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# How to implement and communicate a mental health at work plan



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# The importance of having a mental health strategy in place

The most successful businesses have a strategy. So when it comes to mental health in the workplace, why do so many businesses have nothing in place?

Good mental health at work and good management go hand in hand, and it's proven that organisations with a well-structured mental health strategy not only improve their wellbeing, but also perform better. Research shows that addressing wellbeing at work increases productivity by as much as 12%.

With mental health costing UK businesses up to £42bn each year, it's imperative they take notice. Mark Hashimi, Head of Workplace Wellbeing at Mind has the answer: "We need to move from an auto-pilot, tick-box approach - to a cohesive strategy ensuring everyone organisationally is conscious, competent and confident to proactively communicate and consistently address the hidden factors impacting stigma – on a daily basis.

Legal & General has worked closely with leading mental health charity, Mind to create a sustainable framework that focuses on evolving and embedding a cultural change.

## The 3 'C's of cultural change

80% of employers agree that HR policies and procedures support employee mental health (REBA), yet only 2 in 10 have a mental health policy, and less than half have a defined wellbeing strategy (REBA).

That's why it's imperative to have a strategy, and for businesses to embrace the three 'Cs' of cultural change to help ensure a shift in culture which will in turn deliver:

- A conscious organisation
- A competent management team
- A confident employee base

# 'Conscious' organisation

A conscious organisation is one with 'emotionally intelligent' leaders. It is essential to have senior management buy-in and infrastructure, policies, processes and procedures in place to encourage long-term support.

Research shows that most of our decisions, actions and emotions depend on the 95% of brain activity that is outside of our conscious awareness. This means that 95% of our living actions arise from the programming in our unconscious mind. It's the reason why we often act on autopilot, which is driven by years of

negative stereotypes on how to work hard, be strong, suppress or control emotions, and not let our feelings show. All this impacts the creation of stigmas.

A strategy alone won't change this unconscious pattern of thinking. What really needs to happen is to change our state of mind. Employers and managers need to tackle their own state of functioning and emotional intelligence. All this helps to build long-lasting relationship with employees that allow for conversations around mental health.

# The importance of having a mental health strategy in place

**Buy in** – Get management to agree to a new way of working. Highlighting the impact on the bottom line can be a persuasive tool. With poor mental health costing up to £1560 per employee, the costs far outweigh the small investment to improve wellbeing.

**Steering group** – Set up a steering group made from senior management and other employees from across the business. The group should consist of idea generators, persuaders, as well as influential communicators who can help spread the word around the office.

**Policy** – Define your mental health policy and clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of employees, line managers, HR, Senior Management Team, external services, and detail internal signposting and support available.

**Strategy** – Define what you are trying to achieve over the short, medium and long term. (for example Reducing stigma, improving communication, reducing sickness absence etc.)

**Monitor** – Set KPIs (Key performance indicators) to measure the success of your strategy. These could be based on:

- Temperature checks to evaluate employee stress
- Absence monitoring and their value
- Referrals (Employee Assistance Programmes, Occupational Health, psychological)
- Uptake of other support offered such as training etc.
- Shifts in productivity

Remember, to get the full picture of how well your strategy is working. It's important to evaluate all the data available, and not look at one element in isolation. For example, an increase in Employee Assistance Programme usage may be a good thing if stigma is being challenged and performance is improving.

- **Temperature check** – Keep check on staff wellbeing by following HSE line management standards ([www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/)) and with employee engagement surveys. Repeat this at regular intervals (for example quarterly). Then communicate the outcomes and actions back into the business.

Below are some example statements:

- I feel I am in control of my workload
- The demands placed upon me are reasonable
- I know where to seek help or look for support if I am struggling
- I feel like I am in a safe working relationship with my manager and my peers
- I am able to communicate openly with my manager, without fear of discrimination
- My organisation manages conflict appropriately when it arises
- I understand how my role contributes to the organisations strategic aims
- Change is managed and communicated effectively within my workplace
- **Commit** – Explore external wellbeing accreditation frameworks to keep momentum and gain recognition as a healthy workplace.

# ‘Competent’ management team

To move away from acting on ‘autopilot’, managers need to be competent in managing mental health. This doesn’t mean that all managers must be clinically qualified.

Training managers to manage mental health and wellbeing can give them the confidence to talk to employees about mental health. It also equips them to signpost employees to relevant help - if and when they need it.

## Creating a ‘competent’ management team

**Upskill** – Ensure all line managers and staff are trained in the proactive approach to managing mental health. As a bare minimum, they should have the competence to spot the signs as well as have the know-how of when to intervene appropriately; make a pre-emptive reasonable adjustment; promote wellbeing, and when and where to signpost for support.

**Normalise** – Turn policy into practice and get mental health on every agenda (such as team meetings, one-to-one’s, appraisals, team huddles etc.) This ensures it’s not a ‘fluffy add-on’ and becomes the life blood of the business.

**Demystify** – Encourage open conversations, discourage the words such as “I’m fine” being used and make a genuine enquiry into mental health.

Encourage managers to use the ‘stress curve’ in their daily interactions by simply asking ‘where are you on the stress curve?’ Are you:

1. Cool and calm
2. Pressured but positive
3. Pressured turning negative
4. Stressed

**Feedback** – All actions should be fed back into the steering group, so the strategy is constantly evolving. This helps empower line managers to have a voice and facilitate change where needed.



# 'Confident' employee base

To begin to talk about mental health problems, employees need to feel they are in a safe environment to do so.

A truly confident employee base will only happen when employees feel part of the solution and trust the change in approach.

To do this, an inclusive approach is called for, involving everyone to support the cultural change.

## Creating 'confidence'

**Awareness** – Roll out awareness training for all staff to encourage an environment which is supportive and complementary to the culture shift. Host national awareness days or weeks, but also ensure you make it more of your day-to-day culture.

**Initiatives** – These should be chosen by staff, supporting a feeling of inclusion for all. Some successful initiatives that incentivise wellbeing include:

**Connecting** – have a 'no emails' afternoon once a week.

**Being active** – promote 'walking meetings'.

**Taking notice** – offer mindfulness drop ins.

**Learning forums** – set up resilience 'lunch and learn' sessions.

**Giving** – promoting gratitude and skills sharing.



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For more information, visit the 5 ways to wellbeing at: [www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing/](http://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing/)

**Champions** – Managers can't be available all of the time. Create ambassador roles, groups and networks within your organisation to champion mental health – letting employees know they always have someone to turn to.

**Support** – Ensure staff are aware of internal and external support services and the help available to them. Make awareness one of your mental health KPI's and measure this through employee engagement surveys.

**Destigmatise:** Provide staff with areas they can talk about mental health so they can challenge the stigma. Facilitate team exercises like 'understanding each others stress-signature' to help increase support, encourage communication and reduce sickness. This can be done by asking questions like: What are my stress triggers? (work demands, lack of control, change)

**What are my signs?** (irritability, stomach ache, lack of concentration)

**What action do I take to look after myself?** (take a break, make a list, mindfulness)

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