion CAD.¹⁰ If the status quo is maintained, by 2041, the cost of poor mental health to the Canadian economy is projected to be \$2.5 trillion CAD.¹¹



A leader's personal experience

I once worked at an organization whose mission was to provide health care services to marginalized populations. I was in a supervisory role. My team worked out of multiple locations across the city. This was a unionized workplace.

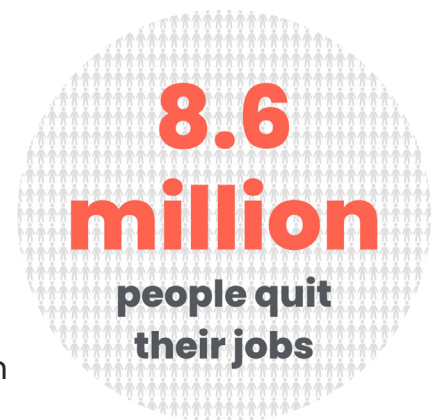
Our union steward, whom everyone respected because of how much he cared for everyone's wellbeing, took a sick leave and never returned. Sadly, he made a painful decision to take his own life. This event had a ripple effect over the entire organization. Fingers were pointed at the executive team in a desperate attempt to find someone to blame. The turnover within the organization during the following months was unprecedented. I myself had originally envisioned growing my career within this organization but found myself out of alignment with the organization's policies and internal practices which ultimately resulted in my resignation and acceptance of a job offer at a better organization. The cost of turnover (including the transition period, the hiring and training costs and the impact on the clients) must have been close to half a million dollars.



Disengaged employees are also a huge cost to organizations.

Employees can become disengaged if their workplace does not prioritize staff wellbeing. How much of a problem is disengagement? Recent statistics show that only 35% of employees in the U.S. and 15% worldwide are engaged at work.¹² That means that 65% of employees in the U.S. are disengaged! Given that a disengaged employee costs an organization approximately USD\$3,400 for every \$10,000 in salary¹³, you can see that the costs of disengaged employees to our economy are mind-boggling.

Workers who prefer to work remotely and who wish to work with a company that prioritizes wellbeing have many options. In the U.S., approximately four million workers left their jobs monthly in 2021 for a total of 48 million people annually. While the impact of the pandemic lessened somewhat in 2022, the Great Resignation shows no signs of abating. In just the months of January and February 2022 alone, 8.6 million people quit their jobs in the U.S.¹⁴



\$660,000
to
\$2.6
million
per year.

Losing employees who want to improve their personal wellbeing is expensive to organizations. The cost of replacing an employee is between 1.5 and 2.5 times the individual's salary, due mainly to the cost of hiring and training a new person. Based on these figures, assuming that only 25% of employees are actively engaged, a 100-person organization that provides an average salary of \$50,000 could have turnover and replacement costs of approximately \$660,000 to \$2.6 million per year.¹⁵ Note that the above only accounts for the expenses of hiring and training a replacement, but doesn't take into consideration the emotional costs and productivity impact to a team when staff leave. Those left behind may now be eyeing a way out, especially when the workplace isn't talking openly about the challenges and looking to solutions.

It doesn't need to be this way!

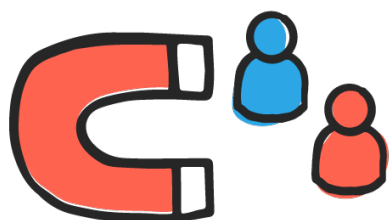
Here's the thing: as leaders we've been fed a message that you need to be a work-a-holic to succeed, and that striving for work life balance is detrimental to productivity and profitability. But it's simply not true! As we've shown, there are real costs associated with burnout, anxiety, and an overall lack of wellbeing. Productivity and profitability is highest for organizations that score highly on engagement and wellbeing.

The Benefits of Workplace Wellbeing

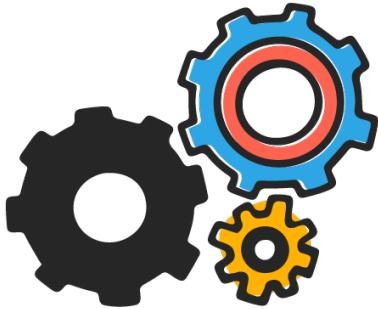
The evidence is clear; wellbeing on your team results in:



Reduced Absenteeism: You will see less need for sick days and sick leave, and a reduction in presenteeism. A Gallup study comparing business units with low engagement and high engagement found that high engagement leads to 81% less absenteeism.¹⁶ In an organization that prioritizes wellbeing, staff are more fully engaged as opposed to feeling tired and unmotivated.



Talent retention, engagement and loyalty: You will save yourself the time and costs of hiring, onboarding and training replacements while you witness a stronger sense of belonging, pride and team spirit. The same Gallup study found an 18% reduction in turnover in organizations where turnover is typically high and a 43% reduction in turnover in organizations where turnover is typically low.¹⁷ The reason for this is higher staff engagement.



Enhanced performance, productivity and efficiency: It pays to prioritize employee wellbeing. Imagine having certainty that your hybrid team is performing at the highest level and seeing that impact to your bottom line! Research by the global technology company Xero and the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research showed that the financial return is an average of 5 times every dollar invested in organizational wellbeing initiatives (wellbeing education programmes, fostering environments supportive of mental health, and organizing specific activities designed to improve staff wellbeing, as well as employee assistance programs) due to productivity improvements.¹⁸

The secret to high-performing hybrid teams

The End Result



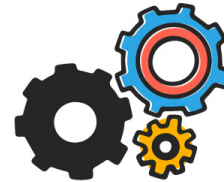
Reduce Absenteeism

COUNT ON YOUR TEAM TO BRING THEIR BEST SELVES TO THEIR WORK



Attract and Retain Talent

SAVE TIME AND MONEY HIRING AND TRAINING



Increase Efficiency + Productivity

CERTAINTY THAT HYBRID TEAM IS PERFORMING AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL



UPWELL
by neolé

Who doesn't want a team of people who are engaged and motivated, who feel a strong sense of commitment to their team, who look forward to every work day, get stuff done and speak highly of their organization to others? That's what happens when you create a workplace culture that values and supports wellbeing as much as you value and support productivity and high performance.

The background is a solid dark blue. In the top left corner, there is a light blue semi-circle with several small yellow dots scattered around it. In the top right corner, there is a large orange semi-circle. In the bottom left corner, there is a yellow semi-circle with a white arc passing over it.

PART IV:

What Is Wellbeing Anyways?

A Holistic Approach to Wellbeing

In Part II, we talked about why wellbeing matters and why it's essential to achieve high performance, sustain productivity and improve retention in the post-pandemic workplace. Now let us introduce you to a holistic understanding of wellbeing that goes beyond the typical approach to workplace wellbeing.

There are Four Areas of Wellbeing that impact productivity, engagement, loyalty and the performance of team members in the post-pandemic workplace:

- **Social wellbeing**
- **Physical wellbeing**
- **Emotional wellbeing**
- **Intellectual wellbeing**

Together, these make the biggest difference to the quality of your life and contribution to society in the context of hybrid or remote work. While each is important in its own right, they are not separate from each other; they are all interconnected. The good news is, that making any improvement to one area of wellbeing will have a positive impact on a person's overall wellbeing as well as the team's wellbeing. Improving all four areas of wellbeing will have the greatest impact on the team's performance, engagement and overall satisfaction with work and life.

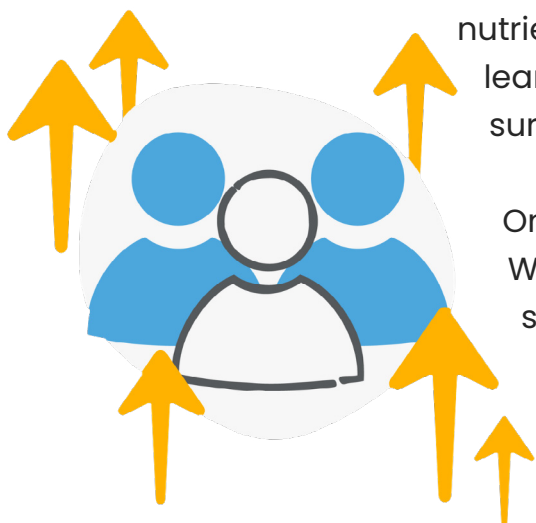
#1: Social Wellbeing:

A sense of psychological safety and trust

Social Wellbeing is all about how connected we are to other people. Humans need to have a sense of belonging and psychological safety in order to thrive and perform at their full potential. Most importantly, we need time to connect at a personal level with colleagues at work in order to build a foundation of trust, which is essential for team agility and efficiency. Ideally we should feel this sense of belonging and safety at work as much as in our communities. The more people are able to develop trust, the more they will develop the cooperative relationships that are essential to team work.



Social wellbeing doesn't only improve your performance on a team; it also has a positive impact on your overall health and resilience to illness. Many research studies have shown that your social wellbeing is an important factor in maintaining brain health and supporting your immune system. It makes sense! The safer you feel with the people around you, the more your nervous system can relax, and the more your nervous system can go into parasympathetic mode, the better you are able to digest and absorb nutrients, fight disease, and engage in focused work, learning and growth, as opposed to being on alert or survivor mode.



On teams, social wellbeing is extremely important. When social wellbeing is strong on your team, you'll see people trust one another, are comfortable asking for help and supporting one another. Team members are collaborative, creative and lift one another up.

Social wellbeing is just as important for the team leader as it is for each individual on the team. Unfortunately, we have seen a dramatic decrease in the social wellbeing of both leaders and team members as a result of working remotely. The surprising part is that the solution is not to force everyone back to the office or to only hire staff within one geographical area. There are very easy ways of strengthening social wellbeing for distributed teams (In Part V we will discover how).

#2: Physical Wellbeing: The energy for high performance and resilience to illness



When a person's Physical Wellbeing is at its best, everyone can be a high performer. Physical wellbeing has a positive impact on mental health and on a person's ability to sustain high performance throughout the workday, throughout the year, and throughout their career. People who score themselves high for Physical Wellbeing can concentrate on difficult tasks at any time of day, be free from aches, pains or physical discomforts, and avoid recurring illness.

For the first time in history, a number of developed countries have seen a steady decline in life expectancy spanning three consecutive years. Life expectancy should be getting longer, not shorter! It has become more common for people to live with chronic disease and a multitude of health conditions that not only affect their lifespan but also affect their ability to be resilient to illness. As the authors of Wellbeing at Work highlight, "underlying health conditions play a major role in how resilient people are to a virus like COVID-19...the lesson is clear. You can't change your age, but you can influence many of the other risk factors. COVID-19 dramatically exposed just how much poor physical wellbeing puts society – and your employees – at great risk. As a leader, when you think about the new demand of a resilient workforce, you should think beyond cleaning supplies, plexiglass dividers and personal protective equipment for your employees. You need to view ongoing physical wellbeing as an essential part of your overall organizational health."¹⁹

Working from home or having flexible work arrangements has made it possible for people to take better care of themselves. The time spent commuting can now be spent walking a pet or exercising. More meals can be home-made as opposed to defaulting to fast food restaurants. People can take quick stretch breaks without worrying about disrupting their colleagues. Being part of a team that values physical wellbeing makes it so much easier for everyone on the team to take better care of themselves. See Part V to discover how to create a workplace culture that elevates physical wellbeing for distributed teams.



#3: Emotional Wellbeing:

A sense of purpose and resilience to stress

Emotional wellbeing is present when people are able to navigate emotional ups and downs, manage stress, welcome difference in opinions without spiraling into conflict, practice self-awareness, collaborate effectively, and are able to concentrate on difficult work despite the stress that might be present in other areas of life. Emotional wellbeing enables people to maintain mental health and makes it easier to have positive relationships with others even when differences arise.



Feeling emotionally well doesn't mean that you are always happy and cheerful; it means that you are able to experience a variety of emotions without getting stuck in any one emotional state. It means you are able to ride the waves caused by emotions without getting out of balance. People who score high on emotional wellbeing are better able to cope with stress, uncertainty, and challenging relationships.

When we face a stressful situation or a stream of stressful thoughts, our bodies produce a cascade of stress hormones. This reaction results in a series of physiological changes including an elevated heart rate, increased blood flow to our muscles (away from the brain) and rapid breathing. As you probably know, this is useful if the stress you are facing is the kind that requires a fight or flight



response. But this is not usually the case with modern types of stressors. In fact, the fight or flight response gets in the way of creative and strategic thinking, which might be exactly the type of response that is most needed.

Many of the same factors that influence social, physical and intellectual wellbeing, also have an impact on one's emotional wellbeing. The workplace culture can either contribute to a sense of psychological safety or be a source of emotional distress.

Having a sense of purpose or a sense that you play a meaningful role within your team is critical to your emotional and physical wellbeing. Workplaces don't often give much thought to the importance of having a sense of purpose and meaning at work, but the post-pandemic trends are shining a light on the central role of meaningful work to team dynamics, job satisfaction, employee engagement, attraction and retention.

When emotional wellbeing is at its best, team members are better able to collaborate. They are able to get out of bed each morning with a sense of purpose, feeling enthusiastic about contributing to the best of their ability. They value themselves and feel motivated to take care of themselves, and feel inspired to contribute to a collective goal or set of objectives. See Part V to discover how to create a workplace culture that elevates emotional wellbeing for distributed teams.



#4: Intellectual Wellbeing:

True engagement and satisfaction with work and life

Intellectual wellbeing enables individuals and teams to solve problems creatively and be productive throughout the day regardless of whether they are working from home or at the office. It results in active engagement, job satisfaction and commitment to the larger vision and mission. A person whose intellectual wellbeing is high, is productive not for the sake of productivity but as a result of the satisfaction they get from their productivity. This is the opposite of the phenomena we see in the Quiet Quitting movement. When people are “living for the weekend”, it’s a sure sign that their intellectual wellbeing at work is low.

When your intellectual wellbeing is at its best, you are truly engaged in your work, you are able to focus, remember important details, generate new ideas, learn new things, make smart decisions, and sustain cognitive engagement evenly throughout the day.



Both team leaders and employees need to feel intellectually engaged and challenged by their role in order to thrive. Having work that is challenging, meaningful and purposeful, and makes the best use of a person’s talents and strengths contributes to intellectual wellbeing. This results in active engagement at work. In contrast, people who don’t like what they do every day report substantially higher levels of boredom, more anger, and lower engagement, according to Gallup’s research.²⁰ The same research found that “engaged workers reported higher levels of happiness and interest in the moment and lower levels of stress and sadness compared with less engaged workers. [...] Moments of higher reported interest in work were associated with lower cortisol (the stress hormone). In the early morning as they were anticipating work, disengaged employees had higher levels of cortisol than engaged employees did. There was no difference in cortisol levels on Saturdays.”²¹ No wonder disengaged employees are so much more likely to need sick days. See Part V to discover how to create a workplace culture that elevates intellectual wellbeing for distributed teams.



PART V: **How to get there?**

The Four Key Ingredients to Make it Happen

Leaders who have high performance and retention in the hybrid workplace have incorporated the following four ingredients in their approach:

1. A true commitment to team wellbeing

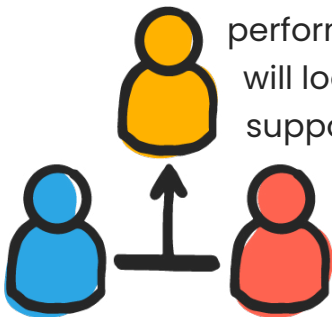
As explained in Part I, a true commitment is only effective and sustainable when you have both the individual commitment to healthy habits and the team's commitment to creating a healthy workplace culture. For leaders, it's important to lead by example and model taking responsibility for your own individual wellbeing while engaging team members in co-creating a supportive culture that enables this for everyone. If leaders don't model healthy self-care, no one will do it! Make time for social connection and personal check-ins with your team. The more people feel connected to one another, the better everyone can manage stress and function together.



The point is to enable high performance as a team as opposed to just having a few high performers on a team. What's the difference? A team with high performers is not sustainable, whereas a high performing team will remain high performing even when some of the team members are on vacation or move onto the next level in their career.

2. A Bottom-up Approach

A bottom-up approach engages everyone in co-creating a high performing team. It's not the leader's role to decide what wellbeing will look like or what types of practices to put into place in order to support high performance. The practices, the values, the mindset, the behaviours – all need to come from the bottom up. You need to engage the whole team in ideating and deciding on what wellbeing looks like, what enables team members to commit to their own individual wellbeing, and what types of workplace practices enable the team to be high performing.



3. A Creative Mindset that Encourages Experimentation and Growth



Elevating Individual and team wellbeing and performance will require some creative thinking. Like every culture change effort, there will be complex roadblocks and challenges to overcome. This creates an opportunity for the team to develop and practice skills in creative problem solving. There is no better way to practice creativity and innovation than on a challenge that truly matters to the individual as well as the organization. Every organization that survived the pandemic-induced lockdowns already knows the value of creativity in problem solving. Creative thinking is a natural human ability that isn't always encouraged within organizations. If you want a high performing hybrid team, you need to foster creative thinking and problem solving! There is not one solution that fits all. One proven way to find solutions that work for your unique team and in your unique context is to engage your team in learning from experimentation and reflection. You have already done this before! It's now time to be proactive rather than reactive.

Tried And True

The Two-Minute Appreciation Technique

At Neolé, we love testing new rituals. For example, we were inspired by a practice used by CEO Vishen Lakhiani within his organization Mindvalley. It's called "The Two-Minute Appreciation Technique." For one month, every team member was encouraged to start their day by dedicating two minutes to writing someone a note of appreciation. The note could be in the form of an email, a text message, a phone call or even a greeting card

sent in the mail. And it could be addressed to someone at work or someone in your personal life. What mattered most, was that the message of appreciation be genuine (e.g., "I really appreciate how quickly you jumped in to support my idea at last week's meeting" or "Thank you for sharing your war time stories when I was a child—you really inspired me to be strong and resilient.")



As Vishen testifies: “By appreciating others, you feel good about yourself. And you realize your own strengths. It comes from the concept of projection, which means we can better see in others what we already possess.”

The Daily Gratitude Practice

Another ritual we experimented with at Neolé has really taken hold: the daily gratitude. Every morning, each team member starts their work day by saying hello in our Daily Check-in Channel in Zoom team chat, followed by a genuine expression of gratitude. Here are some recent examples:

- Good morning! I’m grateful that we have a guest room, where friends visiting from out of town can stay and feel at home. 🌞
- Good morning, I’m grateful for my mental health...there are a lot of things happening in the news that make me realize how much I take it for granted sometimes.
- Good morning. Grateful for the long weekend coming up, looking forward to showing my brother around more and hopefully working on some personal projects.
- Good morning. Grateful for macarons.
- Good morning. I’m grateful for my wonderful team, thank you all for

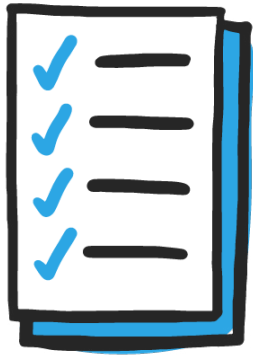
being so caring and patient with me this week. I’m feeling good this morning. ❤️

- Good morning. I’m grateful to read a little of what everyone’s grateful for and for yesterday’s nourishing hike in the mountains with Renee. 😊

This morning gratitude practice allows us all to get a pleasant glimpse into everyone’s personal lives and feel connected despite working from four different time zones.

What daily, weekly, monthly and annual rituals might your team come up with? What might they want to experiment with? Innovating is testing new ideas, experimenting with them and then seeing what works and what doesn’t work. The best ideas will stick while others will just be an opportunity to learn and grow from the experience. By testing new ideas your whole team will practice the creative mindset while improving the sense of connection and belonging on the team.

4. A Living Team Charter



Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, you need to use the creative mindset and the bottom-up approach to co-create a Living Team Charter. A Living Team Charter lays out the team's shared values and mission, and outlines how the team wishes to connect, collaborate, and support each other's performance and wellbeing. Wellbeing needs to be proactive, not just reactive, and a Living Team Charter is one way of agreeing upon and establishing proactive wellbeing practices. In addition to getting everyone on the same page with regards to how to work together, a Living Team Charter that is revisited and updated at regular intervals is a way to document the results; it's not enough to just experiment and learn. Documenting the results into a team charter is something that new onboards can follow and that the team can use as a benchmark and accountability tool on an ongoing basis.

If you tried to create a team charter without doing any experimentation and learning, it may end up being a meaningless document that is often aspirational but not grounded in evidence of what actually works for your specific team. If you want the Team Charter to be most effective, you absolutely need the TRUE commitment to team wellbeing, the BOTTOM-UP approach, and the CREATIVE mindset.

Marc Lesser, CEO of ZBA Associates, an executive development and leadership consulting company, stresses the importance of how we work together: "Things go a lot better when there is a sense of trust, vulnerability and the sense that we care about each other. Great workplaces are open, transparent, safe, and we're all working together toward creating something that matters." Lesser also says "...the conversation that leaders could/should be having more is making it clear how everyone is connected to the larger purpose of the team or the organization. We are storytelling creatures. We need at work, a positive story,



a purposeful story. That's a skill, I think, that should be taught more in business school and to all leaders of having and expressing a clear vision and clear purpose and connecting the dots about how everyone's work is part of that larger purpose. Everything we do, every communication is connected to the environment, to the culture that we're creating."

A Team Charter does just that; it aligns everyone on the team's purpose and values, it outlines how the team works together, and creates a sense of trust and a sense that team members care about each other.

What to Include in a Living Team Charter

Your Living Team Charter should be unique to your team. Some of the categories we include in our client's Living Team Charters are:

- The team's mission and shared values
- How the team communicates
- How/when the team meets so that meetings are efficient and supportive at the same time
- How the team fosters a sense of connection and belonging
- How the team enables its members to sustain healthy lifestyle practices
- How the team prevents and addresses potential conflicts

Ideas that other teams have incorporated into their Living Team Charter

Here are some examples of wellbeing practices we encourage our clients to experiment with and incorporate into their Living Team Charters:



1. Setting and maintaining boundaries.

The whole team identifies and commits to respecting important work life boundaries. Boundaries can include internal work practices such as meeting times (leaving breaks between meetings) as well as ways that the team disconnects outside of work.

2. Creating space for social connection and personal check-ins.

The more you feel connected to the people you work with the better you can recover from stress, and the better you manage your stress, the better your immune system is able to function. We all need a certain amount of social nourishment in our lives!

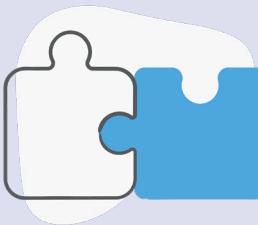
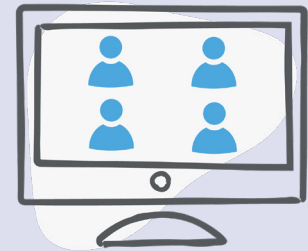


3. Making time for regular feedback and celebrating accomplishments on your team.

Employees who receive daily feedback from managers are three times more likely to be engaged than those who receive feedback once a year or less. Remote work has negatively impacted this feedback loop.

4. A commitment to hosting monthly discussion circles about work life balance practices and habits.

This could include inviting guest speakers to inform and motivate team members and engage in authentic discussion to help team members prioritize their own wellbeing.



5. Making space for personal wellbeing practices.

Making space and incorporating personal wellbeing practices for the team (e.g., breathing exercises during meetings or hydration reminders in the workday).

6. Creating practices to celebrate your workplace's progress on team wellbeing.

This should include meaningful opportunities for everyone to reflect, learn and grow.





PART VI: **Now What?**

You know that the cost of doing nothing is enormous. Not only are there high financial costs as outlined in Part II, but there's also an emotional cost that impacts your own health and wellness. Doing nothing puts you, as the leader, at the risk of burnout as you witness a rise in absenteeism, sick leave and turnover. On the other hand, by committing to your team's wellbeing, you are enabling an environment of high performance, productivity and efficiency where people are engaged, happy and thriving.

Going to work should add years to your life rather than sucking the life out of you.

It's not enough for organizations just to provide health benefits — they must also develop a workplace culture that prioritizes wellbeing.

Plan a Transformative Retreat for your Team

Creating a workplace culture that prioritizes wellbeing requires that leaders understand their teams' most pressing concerns and that team members be engaged in co-creating solutions. Obtaining this critical input—and involving teams in creating the solution—starts with honest conversations with team members. By giving individuals the space to contribute their personal values, you create a powerful foundation for a happy and high-functioning team.

Building relationships and fostering the sense of team connectedness required for these conversations can be difficult when not everyone is in the same office, particularly for new hires. Leaders need to be very intentional about connecting their team, making space for honest communication and launching a new era of wellbeing, engagement and collaboration. An **offsite retreat** for your team is the best way to accomplish all these goals all at once.

One of our favourite workshops that we recommend take place during a Team Retreat is a Living Team Charter session. This workshop, led by one of our Wellbeing Experts, explores your team values, establishes priorities for how everyone will work



together, and gets everyone on the same page with how your workplace will support individual and team wellbeing. The end result is recorded in a living document that can be revisited at any point by your evolving team.

Of course, team retreats can be productive AND fun! We custom-design retreats for teams of between 5 and 50 members, with activities that leave everyone feeling engaged, connected and excited to get back to work.

Your Next Steps

Learn more about our [Team Building Retreats](#).

[Book a free consultation](#) today to get some guidance from our team Wellbeing Experts.



“When we start focusing on what can I do, it shifts our whole mindset into solution-based thinking and possibility rather than sitting back and just feeling victimized by a situation.”

- Fleet Maul

About the Author



Ginny Santos works exclusively with organizations that truly care about their people and want a healthy workplace culture. That's why she founded Neolé, a training, facilitation and event production company that specializes in designing and facilitating team development and retreats that make a lasting impact—resulting in increased engagement, productivity and retention, and most importantly, a healthy workplace culture.

Everything she does is influenced by her drive to have a positive impact, and the practical skills and knowledge she developed while completing a Master's of Science in Creativity and Change Leadership and several graduate certificates in Solution-Focused Coaching, Nutrition Sciences and

Productive Thinking. Ginny is also a professor at Wilfrid Laurier University where she teaches creativity and entrepreneurship to executive MBA students.

Originally from Spain, she is an entrepreneurial mother, a digital geek and an enthusiastic dancer in the privacy of her kitchen.

Find out more about Neolé and the work to transform disconnected hybrid and remote teams to high-performing healthy teams at neole.ca

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