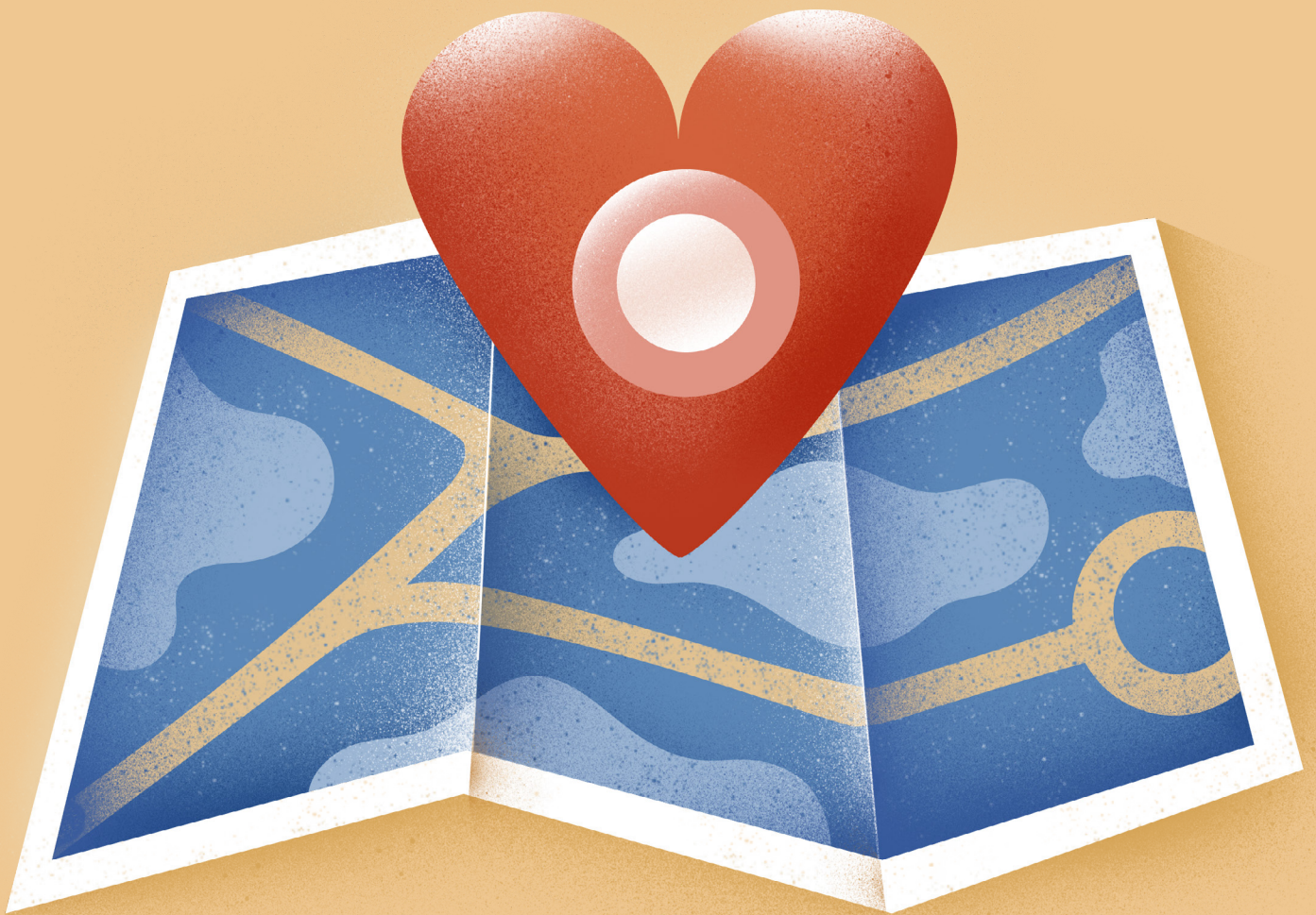


Making Mental Health Part of Your DEI Strategy

A roadmap to achieving a more equitable and inclusive workplace



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The stacked crises of 2020 have spurred unprecedented investment in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. People leaders like you have been given both the greenlight and the financial support to move forward with key initiatives. Yet, [global research conducted by McKinsey and Company](#) finds that nine out of ten executives report challenges executing their DEI strategies.

In the pages that follow, we'll explore some of the potential roadblocks to achieving a more equitable and inclusive workplace and offer alternate routes you can explore to drive real and sustainable change in your organization.



Start at the intersection of *mental health and DEI*

You can't arrive at a more equitable and inclusive workplace without investing in a sustainable mental health strategy. Why? Because mental health is inextricably linked to one's sense of identity, belonging, and self-worth. And, when a person's identity—gender, race, ethnicity, or disability—is questioned, used against them, or used to exclude them it absolutely affects their mental health.

Fortunately, more and more companies are prioritizing mental health in the workplace and recognizing the critical role it plays in DEI planning.

In fact, [a recent survey conducted by Willis Towers Watson](#) finds that nearly two thirds of employers (some 62 percent) are already increasing access to mental health services, and a whopping 93 percent say mental/behavioral health will be a top priority over the next three years.

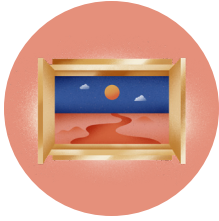
DEI
Strategy



Map the best route for your organization to take

As we look to expand access to mental healthcare for all, many organizations in the U.S. and around the world are turning to technology-based mental healthcare tools to solve for the ever-growing disparity between demand and supply. In fact, a [January 2021 survey](#) of 494 organizations in the U.S. found that some 83 percent are offering access to virtual coaching and 67 percent are delivering care via a digital platform.

Innovative on-demand solutions like Ginger provide employees with 24/7 access to the high-quality mental health support they need when they need it. And, more and more employees are taking advantage of this valuable benefit. In May of 2021 alone, Ginger saw a 318 percent increase in demand for our behavioral health coaching support and a staggering 363 percent increase in demand for therapy and psychiatry services, in comparison to pre-COVID-19 averages.



Check the *rear view mirror*

While it may seem like the events of 2020 are behind us, keep in mind that "objects in the mirror are closer than they appear." The fallout from the pandemic is far from over and underrepresented communities continue to struggle disproportionately.

The gender gap has significantly widened as women are now more than ever burdened with more unpaid work and the "double-shift" of balancing their household and professional workloads. [According to Pew Research](#), 2.4 million women left the labor force in the first year of the COVID-19 recession.

Pew Research also shows that Black and Hispanic workers continue to face higher unemployment rates. And, the [New York Times](#) reports that disabled workers and neurodiverse workers disproportionately lost jobs, too.

Meanwhile, the pandemic has had an outsized impact on marginalized communities within the workplace. [McKinsey & Company found](#) that women, LGBTQ+ employees, and people of color were more likely to report acute mental health challenges. In fact, they reveal that "only one in six diverse employees feels supported."

One important way you can support underrepresented communities in the workplace is to invest in culturally competent mental healthcare services. Culturally responsive mental healthcare can work in tandem with your DEI programs by:

- Providing a safe and productive space to articulate and work through trauma.
- Reducing barriers to care experienced by underrepresented populations and those experiencing the intersectionality of identity.
- Providing better experiences and outcomes for diverse populations.

At Ginger, we offer a diverse care team that can support any member of any community. We invest in cultural competency and ongoing training on topics relating to LGBTQ+, racial trauma, veterans, traditionally underserved groups, economically disadvantaged groups, and more.



Work to understand where *employees are coming from*

The road to equity is paved with empathy. We are all heading to the same destination, but we're starting from different places and taking different vehicles to get there.

For example, people of color were speaking their truth about police brutality long before 2020 reared its ugly head. It took a global pandemic and a cellphone recording of the murder of George Floyd to elevate their voices. Now, the world is watching (and listening). And many are ready to act.

As we collectively pursue racial equity and social justice, it's important to understand that the needs and learning curves for each community are very different. Some are grieving. Some are exhausted. Some are cautiously optimistic. Some want to know more. Some can't bear to explain it again. We all want and deserve to be heard, seen, and made to feel that we matter.

DEI
Strategy

As HR leaders, we have to find authentic ways to support all of these communities on their respective journeys.



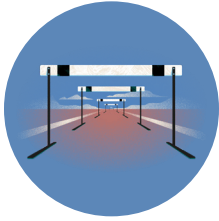
Include plenty of *rest stops*

It's never been more important to create safe spaces in your workplace where employees can gather to heal and support one another in times of crisis and beyond. Axios reports that 33 percent of employers are prioritizing Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) as part of their post-COVID planning.

If you haven't done so already, think about creating different types of spaces:

- **Support spaces** (for community members and allies). Here, all employees can gather to discuss recent events or anything else that affects a community.
- **Affinity spaces** (for community members only). These spaces are only open to those that identify as a member of a community. Affinity spaces are not designed for allies to join because there are some shared experiences that someone outside of a community can never truly understand.

Creating transparent, properly funded ERGs, that are supported and validated by senior leadership, can help foster employee trust and drive better mental health. And, there may be an added bonus as well. [New research from Great Place to Work®](#) found that nine in ten ERG leaders feel positive about the companies they work for and believe that their employers are "consistently taking meaningful actions to create a better society for all."

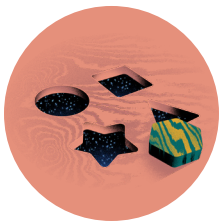


Don't speed through initiatives

You finally have resources, organizational support, and momentum on your side. While your first impulse may be to put the pedal to the metal and seize the moment before it's gone—slow down. It's better to proceed thoughtfully, with purpose, than to quickly zip through initiatives like items on a ToDo list.

Remember, the goal is to drive meaningful change. Take time to stop and reflect on what works and what doesn't. And, don't be afraid to acknowledge mistakes along the way. It's how we learn, improve, and move forward. Proceeding with purpose will improve outcomes, while performative actions will yield fleeting results at best, and may ultimately harm your credibility and impede your organization's ability to attract and retain top talent.

DEI
Strategy



Know your limits

Perhaps one of the few positive side effects of the pandemic is that today more people are willing to self-disclose, which can be particularly important for boosting empathy, building trust, and ultimately creating a more inclusive culture. That said, as an HR representative, you are often the first stop on an employee's journey to getting the care they need. So, it's important to know your limits and to set appropriate boundaries from the start—both for the employee and yourself.

Chances are you have a lot more people knocking on your door these days (if not physically, then virtually). But, how do you keep your own emotions in check and where do you knock when you need to vent?

As a people leader you need to practice what you preach—especially when it comes to self care. Ask for help when you need it, lean on internal and external peers for support whenever you can, and use up that vacation time. You can't support employees if you burn out.

Remember that while it's important to make people feel heard and understood, it's equally important to know when it's time to tap out. For example, if you are not a trained therapist experienced in dealing with trauma, you need to know when it's appropriate to escalate an issue or direct an employee to external resources and culturally competent care.



Prepare for a *lane change*

After more than a year of working remotely, the line between personal and professional has been blurred. Teleconferencing has given us all a window into our colleague's homes. We've met their children, their pets, and their partners—and seen them in their sweats—and there's no going back.

Employees are finding it increasingly difficult to compartmentalize their lives—and they no longer want to. It's simple, really. They want to be accepted and welcomed for who they are and they want to do meaningful work. They're looking for employers who are inclusive, consistent, and authentic, and for businesses that are committed to a mission that excites them. They also want employers who genuinely care about their well-being—this is especially true of younger workers.

DEI
Strategy

Mckinsey & Company says that 60 percent of Gen Z employees surveyed report that mental health resources are important in choosing an employer, and 57 percent say they are important when deciding to stay at an employer.

Forward-thinking organizations are taking notice and putting employee mental health and well-being at the center of their benefit packages and at the very heart of their DEI objectives.

Ginger brings high-quality mental health support within seconds to those in need. Through the Ginger app, members can connect with our team of coaches via text, 24/7, 365 days a year. For those in need of additional support, a therapist or psychiatrist can be added to their care team for video sessions. More than 25 million people have access to the Ginger on-demand mental health system through our work with employers, health plans, and other partners.

DEI
Strategy

To learn more about how Ginger can support your workforce, contact us at ginger.com/contact.

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