



Notes from Mental Health Week Breakfast Forum  
At the offices of Withers & Rogers, Bristol, on Friday 11 May

## "Mental Health - The Last Taboo?"

Workplace mental wellbeing is an important but difficult topic, and one that organisations are often wary of engaging with for fear of getting it wrong. For our event we lined-up speakers from the UKIPO's mental health awareness programme to share their experiences and the lessons learnt from their established mental health programme. A copy of their presentation is attached. The objective was to kick off a dialogue and to provide attendees (who came from a range of different organisations in the IP professions) with some practical ideas for creating a framework in support of mental wellbeing in their own workplace or for developing the frameworks already in place. These ideas are summarised below.

Summary of 4 Key elements in establishing a framework for mental wellbeing:

### 1. **Provide Practical Support:**

Provide as much resource as you reasonably can based on the scale of your operation. This might include:

- Training some people as Mental Health First Aiders and making sure everyone knows who they are and how to access them.
- Providing training for managers and others (especially in the HR team) on how to support good mental health - give them the confidence to make a difference when people come to them with problems
- Establishing informal peer to peer groups and encouraging them to organise information sessions on topics of interest such as anxiety, stress management and autism.

### 2. **Invest in Tools and Resources:**

Training is the most important resource here and there are lots of different types of training that can impact a good mental health environment including conversation skills training, feedback training and appraisal training. The goal again is to equip line managers to spot and deal confidently and appropriately with individuals who may present with stress, anxiety, depression, workload concerns, concerns around feedback/criticism and a range of other mental health concerns.

Other resources might include

- the provision of materials and information about mental health issues on the company intranet and on notice boards and staff kitchens
- a quiet or calm area where people can go to regroup when they feel anxious or overloaded
- the provision of buddy systems for those facing specific issues or challenges that others have tackled
- programmes to encourage hydration, exercise, mindfulness and healthy eating in the workplace

### 3. **Build Awareness:**

To break the taboo we have to be willing to talk about mental health issues and to make them more visible and mainstream. A very effective way to do this is through **Mental Health Advocates** - people within the business who have experienced mental health issues themselves and are willing to speak about their experience. Senior People who are willing to show leadership in this way can be particularly powerful in removing any stigma associated with mental health.

Another way to create awareness is by linking into national "awareness" events and organisations. There are awareness days or weeks for issues such as mental health generally, depression, suicide, autism and eating disorders. See calendar at <https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/get-involved/tackle-stigma-workplace/make-impact-your-workplace/mental-health-calendar>

MIND do a workplace wellbeing index, which benchmarks where you are as an organisation currently in dealing with mental health issues and offers suggestions for improvement. See <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/workplace-wellbeing-index/>

### 4. **Keep it Going**

Ideally you should aim to establish a mental wellbeing programme that is supported by senior management and that allows the organisation to plan and budget for events, communications and training to maintain momentum over the longer term. Here are some things to think about:

- Be creative about keeping mental health issues in front of people through training, blogs, talks and e-mails. Mix it up and keep it fresh for different individuals and work groups
- Bring mental health and wellbeing into the mainstream of your induction, appraisal and development processes
- Tackle "policy" and culture issues such as out of hours working, travel fatigue and work allocation. Identify and deal with any aspects of your business culture or ethos that may be creating or contributing to sub-optimal mental health conditions
- Support the managers – make sure that as you train them to respond to the mental health concerns of others they also know how to look out for themselves and have ways to "offload".

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