

Walking on sunshine

Ensuring wellbeing is a vital task for the modern day employer, and this edition of *PPMA Focus* goes into some of the ways it is being achieved within this sector. **Karen Grave** explains

I'll wager that like me, you started singing Katrina and the Waves' fabulous song when you read the headline to this article.

PPMA started its 'recent' focus on Wellbeing when our previous President Caroline Nugent, started her term. That focus helped start a debate which led to the 2019 conference focus on the relationship between leadership, employee wellbeing, employee engagement and productivity.

The reality for too many of us is that we are not walking on sunshine. And while we are not guaranteed lives and careers free from challenge, I've no doubt society and employers are recognising that equipping our workforces and users of service to live and work in healthy and productive ways is essential.

Employers across public (and private) sector organisations are moving away from a narrow focus on managing absence rates to building organisations that see wellbeing as a strategic goal. This is really helpful as what that does is move the debate from managing costs to investing in better individual and organisation performance outcomes for the future.

Our Let's Talk: Wellbeing theme recognises that wellbeing is a broad topic. Our theme lead, Mykela Pratt, has an interesting piece on what our focus is later on in the supplement. Looking at all aspects of wellbeing is important, but it does present some challenges. The most immediate from a HR & OD perspective (and that of our finance colleagues) is cost. Making the case for prevention versus cure is in my view a no brainer. However, when financial pressures continue to be at the focus of our minds, being able to show financial benefits where it is possible to do so, is essential.

I think we can learn from our public health colleagues. It is clear that efforts to improve sexual health, obesity, and reduce smoking rates reduce long term pressures on NHS resources. Influencing children about how to live healthy lives is also enabling us to better manage demand



on all of our services, not just the NHS.

In thinking about prevention and cure, I find it fascinating to see how different parts of the public sector tackle this. At the recent Healthcare People Management Association (HPMA) conference I heard how Mersey Care tackle the issue. In some respects, it isn't surprising that a clinical approach is taken. We're seeing increasing use of clinical take up in the provision of counselling and mental health services in local government too. You will be able to read about this in the articles from our colleagues in Norfolk and in Scotland. What I especially admire about the Norfolk approach is that it works so closely with public health colleagues. It's another great example of whole system collaboration.

Local government brings us a different perspective too. Given that we provide a whole range of services

to support wellbeing – such as adult care – it stands to reason that we should be practising what we preach. Basildon Council won one of our two wellbeing-related PPMA Excellence in People Management awards this year. They've outlined their winning

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approach in an article later on in this supplement. I love what they have done because it demonstrates what an idea, conceived of by two fantastic individuals and supported

by one amazing HR head of service can achieve. I especially love that this initiative has increased volunteering.

Another unique approach in local government comes from our PPMA South East Chair Anastasia Simpson, where Tendring DC have implemented Wellbeing Hubs in schools. This is absolutely inspired and is one of the best strategic approaches to wellbeing I have seen. Anastasia is so passionate about this and it's easy to see why. Her approach is even smarter as the majority of Tendring employees come from the locality. So, this isn't just the right thing to do for children, it's actually a smart recruitment and retention strategy too.

Of course, we don't all just have the luxury of prevention. We need to ensure we are able to respond to employees in times of real crisis. Another of our winners was the British Transport Police (BTP).

Our blue light colleagues deal with situations the majority of us will never face in our lives (thank goodness). BTP employees face a high risk of exposure to traumatic incidents. We are so busy in our lives that I think we sometimes forget we have a moral and sacred obligation to look after those who look after us. BTP colleagues deserve huge plaudits for what they do for their people.

Our final article from MHR also makes an important point. Human beings are unique, and one size does not fit all. The point here being that while employers can offer a range of opportunities to help, how each of us will experience that help will differ and we always need to keep that in mind.

There is another debate we need to start having that directly influences wellbeing. And this is an important debate about job quality. Each year, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) produces a UK Working Lives survey, which has a particular focus on 'Good work'. The CIPD sets out seven characteristics of Good Work, namely:

- fairly rewards people
- gives people the means to securely make a living
- gives opportunities to develop skills and a career, and ideally gives a sense of fulfilment
- provides a supportive environment with constructive relationships
- allows for work-life balance
- is physically and mentally healthy
- gives employees the voice and choice they need to shape their working lives
- is accessible to all.

We will be looking at aspects of this in our next PPMA supplement which is focused on Future Workforce.

In the meantime, please enjoy *PPMA Focus* and find as much sunshine in your lives as you can.

Karen Grave is PPMA President





Let's start at the beginning

A collaboration between Tendring DC and a local primary school has shown the way forward in aiding the nation's youth in improving their mental wellbeing. **Anastasia Simpson** explains

Mental health wellbeing is hugely important to quality of life and comprises of feeling good and functioning well. It describes how resilient we are to life's ups and downs and is associated with a range of better outcomes for both children and adults.

We all know about the various initiatives to support positive mental health in the workplace. Many of us as HRDs in the public sector have access to occupational health services, employee assistance programmes, and counselling providers, however mental health issues are still on the rise. Within the district of Tendring there are significant adult mental health issues, with high rates of emergency hospital admissions for self-harm and one of the highest suicide rates in the country (ranked 5th of 324 districts for persons aged 10+ years).

Building strong mental health in early life can help children build self-esteem, learn to settle themselves and engage positively with their education. This in turn can lead to improved academic achievement and enhanced future employment opportunities and positive life choices. Within Tendring DC, 94% of employees also live in the district, so it is vital both for the organisation and the community that jointly we work together to address mental health and build resilience.

The national *Mental Health of Children and Young People Survey* carried out in 2017 allows for the examination of trends and gives the prevalence of diagnosable mental health problems among children and young people together with factors associated with mental health. In primary schools 9.5% of children aged 5-10 had at least one disorder. The most common types in this age were behavioural (5%) and emotional (4.1%). Using national prevalence data shows that Tendring has the highest prevalence of mental health disorders in children in Essex at 9.8% of the population aged 5-16 years.

Within Tendring a new approach was needed.

The ongoing priority for the council's Partnership Portfolio Holder, Cllr Lynda McWilliams and Chief Executive, Ian Davidson, is to ensure that community leadership is in everything we undertake as officers of the council. In 2016, the council went with a proposal to local primary schools, through the Tendring Education Improvement Group, to ask if there was a school in the district that would like to be a pilot and work directly with the council to establish a Wellbeing Hub. Great Bentley Primary School stepped forward to work jointly with the council, embracing a whole school approach to universally supporting the wellbeing and mental health of students and staff. They also designed a hub for targeted provision of a structured course of additional support to children with emerging difficulties who did not reach the threshold for statutory services.

All of these life skills are transferable into the workplace and the council provided the training for the teachers and support staff at Great Bentley school, so that all employees involved in the wellbeing hub are accredited Mental Health First Aiders

The aim of the programme is to:

- Develop resilience skills
- Encourage each child to recognise and express emotion
- Empower children
- Enable children to start to develop their self esteem
- Equip children with a set of skills/choices to tackle things that cause anxiety
- To gain a 'rucksack of skills' to take them forward into secondary school and beyond into the world of employment

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In conjunction with the after school sessions for children, the Wellbeing Hub also engages with and offers support to parents and carers providing information and learning sessions on subjects such as sleep, nutrition, growth mindset, skills packages and resilience.

Evaluation undertaken by Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services Essex of the impact of the hub categorises three domains. Early data shows all domains have an increase, in order, of 58% for 'how is everything', 29% for 'how am I feeling' and 21% for 'how are things with my family'. This shows that young people and their parents/carers are feeling more resilient and equipped and empowered.

The headteacher at Great Bentley Primary School is an inspiration, she has invested her pupil premium funding to support this project, and is passionate that if she can unlock these barriers to learning at an early age and support healthy mental wellbeing in her school her children will be able to take these skills with them on their lifelong journey.

Alongside this, as the largest local employer in Tendring the council also hopes that in a few years these young people will be the talent pipeline and will be applying for job roles with us.

The Wellbeing Hub at Great Bentley has been identified as good practice by Healthwatch Essex, who have produced a video to showcase it.

Anastasia Simpson is Head of People, Performance and Projects at Tendring DC and PPMA South East Regional Chair

<https://healthwatchessex.org.uk/2019/02/primary-school-uses-innovative-wellbeing-hub-to-help-pupils-with-mental-health/>

Some things to ponder

Sharon McKenzie shares some valuable insights from a recent day spent with colleagues alongside a chartered psychologist on wellbeing

Supporting good mental health in the workplace is a central part of most organisations' wellbeing agendas. The focus on 'evidence' is becoming ever more acute. Evidence supports the need to make an effective business case for any investment. This is a particular challenge when investment in wellbeing is, by its very nature, a long-term one and the common focus in local government tends to be short term financial savings.

Dr Richard MacKinnon, a chartered psychologist from WorkLifePsych shared his insights into the measurement of wellbeing with myself and my colleagues. He reminded us as practitioners that we need to think scientifically, be evidence based and approach wellbeing from a holistic standpoint.

One interesting observation was the language we see used in recruitment. You will have seen, and maybe even written, person specifications which identify 'resilience' as a necessary attribute. Viewed from the wellbeing perspective, this is a red flag – as it begs the question, why do you need to be resilient to work for this organisation?

The UK has evolved into a country with a very high stress culture, particularly when you compare it to other European countries. This is due to a legacy of decisions resulting in, for example, a national childcare model that can contribute to, rather than eliminate, the parental

stress of juggling family and work. This perspective provides food for thought about the wellbeing consequences of decisions being taken today on our employees of the future. This perspective also gives us an opportunity to reflect on the longer-term wellbeing consequences of our own organisational decisions.

Another important focus for HR and OD practitioners is not to lose sight of the psychological perspective of wellbeing. This covers engagement, fulfilment and satisfaction.

Dr MacKinnon challenged a number of false beliefs. 'Fake news' has some currency and it has a place in this discussion – for example, we have accepted as 'gospel' a range of information for which there is actually no scientific evidence. For some circumstances there is corroborative evidence, however that is not as strong as a proven causal link. We were challenged to think like a scientist and ask for the evidence rather than taking what we think we know, for granted.

Are you aware that there is no causal evidence linking engagement to productivity yet? Engagement however is worthwhile for the sake of wellbeing.

Another key message: To be effective, support for good mental health needs to be embedded. No surprise then that it has to be much more than a Mental Health Week or free

bananas! The holistic view recognises that life outside work can contribute to, or detract from, work in the organisation and acknowledges that sometimes the multiple roles an individual has can be in conflict.

We need to identify our real priorities, address poor job design, mitigate unsustainable working styles, and work really hard to manage conflicting demands and overwhelming workload

The first step in a scientific approach is to be very clear about the goal. We need to take time defining the exact nature of the problem we are trying to solve. Using a simple example, is stress the issue or is it bullying that is causing the stress? And, if it is bullying, what is the context in which it occurs as bullying can be contextual. We need to make sure we avoid the normal temptation (particularly when politicians and management teams need a supply of visible activity) to start with 'solutions' – like those free bananas.

There is good news, however. The Health and Safety Executive Stress Management Standards were recommended by Dr MacKinnon as a good route to obtain evidence.

As you would expect from the HSE, the stress management standards are evidence based and have a causal relationship with stress and are also supported by a range of tools.

Our workplaces present other challenges. We need to identify our real priorities, address poor job design, mitigate unsustainable working styles, and work really hard to manage conflicting demands and overwhelming workload. Importantly, the Stress Management Standards cover job demands, extent of control, availability of support, relationships with peers and line manager, role clarity and the management of change.

In wanting to do good, we need to beware negative outcomes and unintended consequences. As well as identifying the goal, which is the intended positive outcome, be aware and think through potential negative outcomes and recognise there will be unintended ones. Your 'before' and 'after' interventions may also produce some curved balls.

If we approach this positively though we will be able to use our intended consequences as good learning experience.

Sharon McKenzie is Head of Human Resources at Fife Council and Society for Personnel and Development Scotland (SPDS) President



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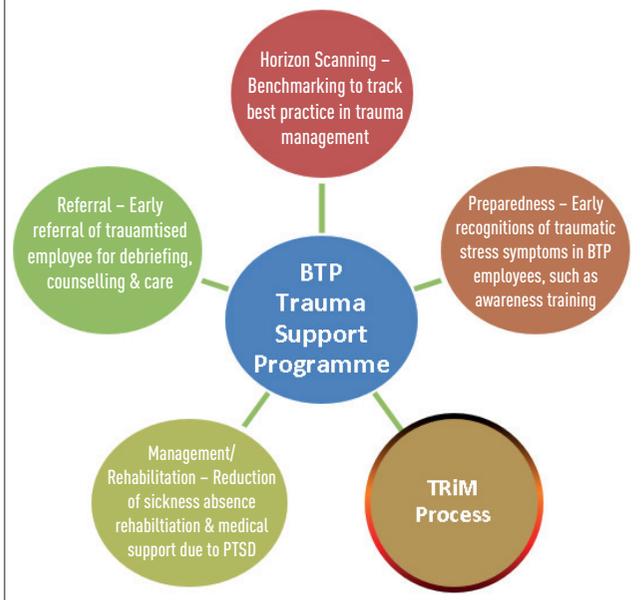


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Supporting our staff today

Nisa Gina Carey discusses the British Transport Police's PPMA Award-winning Most Effective Mental Health Initiative

Figure 1: BTP Trauma Support Programme



Almost all of British Transport Police (BTP) employees work in situations that under health, safety and wellbeing are deemed high risk and as a result can be exposed either directly or indirectly in their daily work on the railways to suicides, fatalities, and other critical incidents.

They are also at risk of serious assault and injury. For this reason, the highest risk to BTP employee wellbeing is the high frequency of exposure to work related traumatic incidents. Therefore, as part of the BTP Wellbeing strategy, the BTP has developed a Trauma Support Programme (TSP) to minimise the potentially negative impact of traumatic stress and to pro-actively prevent the progression of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

affecting the health and wellbeing of BTP employees.

One key area in TSP is a peer support system called Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) which also achieves National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's (NICE) recommendation. It is an early intervention system that was initially developed from the military which has proven to be very effective in pro-active support and care through robust research.

TRiM involves post incident procedures carried out by appropriately trained volunteers called TRiM practitioners. TRiM practitioners are able to provide peer support to monitor trauma-exposed individuals and, where necessary, assist them to access professional support.

Table 1

TRiM Incident Briefs/Emails 2016 - 2018

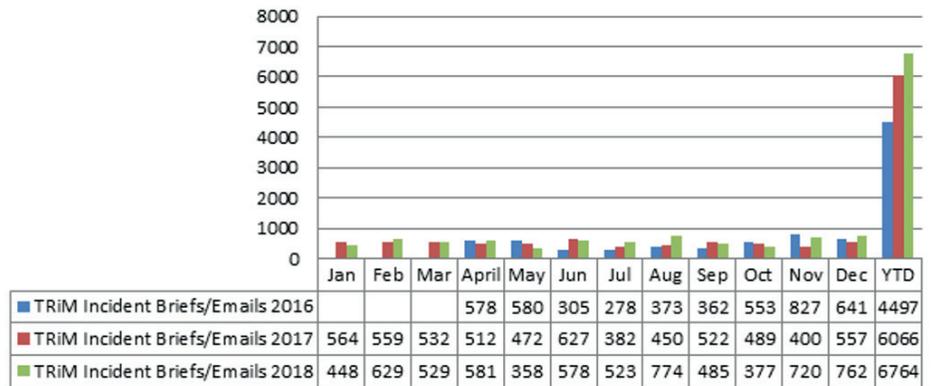
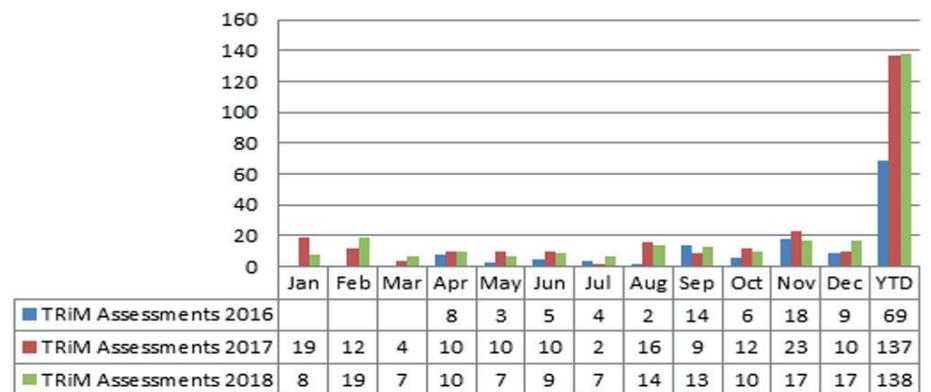


Table 2

TRiM Assessments 2016 - 2018



The practitioner course trains appropriately selected volunteers to identify actual and potential psychological problems that may occur following a traumatic event. BTP has invested approximately

£70k in training more than 72 practitioners, who are based nationally to cover the geographic and shift based logistics of BTP and is continually investing in training new volunteers and refresher. This

ensures that a TRiM practitioner can be on site immediately if needed.

The initial management of employees after a traumatic incident involves a Trauma Incident

We're changing the view

Paddy Lorenzen summarises a successful first year for Norfolk CC, whose three-year collaboration with Public Health is making wellbeing an integral part of the employee-employer relationship

Norfolk CC have a long history of putting in measures to address wellbeing. All these measures have made a difference to teams and individual employees and managers, but there was always a feeling that we were picking at wellbeing and making it a 'thing' and nice if it could be accommodated. It was also heavily weighted on reactive measures, and just 'fixing broken stuff' isn't the best way to improve wellbeing in the long-term.

The change came about in 2018 when the wellbeing team in collaboration with Public Health presented a three year plan to make wellbeing an integral part of the employee-employer relationship. The paper laid out the drivers for making wellbeing an issue that needed addressing in the council (referring to the *Thriving at Work* report and The *Taylor*

Review of Modern Working Practices) and how addressing employee wellbeing related to the council's aspirations.

Because of the wide range of actions and activities that could come under the wellbeing banner, the plan focused on four areas that had the greatest impact on a person's health and wellbeing – mental health, activity, diet (including alcohol consumption) and smoking. The plan laid out broad actions for employees, managers and supervisors, and the organisation. While the plan was spread over three years, at the core of the plan is a culture change and it would be naïve to think this would magically happen this quickly.

So what has been done? There are obvious changes – mental health first aid training

for nearly 300 managers and supervisors, a video featuring employees talking about their mental health, health related apps becoming available on work phones, all new employees being contacted and advised how Norfolk CC can support their wellbeing. As well as less obvious changes – wellbeing being raised at management level, surveys of premises to understand the barriers to healthy diet and activity, and making one of the sites smokefree.

But the most important changes, the ones that are about changing a culture, are the ones you only notice if someone points them out. Such as having in-house mental health first aid trainers which whispers 'this organisation is committed long-term', weaving wellbeing into all training for

managers which whispers 'everything you do has an impact on your team's wellbeing', and weaving wellbeing into all internal comms, which whispers 'Norfolk cares about your wellbeing'.

Trying to correlate an individual action to a specific outcome ('has advising new employees about how Norfolk support wellbeing resulted in better staff retention?') is to miss the whole point of the plan, and a path to a dangerous place.

Maybe a better way of thinking of it is like tending a garden, and the gardener focuses on what needs improving and what they haven't done. It's only when a friend who visits infrequently turns up and says 'Wow, this is fantastic! It feels so different from last time I visited. What have you done?' that the

– and for the long term



Table 3: TRiM Data from 2016/2017 – Major Incidents Within BTP

Incident	TIBs	In TRiM Process
Croydon Tram Crash	279	Not Known
Westminster	4	0
Manchester	221	77
London Bridge	198	28
Grenfell Tower	35	6
Parsons Green	115	0

Briefing (TIB) which assists in defusing post incident issues and is carried out within 72 hours of the incident. After 72 hours, employees voluntarily attend for an initial TRiM session when support is required. If signs and symptoms of distress are displayed when going through this session, the individual is risk assessed to be fast tracked for:

- Appropriate clinical pathways through occupational health when a high risk score is indicated for potential PTSD;
- Regular reviews with the practitioner for continuous checks and support.

Tables 1 and 2 provide the 2018 year end for TIBs either in person or via emails and TRiM assessments. Both demonstrate the increase in usage and culture from the launch of the wellbeing strategy in April 2016 to the end of 2018.

Table 3 provides the data for TRiM post major incidents. By

utilising TRiM intervention there was a minimal rate of sickness absence in mental health conditions, an increase in mental health culture/awareness to the process and positive feedback on the support provided through Lessons Learnt Exercises and a recent employee survey. The Police Federation, which represents our police officers, are also hugely supportive of this initiative.

Table 4 illustrates the low rate of PTSD occupational health cases each month in 2018 out of approximately 5,500 BTP employees. It provides evidence and confirms that using TRiM as an early intervention is an effective system to use for BTP.

There are currently additional continuous support services provided for employee mental health wellbeing in the workplace. For instance:

- A TRiM video which provides what BTP employees say about

TRiM and how it has benefited them (<https://bit.ly/2WT7p5l>)

• BTP mental health support guide for employees and their families. This short guide has been designed to give tips to help recover from traumatic events, information about the range of services on offer, as well as some specific advice for BTP employees, their friends and family.

• Additional support services through the Employees Assistance Programme called BTP Assist which provides a confidential telephone counselling service (24/7) and an online resource providing a comprehensive source of information on a range of issues from stress and anxiety to life stage events, such as separation/divorce.

Nisa Gina Carey is Deputy Director (People and Culture Directorate), Safety, Health and Wellbeing Department, at the British Transport Police

Table 4: PTSD Occupational Health Cases Within BTP

Month	Confirmed PTSD
Jan 18	6
Feb 18	3
Mar 18	4
Apr 18	1
May 18	0
Jun 18	1
Jul 18	4
Aug 18	2
Sep 18	2
Oct 18	2
Nov 18	3
Dec 18	7
Total	35

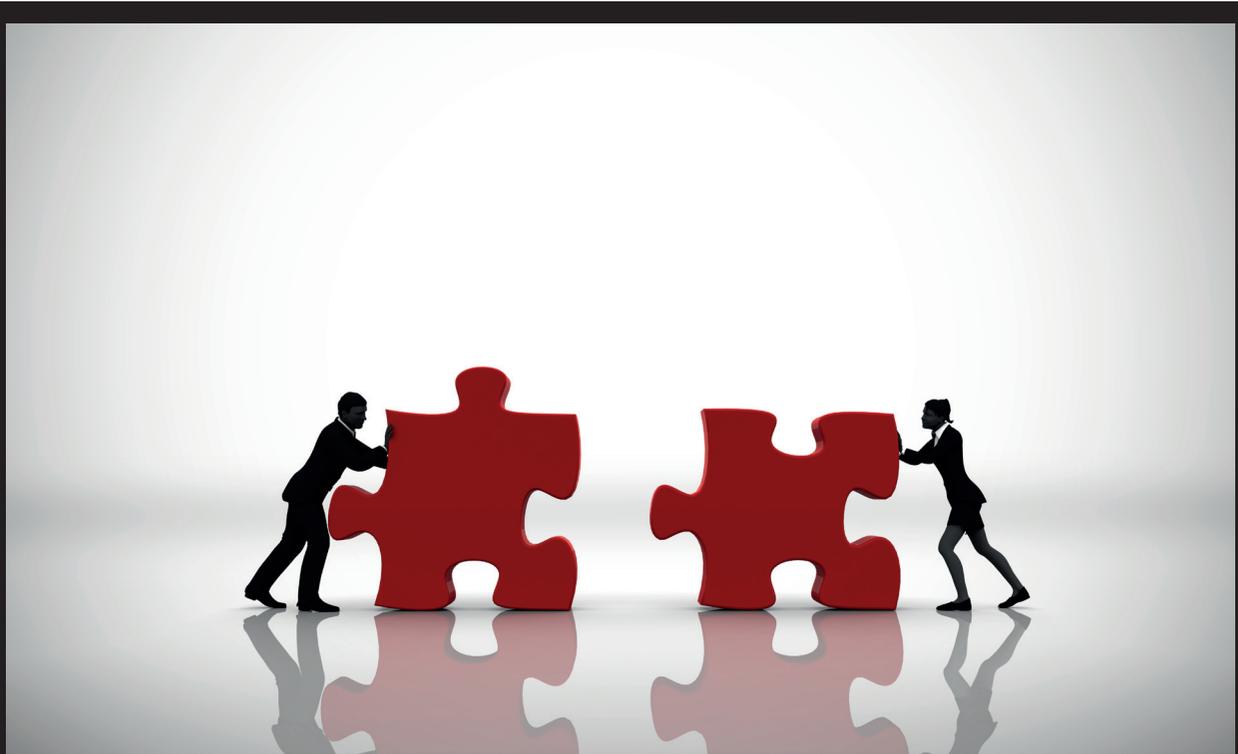
Past Norfolk CC wellbeing measures

- Wellbeing officers since 2008
- Wellbeing questionnaire for teams – similar to the HSE stress risk questionnaire – since 2009 (completed by approximately 15% of employees each year)
- On-site NHS Health Checks for eligible staff since 2010 (200–300 undertaken each year).
- Promotion of national health related campaigns since 2010 (approx four campaigns each year).
- Psychological assessments since 2012 (Approx eight undertaken each year).
- In-house mediation since 2013 (24 undertaken in the last financial year).

gardener realises what they have created.

We are currently starting year two of our plan. If you know Norfolk CC, visit us in a couple of years and we'll take a moment to take in the view.

Paddy Lorenzen is Occupational Health & Wellbeing Manager at Norfolk CC



Healthy results in Basildon

Stuart Young reflects on a fun and engaging approach to health and wellbeing at Basildon BC



In February 2018 Basildon BC produced its first health and wellbeing policy.

Like all good policies it was duly published on the staff intranet and mentioned in the chief's monthly blog.

HR was given a small budget to run staff communications and a working group was formed... what could possibly go wrong? Well as we know, this isn't how to take people with us and to engender cultural change.

Fortunately two willing HR staff took up the mantle of engaging employees and enthusing us all to better our physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

Nichola and Angharad work in HR looking after employee relations, recruitment and operations. Wellbeing wouldn't appear in their job description or appraisal targets, none of which deterred them from coming forward with an idea. They wanted to develop a series of activities for staff, organised by staff, and run by staff. Volunteering isn't a new idea nor is it complex however it requires concerted and sustained effort to deliver.

Never underestimate the power of a ping pong ball to bring staff together

Nichola and Angharad started small, launching 'Couch to 5k' with six regular attendees. As word spread the numbers grew and early evening walks became jogs. Not satisfied with running in the rain, the pair started a 12 week nutrition programme working with health partners to source materials. The programme, which ran for staff and residents was supported by volunteers who held weekly weigh-ins and provided advice. Feedback was positive and stories were shared at the water cooler each week. This positive peer feedback urged attendees to sustain healthier eating and lifestyle choices. Together we lost a combined 25 stone!

Basildon staff have many talents and our HR duo were keen to tap into activity that would benefit the mental wellbeing of staff. Some activities were arty like the craft club who learned to crochet, whilst others provided a safe space to share some of life's challenges. One of the most touching moments was our Time to Talk event where staff spoke openly about their past experiences of depression, feelings of suicide, substance misuse and how they had built coping mechanisms supported by the council.

Some of our activities have been suggested by staff and are just

unashamed fun, like lunchtime ping pong. We ran a pilot for a few weeks and the demand was so great that for the last Friday of every month it is now a regular feature in the staff lounge. Never underestimate the power of a ping pong ball to bring staff together.

Evaluating wellbeing programmes can be tricky. Management board colleagues were interested in the return on investment. While it is early days we have seen a decrease in sickness absence, especially relating to stress. The metrics will take time to feed through and we are confident of the business benefits of employee wellbeing.

Of course the best evaluation is always to listen to the feedback of those participating and volunteering:

'The group is a good way to learn a new skill and to socialise with colleagues away from pressures of work'

'I slept like a baby and have woken up feeling great!!!!!!!!!!!!!! if a little achy...'

'Just wanted to say how much I enjoyed the first session of yoga. I was a bit dubious that I would feel silly and be unable to do the poses, but it was the opposite...'

Early indications from the various initiatives is promising as staff report increased levels of concentration, feeling more motivated and mentally alert.

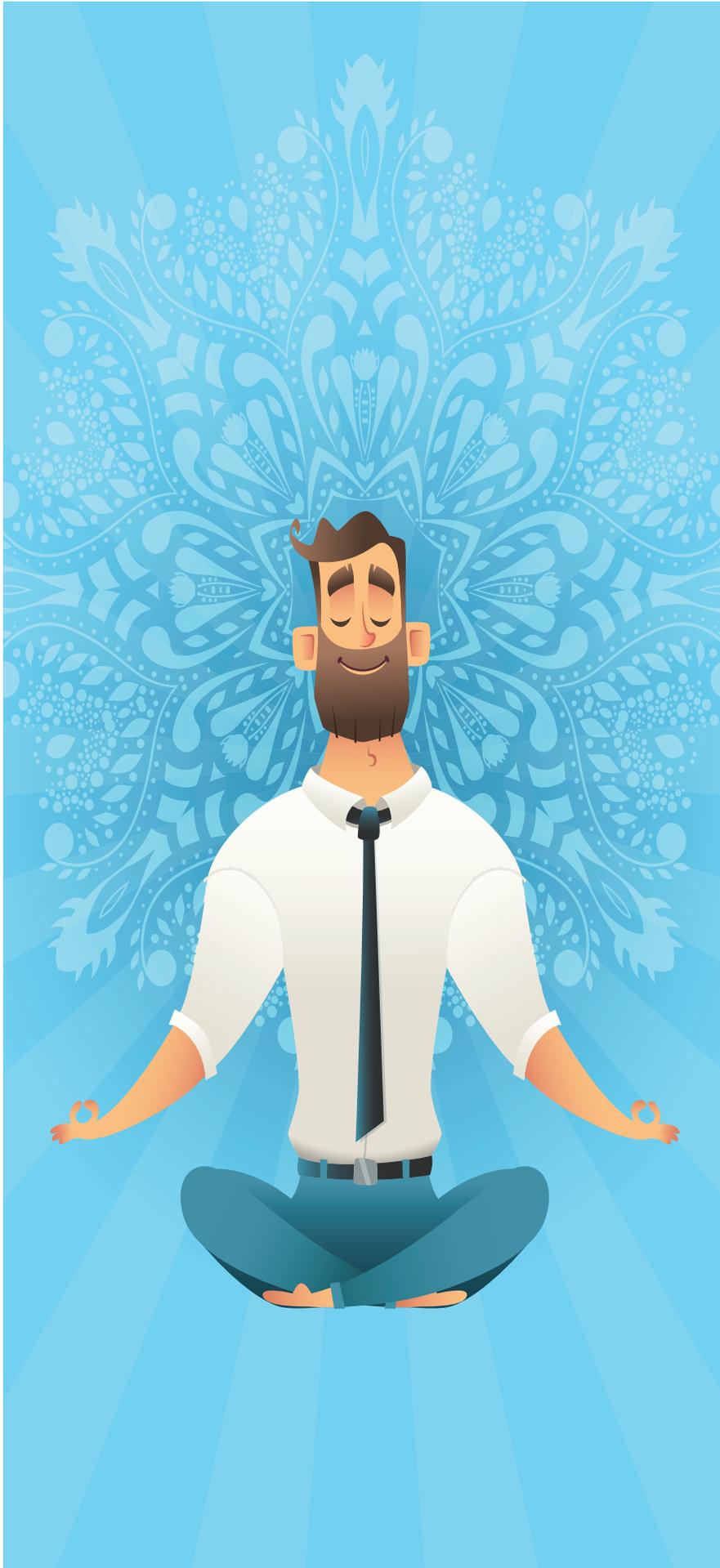
As we reflect at the end of our first year, Basildon is rightly proud of the volunteers and participants in our wellbeing activities. The programme goes from strength to strength with the recent addition of Yoga, significantly over-subscribed.

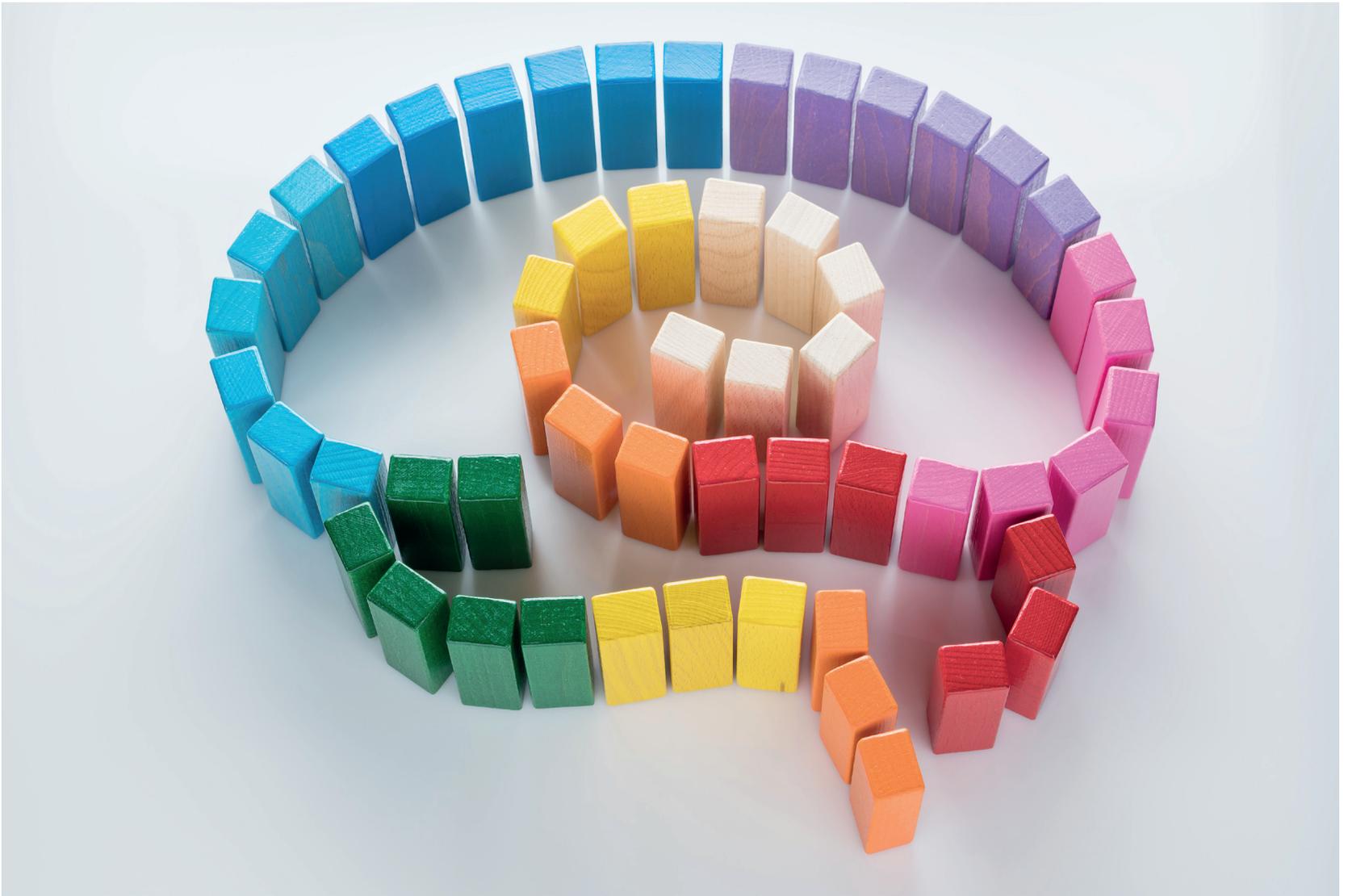
It's been quite an experiment and we were absolutely delighted to be recognised by the PPMA at the annual conference.

There is no magic bullet in our story just plenty of enthusiastic shepherding. As we reflect on our continuing wellbeing journey the lessons we have learnt are to start small, to maintain infectious enthusiasm, to be relentless in the pursuit of talents within the workforce and to celebrate everything, whatever it delivers.

Workforce volunteering is a positive force for culture change and worth consideration if your organisation is embarking on any change programme. Plus for us it was particularly pleasing at the end of the year to return the wellbeing budget to our finance colleagues.

Stuart Young is Head of People and Change at Basildon BC





We're making wellbeing count

Mykela Pratt tells *PPMA Focus* what tasks and opportunities lie ahead in her new wellbeing-focused role at the organisation

Why the interest in being strategic theme lead for wellbeing?

In my role as Strategic Lead for HR, Resourcing and Improvement, I have seen first hand the impact an effective wellbeing approach can have on an organisation and its workforce. At Thurrock Council, over the past five years, we have built and delivered a wellbeing programme that our workforce truly values. We deliver it at minimal cost; it aligns with targeting our key sickness absence drivers and strives to help us to achieve a healthy workforce who recognise that their employer is concerned with their wellbeing.

Wellbeing is an area I am passionate about as I look to share examples of best practice and ensure the same approaches and commitment to wellbeing are implemented across the sector. I am lucky to have Hannah Bornet, Wellbeing Manager at the Financial Ombudsman Service, supporting as deputy theme lead.

Why a focus on wellbeing as a strategic theme?

Employee wellbeing is critical to the success of any organisation. Particularly in the public sector, given the challenging economic climate and pressures on services, our workforce are doing more with less and this inevitably has an impact on individual and team wellbeing. Employers that make wellbeing a priority will have a healthy,

engaged and loyal workforce that is best able to deliver the quality services that we strive to achieve.

At the recent PPMA conference the theme was 'Don't Worry, Be Happy' and we had a number of inspirational speakers who really helped focus our HR/OD colleagues on ensuring employee happiness and wellbeing as a priority.

The theme also aligns with the PPMA's recently launched 'Out of the Shadows' campaign that looks to ensure HR best supports employees through cases of bullying and harassment in the workplace. Any employee experiencing such an issue, as well as those who are accused, will undoubtedly be affected in some way and so it is vital that wellbeing support is integrated with organisational processes for all parties.

What will the focus on the wellbeing theme be for 2019/20?

The scope of the wellbeing theme cannot be underestimated – from mental health to resilience, flexible working to financial wellbeing, as well as key focus areas such as the menopause – the topic of employee wellbeing, and an employer's responsibility for it, is clearer than ever before.

PPMA areas of focus for 2019/20 are digital wellbeing, mental health and resilience and the menopause.

Digital wellbeing will look to explore how HR can best utilise new technology to encourage employees to take individual accountability for their wellbeing (think fitbits and couch to 5k challenges!).

Conversely, with flexible working now made easier through enhanced technology how do HR ensure employees maintain work-life balance and healthy technology boundaries. The topic of mental health has seen an increasing amount of publicity in recent years and PPMA will look to highlight examples of how organisations have responded to the issue, ensuring workforces are supported with mental health issues and individuals empowered to take charge of their own resilience.

A focus on the menopause is a relatively recent addition to the wellbeing agenda for employers. According to new research from the CIPD, 59% of working women between the ages of 45 and 55 who are experiencing menopause symptoms say it has a negative impact on them at work. With women over the age of 50 the fastest growing group in the workforce and with the average age for the

menopause transition being 51 it is integral that employers open up conversations and ensure the right support mechanisms are in place for their female workforce.

PPMA areas of focus for 2019/20 are digital wellbeing, mental health and resilience and the menopause

What next?

So far we have started to identify the fantastic work already being delivered in both the private and public sector through a number of innovative wellbeing strategies. It has been encouraging to hear first-hand how employers are embedding employee wellbeing into their approach and responding to critical wellbeing issues.

The PPMA membership community has a wealth of best practice stories to share on wellbeing and both Hannah and I look forward to being able to showcase these over the remainder of the year. I would really welcome discussions on other examples organisations would be willing to share and can be contacted at wellbeing@ppma.org.uk

Mykela Pratt is the Strategic Lead for HR, Resourcing and Improvement at Thurrock Council, and Strategic Theme Lead – Let's Talk: Wellbeing for the PPMA

Are you doing the best you can for the people at your business?

Your people are everything to your business. If you arrived at work one morning and the office, factory or site was deserted, you'd panic – nothing would be achieved that day.

While this isn't likely (unless it's Sunday), it is likely that certain key people will leave over the years that are key to running your business. Don't let it be because of mental health issues which you could have prevented through supporting wellness or wellbeing at work.

What your business can do to support employee wellbeing

Nothing can be done to ensure employee wellbeing at your organisation if you don't know there's a problem.

There is chance for you to help in two scenarios:

- Do you know what to do if an employee reaches out? When this happens, consider if you have the guidelines in place to document any meetings and agree on some actions.
- Do you have a platform for discussion? Rather than waiting for employees (who may be anxious) to come forward, it's better to pre-empt any issues by providing an online platform for communication, ensuring your managers are trained to help, or can refer employees accordingly.

Essentially, communication is everything if you want employees with good mental health, who can deliver results without negative consequences.

The experience of work is huge for wellbeing and as Professor Cary Cooper says: 'Jobs are no longer secure, so there are a lot of people feeling insecure

Paul Friday gives some top tips to help improve and maintain employee wellbeing in your workplace

in their working environment because of the downsizing and the changing of the psychological contract that took place during the recession.'

Insecurity adds up to a lack of wellbeing.

A better workspace

Workplaces are often saturated with PR-worthy gimmicks, but which workplace initiatives add real value to your people?

The answer lies in health. Colourful décor may be received differently by various parties, but if something cultivates better mental and physical health, it should be present at your place of work.

When things get too much, employees need a way to escape. What does this look like? Somewhere they can go to do nothing, or workout in the gym/outdoors. If there is the time and budget for it – things like chillout rooms and gyms are great for relaxing and letting off steam.

Other options which are more financially viable and help you to invest in wellbeing straight away include various types of clubs for sport/fitness which happen on or near work, like a running club.

Group activities like this are known to make people feel better and the collaborative effort can add a family feel to your business.

We're not all the same...

While good health benefits everyone, there are

differences that should be considered too. Are your employees young or old? Introverts or extroverts? What do they consider to be real benefits?

Finding the answers to these questions is essential to understanding the needs of your people, so ensure regular surveys or meetings happen to check your business is running in line with everyone's expectations.

What are the benefits for businesses?

Failure to take an active approach towards wellbeing support could have a negative impact on your business. Unhappy or unwell workers are likely to leave, miss long periods of work through sickness and ultimately underperform; perhaps even resenting you.

But invest in your people and everybody wins.

As well as the right support and communication channels, great leaders look after their teams. Investing in your people doesn't just mean managing them – you need to invest in wellness methods including mental health training for your managers (and particularly HR), ensuring they get the support they need to do their job.

Be clear and transparent about your commitment and investment in your people, so they know they can come to you for support when needed. It's also good to make clear what you invest in them in terms of benefits and training,

because people who feel valued are happier and always do their best.

Five tips for personal wellbeing:

1. *Exercise:* Getting outside and active is the first step to better mental health. You'll feel great and get some space. Meeting like-minded people through a sports club is a great way to broaden your support network too.

2. *Healthy lifestyle:* Eating healthily and avoiding alcohol aren't just great for physical health. Evidence shows this will make you feel better psychologically as well.

3. *Write it all down:* Too often we feel bad but don't know why. Write down everything that's on your mind at the end of the day and reflect on what you can change upon waking.

4. *Speak to the experts:* When it all gets too much, then counselling or group support are essential. Start by speaking to your GP.

5. *Reach out to friends:* Medical support cannot be overlooked, but don't forget that if you have friends and family you can turn to, the support they can offer is invaluable.

What's the takeaway for employers?

Make sure you know who your people are, what support they need, then tell them where to find it. Looking after your team will give benefits to everyone for years to come.

Paul Friday is Head of Strategic Relationships at MHR

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