MHR

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

YOUR GUIDE TO A HEALTHIER WORKPLACE.

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INTRODUCTION

In the space of just a few years, mental health has gone from something rarely discussed to a burning issue in the workplace.

As the connection between a happy, healthy workforce and a successful business becomes clearer, industry leaders are waking up to the fact that this is an issue they can't afford to ignore.

Despite the progress, there is still a long way to go. Mental health remains a difficult subject to discuss. Many continue to suffer in silence, afraid that opening up about their struggles will damage their reputation or career prospects. Until we shift the stigma around mental health, people will still suffer without the support they need, and businesses will continue to pay the price through reduced productivity.

This e-book sheds light on the issue of mental health in the workplace, and offers some practical advice designed to help business leaders create a more supportive and healthy work environment.

TALK

WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AS A BUSINESS ISSUE?

Mental illness is responsible for 72 million working days lost and costs £34.9 billion each year. At any given time, 1 in 6 working-age adults have symptoms associated with mental ill health. Every year it costs businesses £1,300 per employee whose mental health needs are unsupported.

On top of this, there is a major disconnect between senior business leaders and the wider workforce.

69% of UK line managers say that supporting employee wellbeing is a core skill, but only **13%** have received mental health training.

Only **11%** of employees feel able to disclose a mental health issue to a manager. In a recent UK survey, stress, anxiety and depression were the three most concealed issues.

Why does this happen?

Because people fear that opening up about their struggles will damage their reputation, make them appear weak, or even threaten their position.

Unfortunately, there is some truth in this – according to a UK survey, almost **10%** of employees who disclosed mental health issues were subject to disciplinary procedures, demotion or dismissal.

HOW DOES MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT BUSINESS?

While mental health is fundamentally a human issue, it also has a direct impact on your bottom line. Any success that your company enjoys is due to the hard work of its staff.

If a large proportion of your workforce is struggling with mental health issues, this will translate to reduced productivity, increased absence and higher staff turnover.

According to the Chief Medical Officer at BHSF, without early intervention strategies, an open workplace culture, and a proactive approach to employee mental health, this issue is not going away.

In fact, if employers don't act now, employee wellbeing and productivity will continue to decline.

- Driven by an 'always on' culture, studies show that more than **40%** of all workers face high stress in their jobs, negatively affecting their productivity, health and family stability

- The global cost of mental health issues between 2011 and 2030 will amount to $16.3 trillion

- The UK loses 12.8 million working days per year due to work-related stress

- The average employee takes 8.4 sick days each year due to a mental health problem

- Yet only **13%** of employees felt able to disclose a mental health issue to their manager

- Addressing wellbeing at work increases productivity by **12%**

HOW CAN WE BRING ABOUT CHANGE?

Mental health has long been seen as a taboo subject in the workplace. In order for this to change, we need to start having proactive conversations around mental health. This means sharing our experiences, confiding in peers, and being available to help others when they need it.

Only by being open with each other will we shift the stigma around mental health.

Managers have a key role to play here. By getting to know their team members on a human level, they help create an environment where employees feel comfortable talking about personal matters.

One way to encourage this is through regular check-ins, where managers and employees discuss not only progress and performance, but also happiness and wellbeing.

THINK

THERE IS NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH WHEN IT COMES TO EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

In order to create a safe environment and reduce workplace anxiety and stress, your approach needs to be personalised to the individual. Work affects people in different ways. What one person might find stressful, another might find exciting.

The only way to understand the contributing factors that can aggravate or even cause mental health issues is to understand the individual.

Again, regular discussions between employees and managers can uncover the factors that are having a detrimental effect on mental health, and help them shape work to suit the individual needs of the employee.

BEWARE OF BURNOUT

Employee burnout cases have increased to the point where the World Health Organization has officially recognised it as an occupational phenomenon and was included in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases. The handbook describes burnout as "a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed."

It is the responsibility of managers and business leaders to ensure that your staff aren't at risk of burning out. This means ensuring that workloads are reasonable, deadlines are realistic, and targets are achievable. By checking in regularly with each member of their team, managers can find out how they are really feeling about their workload.

Are you promoting flexible working?

Flexible working is an effective way of reducing workplace stress and anxiety, and gives employees a degree of control over when and where they work. Even shifting the workday either way by just an hour can make a big difference to some people's lives, particularly those who have caring responsibilities. Taking this a step further, remote working encourages creativity and innovation. Many people find they are at their most productive away from the distractions of the workplace.

ARE YOUR TEAM MEMBERS GETTING ENOUGH BREAKS?

Productivity isn't about long days tethered to a desk. To boost energy and creativity, encourage your staff to take regular exercise and breaks, and make sure they take their entire annual leave. This is particularly important for those working from home who have less of a separation from work and life.

To mix things up, why not organise activities away from the desk or normal work environment. Walking meetings can be held, or if you're at home, why not sit in your garden and have a picnic lunch?
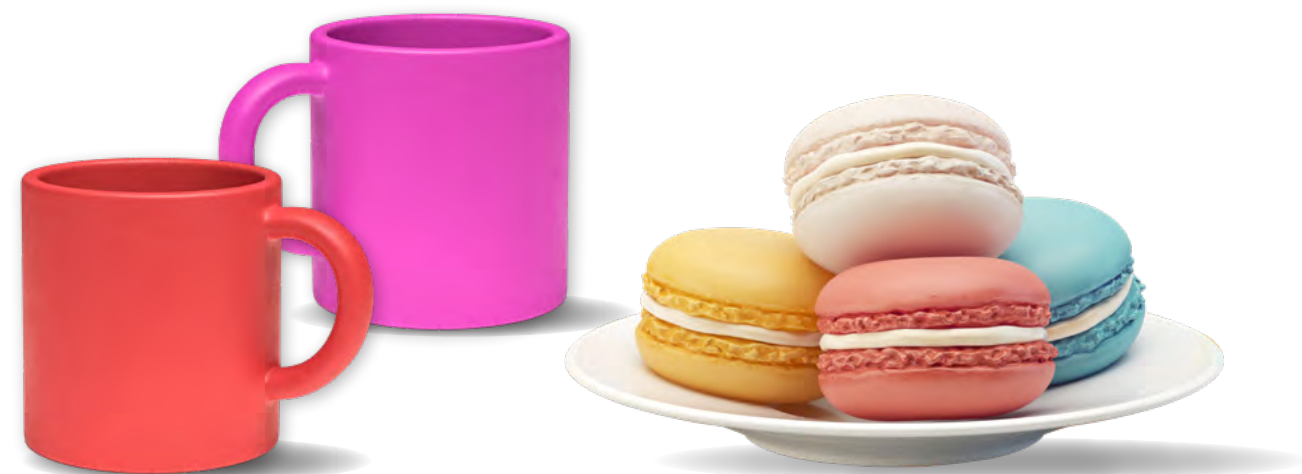
EMPLOYEE WELLBEING ISN'T JUST A 9-TO-5 THING...

It's important that you encourage wellbeing beyond the workplace..

A good night's sleep, healthy eating, regular exercise and mindfulness – all of these things can contribute to a healthier state of mind. It's all about setting regular patterns that can have a positive impact on your team's health and happiness both inside and outside of work. A key part of this is understanding the link between the things we do and the way we feel.

...but work emails should be!

In today's 'always on' work culture, it can be hard to leave the stresses of work at the door when we leave or switch off our laptop at night. There is always the temptation to check or reply to emails, but this type of pressure comes from unreasonable expectations placed on employees.

To help avoid burnout and stress, your staff need to be able to separate their work lives from their private lives.

You can help them do this by resisting the urge to send emails out of working hours, and ensuring that overtime is reserved for exceptional circumstances – if your people are working more than the agreed amount on a regular basis, it means their workload is unrealistic.

TRAIN

MANAGERS MUST TAKE THE LEAD

Ignorance is one of the biggest barriers to positive change. Many people simply don't understand mental health issues, and therefore don't know how to help.

The best way to raise awareness and improve outcomes is through mental health training. This includes learning what to look for, when to intervene, and how to offer support. If we aren't armed with the knowledge and skills needed to tackle this issue, we risk making it worse.

Managers are responsible for their team's happiness and performance. This involves ensuring that workflow and deadlines are reasonable, listening to their team members' concerns, and providing guidance and support around goals, performance and well-being.

Managers have a greater influence on their team members than anyone else in the workplace. In fact, **91%** of managers agree that what they do affects the wellbeing of their staff, while only **58%** of employees feel that their line manager is genuinely concerned about their wellbeing.
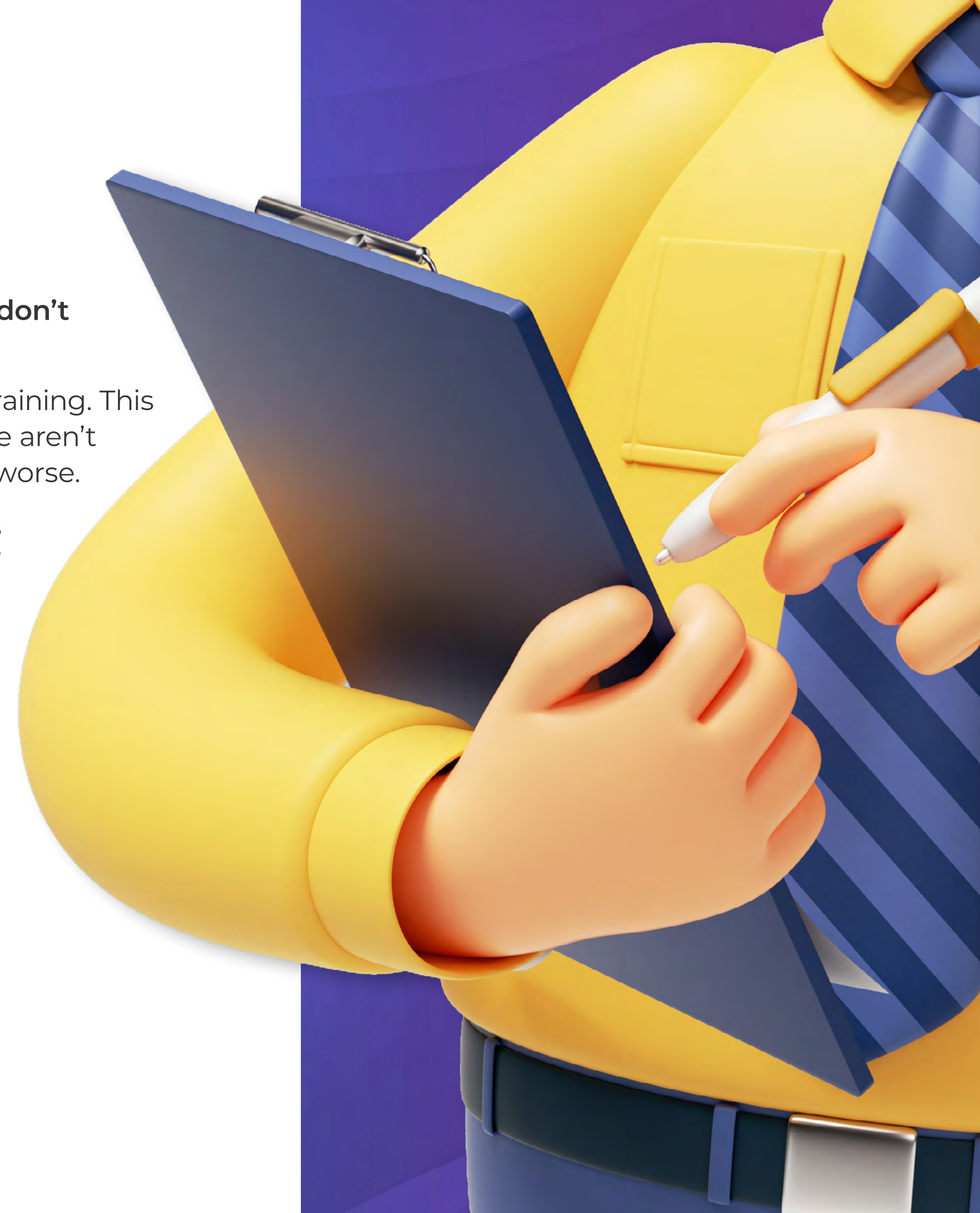
REMEMBER: MANAGEMENT IS A HUMAN PROCESS

In many cases, people become managers because they are experienced or successful in their specialised field, or perhaps because they exhibit certain qualities traditionally associated with leadership – confidence, assertiveness, the ability to make decisions.

Very rarely do people become managers because they are the best at managing people. As a result, many managers are ill-equipped for the human side of management – something that is increasingly important in the modern workplace.

Less than a quarter (**24%**) of managers have received any training in mental health, meaning over three quarters of managers are totally un-equipped for handling one of the biggest workplace issues of our time.

With effective training, managers not only become organisers and delegators, but effective coaches and mentors. Instead of focussing solely on the productivity of their team, they learn to understand the human factors that affect performance.

Mental health training teaches managers to spot the warning signs of mental health issues. It also helps them broach sensitive subjects with colleagues, understand how conscious and unconscious prejudices work, learn how to listen without judgement, and how to welcome staff back after an absence.

WHAT OTHER STRATEGIES ARE THERE?

Beyond providing effective mental health training, here are a number of practical ideas that businesses can implement in the workplace.

1. SURVEYS

While it is the job of a manager to discuss the well-being of team members during check-ins, the HR department or senior leadership are responsible for understanding the well-being of the workforce at large. The best way to do this is through mental health surveys, where employees can disclose information with anonymity.

But beware: if you carry out a survey, you'll have to act on the results. Asking employees to share their experiences and then ignoring them will do more harm than good.

2. MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AIDERS

Mental health first-aiders are effective for a number of reasons. First, they are trained in mental health. Second, they are independent, and therefore unbiased. Knowing that these people are removed from direct management and internal politics may encourage more people to come forward and discuss their mental health in confidence, safe in the knowledge that it won't have a detrimental effect on their progression and growth.

3. ENCOURAGE OPENNESS AND HONESTY

For positive change to take place, you need to encourage a culture of openness and honesty in the workplace.

Perhaps the best way to do this is through regular check-ins, where employees meet face-to-face with their managers and have constructive conversations about anything work related.

Regular meetings help managers and employees to get to know each other on a human level, and breakdown traditional boundaries between both parties.

For these to work, it is important that employees know that there can only be positive outcomes from these discussions.

4. OFFER INDEPENDENT SUPPORT

Another option is to offer independent support as part of your benefits package.

This gives your people access to a range of professionals and services, from counselling to advice around financial management or legal issues.

The confidential nature of these services may encourage employees to disclose information that they might not feel comfortable disclosing in the workplace.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

There are many organisations dedicated to raising awareness around mental health, both globally and locally. Many provide information, training courses and events designed to help us better understand the challenges associated with mental health.

Here are just a few examples.

Global

The World Federation for Mental Health: www.wfmh.global

The Centre for Global Mental Health: www.centreforglobalmentalhealth.org

UK

ACAS: www.acas.org.uk

St. John's Ambulance: www.sja.org.uk

Mind: www.mind.org.uk

USA

Mental Health America: www.mentalhealthamerica.net

The National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov

MentalHealth.gov: www.mentalhealth.gov

ABOUT MHR

MHR supports businesses and organisations shaping their futures through these challenging times – increasing workforce adaptability through delivering integrated people management and learning solutions. We help reduce complexity and build business resilience – key to survival and growth. Find out how we can help you position your organisation for the road ahead.

CONTACT US ❯

info@mhrglobal.com | mhrglobal.com | +44 (0) 115 945 6000 (UK) | +353 (01) 153 98658 (IRE)