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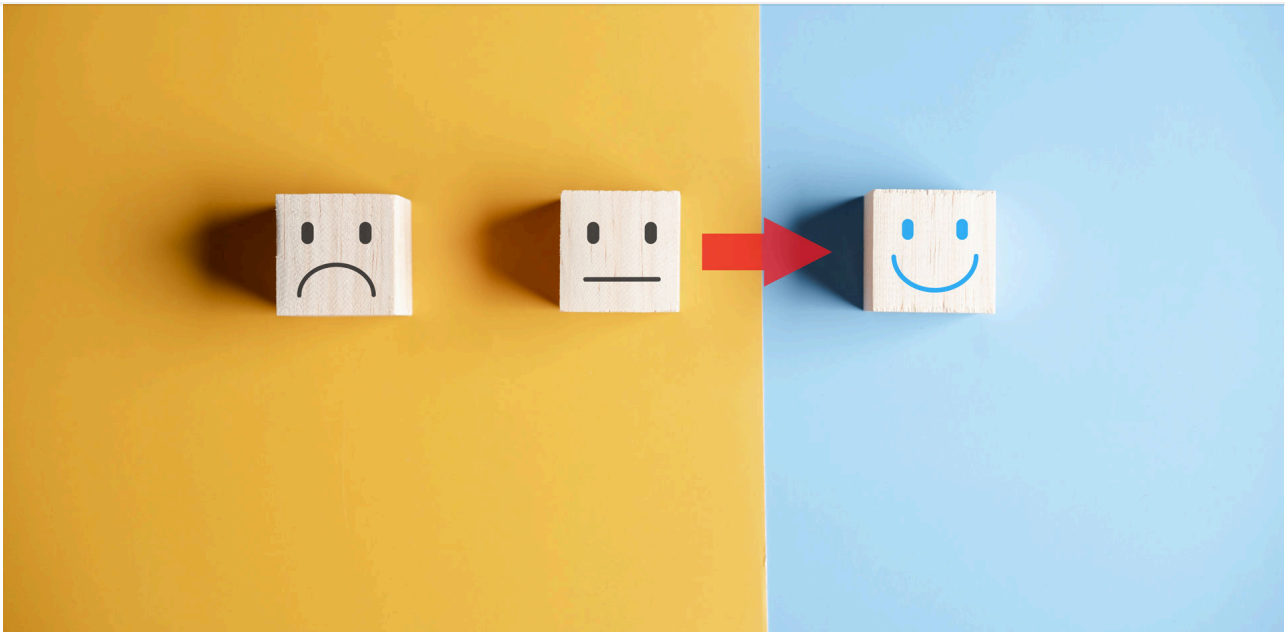
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How managers can support workers with mental health problems

👤 Carl Jones 📅 2 August 2023

in Change, Communication, Leadership, Management, Managing Teams, **Opinion**, Talent, Wellbeing Tagged Change, communication, Engagement, Leadership, Management, Mental Health Awareness Week, teams, Wellbeing - 4 Minutes



Spotting the early signs of mental health issues in employees is vital to ensure recovery and business success. Here Carl Jones looks at the problem and offers advice on helping people recover

Society has changed rapidly in the last 20 years. Workplaces that once commanded people's attention from 9 to 5, five days a week are now a distant memory. The pressure of modern-day living has increased due in no small part by instant access to information via the internet and social media channels. That access has increased demand for higher living standards that has, in turn, pushed human mental capacity to the brink of breakdown.

Organisations and leaders are having to include managing people's emotions along with their other responsibilities. This has accelerated in recent years with well-being now recognised as one of the biggest challenges for businesses; with staff reporting sick more often it has the ongoing effect of adding pressure and reducing outputs, that lead to complaints and bad reviews. Since the pandemic, there has been a dramatic increase of sickness reporting rates, [ONS statistics](#) show an increase from 1.8% to 2.6% (an increase of almost 50%), with mental health issues always hitting one of the top five spots. It is likely that this figure is higher as many mental health issues are reported as other ailments, due to the stigma and fear still associated with mental health. Many people fear admitting to a mental health problem would hinder future career progression.

When mental health issues arise, the capacity to cope with any situation can dramatically reduce

including anxiety, depression and well as many more, but even more serious conditions such as PTSD and neurological disorders are being diagnosed and since COVID [reports are showing a rise in these conditions](#).

When mental health issues arise, the capacity to cope with any situation can dramatically reduce. The fight or flight response can be triggered more easily, and many people will not have their usual mental capacity to cope with the next step.

Leaders need to be acutely aware of their reports' behaviours, long before individuals become unable to function. Some of the signs include: being out of character; a change of emotions or different responses; slowing of work rate; lack of attention to detail; not performing to a usual high standard and so forth. This is where leaders and managers can make a difference – a watchful eye is invaluable, identifying a concern long before it becomes a workplace burden.

Stepping in and helping the situation, rather than watching a downward spiral must be preferred by all involved. Offering support and suggesting ways to get professional help must be the goal. Expectations on output need to be adjusted, regardless of organisational pressure, ultimately this should be seen as a temporary solution and some work is better than none.

One approach that can be helpful is borrowed from the project management field. When projects are large they are broken down into smaller plans and given milestones. This same approach can be used by managers, whilst conducting work assessments with staff who are struggling to cope under the pressure of mental health issues. Finding and creating plans, with agreed milestones can help bring focus and support back into the workplace.

Any task or job has steps that need to be completed – the roles and responsibilities of the employee. Steps form the plan, and expectations along with a mutual agreement can establish milestones, all of which can easily bring clarity to what starts as a complex and overwhelming situation, back to a simple solution.

Talking through workloads, stripping back to the basics can have a clearing effect and identify easy targets, ensuring work can still be produced, to a good standard, rather than a messy unfocussed, unusable output. Regardless of the quantity, leaders need to focus on the quality of the work, providing praise and support when it is needed, and then move toward the next milestone.

Mental health sufferers improve with support, and recovery is accelerated by adding a plan and regular check ins. Focus on staff wellness can even prevent long-term sickness and absenteeism, retain experienced staff and allows for business resilience.

Mental health might not be a new term in the world, but what is clear is that it is becoming more of a costly problem and probably a daily conversational piece in worldwide workplaces. Businesses and organisations can ignore all of this, but early adopters of new leadership practices, that include wellness observations and adjustments, will probably always come out on top.

Carl Jones is founder of [Elevated Training Ltd](#)

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