

Championing men's mental health

On Tuesday 14 November IP professionals gathered at Mathys & Squire in The Shard to attend the Championing Men's Mental Health event. Jointly organised by IP Inclusive and Jonathan's Voice with Nick Bloy, of Wellbeing Republic, as the speaker. Nick wrote the ground-breaking 2022 LawCare report on 'Men's mental health in the legal profession', and he kindly offered to share his insights into the work behind that initiative. Graham McCartney, Jonathan's father and founder of Jonathan's Voice gave an introduction.

The way we talk about mental health has moved forward in the past ten years. Seeking support is, thankfully, not as stigmatised as it once was. However, despite the progress that has been achieved, there is still much work to be done to ensure men feel able to reach out for support when they need it. There is still an expectation that men should be strong, stoic, infallible, not display vulnerability, and be able to shoulder the burden of personal problems by themselves. In addition, working as a lawyer adds additional pressure to this sense of needing to appear perfect and have all the answers.

A couple of the topics Nick focused on were the barriers that exist for men in speaking up or seeking support and the importance of role models. Many men are struggling with the expectation of being the 'ideal worker', to the extent where a lot of men's self-worth is tied to their productivity. This internalised pressure is then often exploited by management. Male employees who set reasonable, sustainable boundaries and openly chose to spend time with their families over taking on more work are penalised, which might include being managed out, having their career prospects limited, being ridiculed or being isolated. Thus, one of the greatest barriers to speaking up is a fear of negative perceptions or negative repercussions. *The Harvard Business Review* wrote a helpful article, 'Why some men pretend to work 80-hour weeks', on this exact theme.

Having better role models in positions of responsibility would pave the way for men to be more open about their mental health. It's important to redefine how we view seeking help, not as a sign of weakness or laziness, but as a sign of strength. Nick Bloy said in his report for Lawcare,

"If the environment we're asking men to speak up in is not psychologically safe and there continues to be examples of people being penalised for speaking up or reaching out, then those significant barriers will remain."

Resources

Nick also spoke about the important role that support groups play in recovery. Stigma surrounding mental health can often leave people feeling isolated and lonely. Social support groups, such as Humen and Men's Sheds, help create a safe space with a shared sense of belonging that

reminds people that they are not alone in their struggles. It's not surprising that a lot of men don't feel comfortable speaking to a therapist in a 1-2-1 environment so these such groups can be a real source of strength. They are non-clinical spaces for men to talk, listen and connect over hobbies on a regular basis. These non-judgemental support groups have proven to be critical in changing the way men think and talk about their mental health.

It's also important to acknowledge that Black men in the UK often face unfair and avoidable differences in healthcare compared to other groups of men. Black Men's Health UK and Black Minds Matter are both invaluable resources. BMH UK focus on empowering men to feel more confident about their mental and

physical health through education and knowledge. BMM work to connect Black individuals and families with free talking therapy by fully accredited Black therapists.

And finally, I wouldn't be writing this article if it weren't for the hard work that IP Inclusive, Jonathan's Voice and Wellbeing Republic put into providing education and resources around mental health.

We are very grateful to Rich Wells, Andrea Brewster, and Jonathan's Voice for their efforts in organising and promoting this event.

Shannon Allison, CIPA



Nick Bloy of Wellbeing Republic discussed men's mental health in the legal profession.

Useful Links

Black Men's Health UK - blackmenshealth.org.uk

Black Minds Matter UK - www.blackmindsmatteruk.com/faq

IP Inclusive - ipinclusive.org.uk

Jonathan's Voice - jonathansvoice.org.uk

Humen - www.wearehuman.org

Men's Sheds - menssheds.org.uk

Wellbeing Republic - www.wellbeingrepublic.com

Why some men pretend to work 80-hour weeks, Harvard Business Review - hbr.org/2015/04/why-some-men-pretend-to-work-80-hour-weeks