

THE INVISIBLE SECOND SHIFT:

YOUR EMPLOYEE IS “AT WORK”... BUT THEIR NERVOUS SYSTEM IS SOMEWHERE ELSE.

By Serenity corporate wellness

In High Conflict or High Uncertainty zones, many employees are doing two jobs at once:

- **Job #1:** Their actual role.
- **Job #2:** Staying mentally braced for what might happen next.

It's the silent load of:

- Safety uncertainty
- Family worry across borders
- Sleep disruption
- Hypervigilance
- Guilt (“*I’m safe, others aren’t*”)
- Compulsive news checking (“*just one more update*”)



And then, one day, a manager says: ***“Their performance is slipping.”***

But here's the truth: it's not a capability issue. It's a capacity issue and it's predictable.

The World Health Organization notes that most people affected by emergencies experience distress symptoms like anxiety, sleep issues, fatigue, irritability, anger, and aches, and that some go on to develop mental health conditions.

(World Health Organization)

At Serenity Corporate Wellness, we support multinational employers with teams based in high-risk settings - including Mozambique, UAE, and Qatar. This is what “The Second Shift” looks like at work, and what to do before it becomes burnout, conflict, or attrition.

THE PERFORMANCE DIP MANAGERS SEE FIRST (BUT MISREAD)

When the “second shift” is active, you’ll often see:

- More mistakes in routine work
- Slower decisions, “brain fog,” forgetfulness
- Withdrawal (quiet in meetings, flat energy)
- Shorter fuse (irritability, blunt messages)
- Conflict sensitivity (“everything feels personal”)
- Presenteeism (online and available, but low output)

This is a nervous system stuck in threat mode and threat mode doesn’t do deep thinking well.

STOP LEADING WITH “ARE YOU OKAY?”

Start protecting workload.

During crises, the most supportive thing a leader can do is reduce pressure at the source.

SHRM’s guidance on international crises emphasizes manager check-ins paired with flexibility around workloads and deadlines, and acknowledging that employees may need to put personal/family needs first.



A “Workload Protection Menu” that works (because it’s choice-based)

Offer options employees can select without explaining their story:

- **Flexible hours (split shifts, later starts, earlier finishes)**
- **Location flexibility (safety-first remote work)**
- **Temporary load reduction (remove 1 or 2 non-essential deliverables for 2 weeks)**
- **Deadline resets (protect quality; reduce rework)**
- **Meeting cuts (limit attendance; protect focus blocks)**
- **Safety-first leave (fast approvals; no stigma)**
- **EAP support (confidential, culturally sensitive)**

This protects performance and dignity.

GIVE MANAGERS A SCRIPT (SO THEY DON’T IMPROVISE)

Most managers care. They just panic about saying the wrong thing.

60-second script (supportive + non-invasive):

“I’m aware the situation may be weighing on people in different ways. You don’t need to share details.

What I can do is protect your workload and flexibility for the next two weeks.

Would you prefer fewer meetings, adjusted deadlines, flexible hours, or a reduced load?

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■ What not to say:

- “Try not to think about it.”
- “Let’s not talk about politics at work.” (can feel silencing)
- “You seem fine.” (often ends trust)

USE PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID PRINCIPLES

Psychological First Aid (PFA) isn’t therapy. It’s humane, supportive, practical help that respects dignity and culture. ([World Health Organization](#))

A workplace-friendly PFA approach:

1. Reduce stressors (load, urgency, meeting overload)
2. Offer practical choices (the Support Menu)
3. Keep people connected (opt-in check-ins; peer support)
4. Guide to help (clear EAP pathway; escalation when risk is high)



THE 14-DAY “SECOND SHIFT RESET” FOR LEADERS

If you want immediate impact, do this for two weeks:

- Cut meetings by 20%
- Reduce non-essential deliverables
- Default to flexible hours where possible
- Run quick check-ins using the script
- Re-share EAP access weekly (same message, calm cadence)



Watch what improves: fewer errors, better tone, faster decisions, less after-hours catch-up

If your organisation employs teams in Mozambique, UAE, Qatar (or any high-risk environment) and you need a structured approach that supports employees **without politicising, overstepping, or creating risk**, Serenity can help you implement an **Invisible Second Shift Support Framework**:

- Workload protection policy + templates
- Manager scripts + referral pathways
- Psychological first aid orientation for leaders
- Trauma-informed EAP escalation



*For People Who Matter **By** People Who Care.*

The journey to self-awareness and emotional resilience begins with a single step.

At Serenity Corporate Wellness, we provide expert counselling services designed to help individuals and organizations cultivate healthier, more productive environments. Whether you're facing personal challenges or seeking to build a stronger workplace culture, our tailored support ensures you never have to navigate these struggles alone. Take the first step toward unlocking your full potential — to learn more visit: www.serenitycorporatewellness.com