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Announcer: Welcome to HII Talking Points, a Huntington Ingalls Industries Podcast. Twice a quarter we'll sit down with HII leaders to discuss topics of interest in our company and industry.

Phoebe Richards: Hi everyone. And welcome to HII Talking Points. I'm Phoebe Richards and joining me today is Amy Iveson, HII's corporate manager of health and wellness strategy. Amy, thanks for joining.

Amy Iveson: Thank you. Glad to be here.

Phoebe Richards: May is Mental Health Awareness Month. And I think we can all agree that the last 12 months have impacted everyone's mental health. As the company's manager of health and wellness strategy, I'd love to get your thoughts on the importance of mental health, how it impacts us at work and what you see in the future for mental health care. So to start, let's set the scene. Over the past few years, HII has put time into refreshing its mental health resources and even rebranded its employee assistance program. Can you talk about why this took place and how it impacted HII's pandemic response in 2020?

Amy Iveson: Sure. And I'm so glad to be here Phoebe and talk about mental health. It's such an important topic for our times right now. We know the mental health issues have been on the rise, and the pandemic has not helped at all. In fact, before the pandemic, we knew that one in five adults experienced a mental illness. And in fact, one in 25 had a serious mental illness that they were dealing with. And in fact, depression had risen to the number one cause of disability worldwide. Often unseen or hidden mental health issues have remained in the shadows if you will. And couple that with the pandemic and the isolation associated with that, it has only exacerbated the concern. So the fact that we're talking about this is very, very timely. The need is very real. We see it in our own employees. We see it in the information that we get back from our healthcare claims.

So I'm really, really glad that we're talking about this issue and an opportunity to highlight the importance of it. What we really found was that when people heard about the employee assistance program, they might've thought about it in a negative connotation because there is a component of the mental of the employee assistance program that had to do with a management referral process. You know, somebody who needed help with their work, and somebody who needed some more structure perhaps. And so, that for some people meant that they were in trouble, if you will. And that's not the case that that side of the program is really designed to help somebody be successful in their job and with their relationships at work. But for some people, it conjured up a negative image. And so what was it that really overshadowed all of the voluntary components of the employee assistance program?

So all of the voluntary benefits, the ability to reach out for information on a variety of life issues, the ability to reach out and voluntarily request counseling was overshadowed. And so we just had to pull that piece out of it and rename it HERO, which is an acronym for HII Employees Reach Out. With that, we've been able to promote it in a different way. We've been able to brand it in a way that people can recognize as a source of help, and doing that is really helped us to increase the availability of those services.

Phoebe Richards: Right. Very good. So for a lot of people, mental health is a private topic that can have a stigma associated with it. So what are your thoughts on mental health stigma? And do you see it changing?

Amy Iveson: Yeah, that's a great question. The stigma question has been around for ages. And it's real and it's societal. In other words, it's easy for people to say, "I'm fine," when asked, because there aren't a lot of outward signs of mental health challenges. And so, the stigma needs to change. And in fact, it is changing. One of the ways it's changing by the fact that we're sitting here talking about it. The fact that there's a mental health awareness month.

The fact that we worked at renaming our employee assistance program to really highlight that help component through the HERO voluntary side of the services. The other thing is what we know is that the workforce that's coming into us nowadays is more comfortable talking about anxiety and depression than any other generation before them. So if you have a child or somebody in the age bracket from 15 to 25, even maybe at 12 to 25, the words depression and anxiety are part of their language. It's not something that they've shied away from. So good for us as a society, we've been able to get that generation to move away from it. But in fact, there are other generations that are really struggling still with stigma. So again, being able to promote mental health awareness, being able to provide services, being able to talk about it, being able to work hard and allowing people to access the resources that are available and making that okay. It will really aid in diminishing the stigma that's associated with it.

Phoebe Richards: At HII, we're a workforce of more than 42,000 people working together every day. So we may notice when our coworkers and teammates aren't acting like their usual selves. How does mental health play into this? And what can coworkers do when they see their teammates in this situation?

Amy Iveson: Yeah. I really liked your terminology. Noticing that someone isn't quite themselves. That's really sometimes the first indication that an individual could use some support. Often people don't feel comfortable approaching someone if they've noticed that something's not quite right. But there's an important component to just being able to notice that that person is not quite themselves. There's a tremendous power in noticing that. It says that I care about you. And I always say that caring isn't rocket science. So being able to just acknowledge that somebody's not quite themselves, and say that. "You don't quite seem like yourself," will hopefully let that person know that they're cared for. And you can easily follow up that statement with, "have you considered the resources that are available or did you know about calling HERO?" You know, whatever the resources that you're offering to them. But the first step really is just acknowledging that your coworkers not quite themselves, and that might look different in any different situation.

It could be somebody who's normally, always on time to work with. Now, they're really struggling to get to work on time or they're leaving early, or they're a person who was always smiling and happy to participate in team meetings, doing their part. And now somehow that's changed. So they don't have the same kind of energy that they had. If they are seeming different to you, if there's a change in personality, again, that's really the first sign that maybe that person could use some support. And it's as simple as saying, "Hey, you don't seem like yourself." You might follow that up with "You don't seem like yourself. Is everything okay?" But that's a comfort level that everybody might not feel comfortable with because it might engage in a conversation you don't want to have. And that's okay. But acknowledging and recognizing that someone's not quite themselves is really the first key.

Phoebe Richards: And so along those lines, whether you're a manager or an individual contributor, there are ways to foster positive mental health in the workplace. Can you give our listeners a few examples?

Amy Iveson: Yeah, sure. This is so important, but let's start with the individual perspective at first, because we know that having positive mental health doesn't mean the absence of stress. In fact, we all encounter stress every single day. So really knowing for yourself, what you do to relieve your own stress is very important. So maybe, I'm listening to music, maybe it is gardening, maybe it's spending time with family. Whatever it is, it's important to know what your thing is, know what your go-to activity is to help reduce stress. Because we also know that stress left unchecked can escalate to distress.

And that's really, when you start to see that change in personality. In the workplace, promoting work-life balance is very important. We know that at HII, we don't just value the individuals, we impact and value the whole person. And we know that when you come to work, you don't just bring that skill and talent that we hired you for, you actually bring all of the cares in your heart and mind. And so, taking that into consideration, we want you to bring your best self to work, to do the job that you want to do, and then also be able to live your best life at home. So finding that good work life balance is very important.

Amy Iveson: Are there things in the work environment that are very important, bring that positive energy in. Be a solution person, not a complainer, working with your coworkers to develop that sense of team. Bringing that positive aspect to the work is very important to creating a positive, healthy team and being able to create an environment where people feel comfortable being themselves on their good days and their bad days. And knowing that they're going to be recognized if something isn't quite right.

Phoebe Richards: And then from like a manager standpoint, if you're leading a team or even if you're a member of a team, what can we do in a team setting to foster that positive mental health?

Amy Iveson: Yeah. There's really some important things that you can work with on your team. And some of those things are just team activities, making sure that you're maximizing the talents of each individual team member. I talked a minute ago about, we were all hired for a certain calendar, for a certain skill, right? Every person's dream job is to be able to do what they do best and be successful at it. So tapping into that, being able to also provide time for individuals to work in small teams, provide time for individuals to have some time out, if you will. Everybody sometimes needs to go in a quiet place and

work by themselves if they're feeling really stressed. But really just making it okay for an individual to be who they are in that moment, knowing that I'm going to bring my best work, my best self to work today, but in fact, also in my mind is, I might not have enough money to pay my rent.

And I might be worried about a sick child at home. I might be worried about caring for an elderly parent. Whatever things we're bringing to our work have an impact on the work team. So being able to recognize and let that person be who they are that day, still holding them accountable, of course, because we do have work to do, right? But having some flexibility in how and what that might look like for that day.

Phoebe Richards: Very good. And finally, as part of mental health awareness month, it's important to spread awareness on the resources available to employees and their families. And we've touched upon them a little bit, but can you tell our listeners about HII's mental health benefits and any new resources that may be coming soon?

Amy Iveson: Yeah, I'm so proud of our company, in that we've not only talked about mental health, but we have some resources to back it up. It wasn't really enough to just say, "Oh, mental health is important," but not back it up with some important resources. First of course, we've already mentioned our HERO Program. That's an acronym that stands for HII Employees Reach Out. They have a number of resources available to help with life's challenges. Simply put, I always like to say, if it's something that's on your mind, HERO's always a great place to start. One of our logos is the conversation bubble. So that makes me think if it's on your mind, HERO, like I said, is a great place to start. Also through HERO, you have access to eight free sessions of counseling for you and your household members.

That's eight free sessions of counseling per person per issue per year. When you really take that in, it's a very, very generous benefit, more generous than any other company that I've ever worked for. So that's really important to know. The other thing is that, when we think about HERO, it is for all of our employees. It's not just for somebody who's on the medical plan, that's really important to know. We also have Teladoc behavioral health services that we engaged in about 18 months ago. Through the pandemic, we actually waived the fee for our Teladoc services, and we're going to continue that moving forward. Again, one of the things that I love so much about our company is that, just like with our healthcare, our goal was to reduce barriers to people seeking care. So when we think about mental health, we've tried to do that as well with the HERO program.

That's free for all of our employees with Teladoc. That's not only for free, but also in terms of access to care, where you go for care, you can either go to a family health center for one of the HERO counselors. We actually have some of our HERO counselors there or out in the community. And then through Teladoc, you can have a video call with a therapist, or you can have a phone call with the therapist. So again, trying to reduce barriers. If you visit the HII benefits website, you'll see some other resources, like there's a mindfulness app on there called MyStrength. And then, looking forward, and Phoebe might already going to ask you this question. But looking forward, some other things that are coming are some programs that will help with issues like sleep or chronic care. Those we know are very closely linked to mental health issues as well.

So again, looking at wellbeing from the perspective of the whole person and making sure that we have resources available. What's important about all those resources is to one, know them for yourself, but also know them for your coworkers. And that's how that team perspective again, becomes very important from the manager perspective to the coworker perspective, know what's available. So if you're struggling or an employee is struggling, or a coworker that you know, at the tip of your fingers, what's available to be able to tap into.

Phoebe Richards: Right. That's great. Well, thank you Amy for sharing this excellent information, and thanks to our listeners for tuning in. Please reach out to the mental health resources mentioned in this episode if you want to talk to someone.

Amy Iveson: Thank you Phoebe. It's been a pleasure to be here. I would just add one last note that I've been on a Roadshow with a presentation that I've been doing called mental health in the workplace. If that's something that you or your team might be interested in, please reach out to me and I'll see if I can get on your schedule on your calendar to present that to your team. So thank you for the opportunity and I hope everybody will tap into these resources.

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Announcer: Thanks for listening to HII Talking Points. This podcast was produced by Huntington Ingalls Industries corporate communications team. We welcome your feedback and ideas for future podcasts at www.huntingtoningalls.com/podcast.

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