

EMPLOYER CASE STUDY:

Hot Topic's company culture supports the health of its people and business

HOT TOPIC® INC.

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District Manager Derek Kaufman has worked at Hot Topic for nine years. Overseeing 200 employees in 14 stores in Southern California and Hawaii, there is one store manager that sticks out.

"I had one manager who had been with us for 10-plus years, and she was struggling," Kaufman said. "With her previous supervisor, she wasn't able to speak openly and honestly, and I think she didn't feel valued. I've found that sometimes as a leader you need to be the one to ask the question and not always assume that they're going to be so forthcoming."

Kaufman's leadership approach is rooted in creating collaboration. He believes that the most effective thing he can do as a supervisor is to create an atmosphere where his team feels safe to be themselves, share feedback, and have agency to ask for what they need.

"By and large, we've created an environment where this manager now feels supported and where she can voice her concerns," said Kaufman, "and quite frankly, I've learned a lot about myself, too. She gives me valuable feedback, and I really trust and respect her. I'm so happy to see that she's in a space where she's thriving."

Kaufman attributes his ability to create a supportive and collaborative workplace environment to the culture at Hot Topic.

Hot Topic's strategic focus of creating a healthy work environment for all aligns with Mental Health America's research: In data gathered from more than 11,000 employees across 17 industries in the U.S., over 50% of respondents working in organizations with healthy work environments reported that their company invests in developing people managers, versus less than 3% of respondents in unhealthy work environments. In unhealthy work environments, nearly 40% of respondents reported that they actively spend time looking for a new position, versus 9% of respondents from healthy workplaces.

Mental health is important to Hot Topic CEO Steve Vranes and is woven into the company's strategic initiatives. Prioritizing mental health prevention and intervention is also a part of the company's mission to have a positive impact on the community. The nonprofit arm of the company, the Hot Topic Foundation, partners with Mental Health America and other organizations to provide grants and put mental health resources and programs directly into the hands of those who need it.

"Through the foundation, Hot Topic has helped more than 80,000 individuals have access to Mental Health America's online screenings. As long as there are people who feel unsafe, are unsupported, and are facing challenging things, we will continue to invest in mental health resources that make a difference for our 10,000-plus employees and in all our communities across the country," said Vranes.



"From our CEO down, there is a lot of empathy and compassion, and there's a high level of understanding about what we're doing here. Yes, we're running a business, and we're also human beings."

Derek Kaufman | District Manager, Hot Topic

HOT TOPIC[®]

At-a-Glance: Workplace Mental Health Support for Employees

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) benefits provided to all employees, regardless of location, and also open to family members

Free and anonymous **Mental Health America Screenings** and resources promoted online and through in-store promos

Behavioral health care treatment covered via telehealth options

Stress prevention, mindfulness practices, and digital coaching through **six different programs**

The company is Mental Health America Bell Seal certified, making it one of less than 25% of companies who make the cut for the rigorous workplace mental health certification. Creating a safe, supportive environment for employees and customers, many of whom identify as individuals from marginalized communities, is foundational to the company's core values. For Human Resources Director Joe Emory, investing in mental health to create a positive culture and a productive work environment is just who they are as an organization.

"I think percentage wise, we probably employ more people who identify as LGBTQ+ than any other company in the world," said Emory. "If you aren't allowed to show up authentically as who you really are, how can you possibly do a great job? It's going to affect your mental health in some capacity, it just will."

And that manager working on Kaufman's team?

"It's no surprise that her store has outperformed every single year since she's been there," Kaufman said. "She has driven a tremendous amount of volume into that location. She's also developed a lot of talented workers. She's got an eye for it. I think promoting and developing [her team] is a big indicator of great leadership and high performance. She tells me that she feels well supported in her role, and her team has benefited as a result of that."