

How to build a
workplace culture
where mental
wellbeing can
flourish



Our fourth annual Mental Health summit took place in October as a virtual event, focused on mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

This blog was drawn from the insights and experiences shared by the event's outstanding panel of industry leaders:

- **Karen Jackson**, who chaired the event, is the founder of didlaw, a specialist practice in employment law, particularly discrimination of all kinds.
- **Dr Jacqui Dyer MBE** is President of the Mental Health Foundation. She is an independent health and social care consultant with a background in adult mental health commissioning as well as community and family social work.
- **Jonny Jacobs**, who has just moved to Starbucks where he is Finance Director for EMEA. Before a period at M&S, Jonny spent seven years at Pladis in senior finance roles in the UK and the US.
- **Jin Chin** is Head of HR Transformation/ Chief of Staff at Legal and General. A long standing volunteer with the Samaritans, he was the Chair of Trustees for the Central London Samaritan branch for four years.
- **Annette Andrews** is an experienced Chief People Officer and has worked with senior leaders on a global basis in highly regulated organisations including Ford Motor Company, Lloyds Banking Group, and most recently, Lloyd's Insurance Market.



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Our responsibility as leaders is to create an environment where people can feel *vulnerable*, share their vulnerability, and be supported.



Our recent webinar on mental health in the workplace highlighted the need for kindness, the power of words and the need to enable leaders to share their vulnerability. Because when senior people talk freely about their own ups and downs, it makes the rest of us feel more comfortable about opening up. But this is undoubtedly easier said than done.



We know that organisations that tie mental wellbeing to their purpose can move things along. Starbucks is a good example: it is obvious how good mental health can play a role in delivering its mission is to 'inspire and nurture the human spirit'. Small organisations have a natural advantage because it's easier to connect directly with everyone more easily. However, if you work in a large enterprise, then you can start small: with your own team.



Personal storytelling is very powerful. In sharing our own experiences, we recognise our shared humanity and give our colleagues permission to do the same. However, sharing personal vulnerabilities is more than talking about all the problems we have – it's really about bringing our whole self to work, the good as well as the not so good. It shows that 'mental health' is something we all have, day in day out, and is simply part of who we are.

Refreshingly
human

For businesses that are serious about building a culture that promotes wellbeing, here are some helpful recommendations from our expert panel:

1. Recognise that mental health is the responsibility of all leaders, not just HR. Leaders who want to make a difference need to be accessible and authentic. Traditional hierarchies and expectations of leadership make this harder. Flatter, more agile organisation models give leaders at every level more opportunity and flexibility to understand and address people's needs. In many ways, Covid has made every leader more accessible and helped to flatten out the hierarchies and barriers to communications that have often held us up before.

2. Introduce a coaching style of liderazgo, especially for middle managers who are frequently under pressure from above and below. You can have great programmes and supportive systems but while 90% of people feel that they can't speak to their line manager about mental health issues then things simply will not improve. To solve this, we have to make sure we have the right people in leadership roles. Not everyone is cut out to be a people manager, but we often consider this too late, or not at all. Let's develop people before they become managers, not just throw them in and hope for the best. The 'servant leadership' model (akin to that used by the Samaritans) can be helpful here.

3. Getting the language right can make a real difference to people's perception of mental health initiatives. Using positive vocabulary and positioning mental health as important to our overall wellbeing and performance helps break down stigma and reluctance to engage.

4. A more holistic approach will thread mental health through induction, training, appraisal and personal development programmes, and we should be aiming to consider how any interaction with employees reinforces the importance an organisation places on good mental health. For example, as well as checking if someone has hit their targets, let's also review how they achieved those goals. Did they lead their team with empathy and honesty? Families and carers are often forgotten in the mental health conversation, yet most of us are also looking out for the mental health of others in our lives. Recognising these demands, as well as providing support for those in a caring capacity can be transformative and all employers should have an employee assistance programme (EAP), which is also available to employees' family members.

Clearly, much of this can take time and planning, and even longer to embed within a business, but there are three practical steps you can do now that will take your business forward:

- Review your wellbeing policies and practice. Whether it's the ups and downs of remote working or the reality of an increase in domestic violence, make sure you have a support infrastructure in place. It's always better to pre-empt rather than react.
- Appoint mental health first aiders for the workplace. Put in place people who are trained to spot the triggers and signs of mental health issues and who have the confidence to step in, reassure and support a person in distress. As a mental health first aider, I am aware of the positivity with which this kind of investment receives from my colleagues, but it really is only part of a puzzle. Stopping here is like providing every household in the UK with a first aid kit but not recognising our needs for a strong public health system or indeed, personal self-care.
- Tap into the expertise and resources of organisations such as Mind, the Mental Health Foundation and the City Mental Health Alliance, who stand ready to partner with organisations of every size.
- We are still a long way from embedding mental health conversations and programmes into the everyday flow of business, but I am heartened with how far the conversation has come in such a short time. One of our webinar attendees observed that the mental health conversation is where diversity and inclusion sat ten years ago in terms of importance on the business agenda. However, the pandemic has thrown a spotlight on mental wellbeing and accelerated all sorts of changes in the workplace and I am optimistic that this progress will continue. For me, vulnerability undoubtedly sits at the heart of the matter. Our responsibility as leaders is to create an environment where people can feel vulnerable, share their vulnerability, and be supported by those around them.

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Watch the
webinar



Read a blog drawn
from the event's
discussion here.



Olivia Sharp

Partner, Human Resources

Olivia specialises in Executive Search for our HR Practice. Her practitioner background in HR, gained in various senior positions in a FTSE100 organisation, combined with her extensive general management experience, gives our HR Practice a unique offering for clients and candidates alike.

A Chartered Member of the CIPD, Olivia has a specialist interest in mental health and its relationship with individual and organisational performance, along with discrimination, diversity and inclusion in the workplace. She also brings first-hand experience of delivering business turnarounds as well as wide- scale people and cultural change.

A skilled HR generalist, Olivia has strong leadership and team development experience, having used a broad spectrum of leadership assessment tools and techniques. Olivia leads search activity across the full HR spectrum, from generalist to specialist roles, and has a particular focus on leadership roles with a strong track record in multisite commercial enterprise, not-for-profit organisations, unionised environments, and the energy sector.

Thank you to
everyone who
attended the
event. We *look
forward* to
welcoming you
back next year!



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