

# Managing Mental Health



**Workplace Diversity Solutions**  
Delivering powerful results in a diverse world

## Meet Your Diversity & Inclusion Partners



Richard Shakespeare is a leading Diversity Consultant and, the Managing Director of Workplace Diversity Solutions Ltd.

Having lived with a disability since birth, Richard is able to offer a unique insight into the challenges faced by consumers with a disability. Richard works with businesses across the United Kingdom to help them to understand how they can create an improved experience for customers with disabilities and embed a culture of inclusion within their businesses.

Richard's credentials include providing disability awareness training and consultancy ahead of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, providing subject matter expertise on disability relating to employment for Channel 4 News, BBC News, Daily Mail and BBC Radio 5 Live as well as providing consultancy services to businesses such as Scottish and Southern Energy, Eurostar International, Care Quality Commission, Standard Life, BBC Country File Live, Novotel Hotels, East Midlands Trains and many other leading companies from a wide range of industries and sectors.

Richard has been a keynote speaker at a range of conferences including the European Bus Forum in Manchester on several occasions, Naidex 2017, Disability Confident and, various other industry events. Previously Richard has shared the stage as a keynote speaker with key figures as such as Simon Weston OBE and the Minister of State for Disabled People.

Since 2010, Richard has provided disability awareness training to in excess of 45,000 individuals via his classroom-based offerings and by designing and supplying eLearning solutions to his clients. Richard passionately believes that by supplying companies with the right guidance and resources we can enhance the experience for consumers with a disability.

Richard has recently been nominated for a Positive Role Model for Disability award at the National Diversity Awards. In September 2019, Richard's work was recognised when he was awarded the Natural Entrepreneurship Award for Diversity and Inclusion.

Richard has supported organisations in exploring cultural issues, attracting a more diverse workforce, considering how an inclusive culture allows enables people to feel valued and empowered and how businesses can celebrate difference. Richard has provided mentoring programs to senior leadership and diversity champions within organisations, giving them the tools and the knowledge needed to deliver powerful results.

Richard has worked within universities, rail operators, financial institutions, healthcare providers and engineering businesses both nationally, and internationally.

# Mental Health for Managers

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Mental health is a subject that has become more and more important for managers and people leaders. It is important that as a manager, or people leader, you equip yourself with a basic understanding of why mental health in the workplace is something you need to be ready to deal with, in a compassionate and professional manner.

Mental health relates our cognitive, and/or emotional wellbeing - it is all about how we think, feel and behave.

Research carried out by NHS Digital has shown that at any one time, as many as one in 6 of the population in England aged 16-64 will have mental ill health. Further research suggests that only around one third of staff with mental health problems, feel that they are supported.

Often, many organisations are afraid to talk about mental health, as there is still be a lot of stigma around the subject.

One of the reasons for common mental health problems escalating into something more serious, is simply that people worry that they will be judged if they open up about their mental wellbeing, or they worry they will not be given support.

Taking the time to consider and invest in the health and wellbeing of your staff, makes good business sense. By having an awareness of employee wellbeing, you can:

- Ensure employees feel valued and respected
- Increase productivity
- Reduce sickness related absence
- Improve employee recruitment and retention

As a manager or people leader, your actions have a huge impact on your team or your employees. It is often said that we spend more time with our work colleagues than we do with our friends and families. If you manage or lead a team of people, there are a few things that you can do to promote employee wellbeing including:

- Organise awareness days or external visitors to come and talk to staff
- Provide e-learning to build awareness around the subject
- Get to know your team members or staff

By letting your staff know that you are available if they want to talk, you can sometimes support the employee with dealing with mental ill health, before a situation becomes more serious.

## Managing Working from Home

With the developing situation surrounding Coronavirus, more of us are working from home, for many this will be the first time they have experienced working from home.

If you want to give your employees and team members some guidance on how to manage their wellbeing when working from home, here are some tips:

### Routine:

You may be tempted to have extra time in bed because you do not need to join thousands of other people in the daily commute. Try to maintain a sense of routine. Waking up at about the same time of day every morning will help stabilise your sleep and mean you wake up feeling more refreshed.

If you continue to follow your normal routine and dress as if you were going into the office, this will help you to keep a mindset of still being at work.

### Workspace:

If possible, try and set your work area up in a quiet area with plenty of space and natural light.

Clear your workspace at the end of each day, this allows you to come into a clean and tidy space each morning.

### Social Contact:

During the Coronavirus we are all being asked to limit our social contact in order to reduce the risk of spreading the virus. However, why not have a cloud-based system to allow you to talk to teammates, arrange a “virtual lunch hour” where you can all get together and talk.

Why not use a video call facility instead of sending an email? This allows you to see others and talk to someone else, this is far better for your stimulation.

## Remain Active:

If you can, go for a walk around the garden, get up from your desk and stretch occasionally or go and make a cup of tea. Even doing some chair-based exercise will help with your well-being.

Make sure you take regular breaks and remain as active as possible.

## Engage with your employees:

During this time, it is important that your employees still feel valued, and part of your business.

- Record a short daily video for your staff with the latest developments to keep your team engaged
- Produce a podcast on key topics relevant to your industry or business area

People are anxious and worried; you could organise a fun team building activity which can be carried out over a video call.

Why not consider doing one of the following:

- **A virtual quiz** -Setup a video call with your teams, make some light-hearted questions and split people into small teams.

You could even have a small prize such as a voucher that the winners could use online.

- **Lunch and Learn**- Put on some training and development opportunities that can be completed over a lunch break.

Perhaps a 30-minute session on customer service, project management or diversity for example.

## Identifying Mental Health:

Here are 5 signs that might help you to identify mental ill health in an individual.

1. **Social Interaction** – If someone is cancelling appointments or not attending meetings or interacting with colleagues like they usually do, then this could be a sign that they are experiencing a period of depression
2. **Difficulty Concentrating** – If a person seems to have difficulty in concentrating, or they appear to be having difficulties with things such as time keeping, or the process of reaching a decision, then this could potentially be a sign of a mental health condition
3. **Panic Attacks or Physical Signals** – Sometimes an individual with anxiety, might experience a panic attack, or display signs of nervousness or excessive sweating, for example.
4. **Low Energy Levels** – If an individual is experiencing depression, they may have a disturbed sleep pattern, or lack the motivation and energy to do simple day to day tasks. They may, for example, have difficulty in going out shopping or preparing an evening meal. You might notice that as a result, a person appears to have low energy levels.
5. **Changes in Behaviour** – We all deal with things in different ways and for different reasons. For example, if you notice a loss of appetite in a person, or they show signs of faster breathing or they become angry easily, these could be signs of a mental health condition, including stress.

## **Some of the simple things that you can do to enhance employee wellbeing and support your staff include:**

- Encouraging staff to take breaks during the day and move around the office
- Provide a breakout area, or a nice relaxing space where they can meet
- Encourage face to face interactions and meetings with other employees, instead of being totally reliant on technology

## Create an Environment to Discuss Mental Health

One of the most important things any successful manager can do, is create a culture of inclusion where people feel they can talk about their thoughts and feelings. We mentioned earlier in this guide, about organising awareness days to promote the importance of mental health. There are several things that you can do to show how it matters to you, and your business.

- **Lead by example** - Gaining the buy in of directors and senior leaders, can really help to promote the importance of employee wellbeing within a business, and start productive mental health discussions within your organisation
- **Information as a stimulator** - Have lots of information and facts at your fingertips, so that you can demonstrate why mental health and mental wellbeing is so important. Stimulate the conversation!
- **Training to enhance understanding** - Provide informative and engaging training solutions to encourage employees to learn more about mental health and to remove some of the fears
- **Call to action** - Think about how your employees might be able to organise an event or activity which promotes mental health awareness. Go armed with ideas and enthusiasm so that your team become motivated.

Poor mental health in the workplace is thought to cost the UK an estimated £26billion a year.

### **Here are a few key points to consider when you start to talk about mental health in the workplace:**

- Let people know that you are available to talk to if they wish to have a chat
- Respect the privacy of an individual and have conversations in a quiet and private setting
- Set plenty of time aside so that an individual does not feel rushed or pressured
- Avoid saying things such as “I know how you feel” and ensure that you are empathetic

## **When Someone Comes to you to discuss their wellbeing it is important that you don't:**

- Make sure you do not judge them, or make assumptions
- Avoid telling the person what they should do or force your views onto that person
- Avoid Interrupting the individual when they are speaking, as this may make them feel that you are not listening to them
- Do not promise to take a specific action, or make a change, unless you know that this is something that you will be able to deliver

## **Avoid using the following language and terminology:**

- There is nothing wrong with you
- "Pull yourself together"
- Stop feeling sorry for yourself
- Other people are worse off than you
- You don't look ill to me
- You must be crazy

## **Be aware of the support that is available:**

- Refer to any mental health policy or guidelines you have, so that you know how the company might be able to support the individual
- Consider any short-term changes you might be able to make to the persons role or work patterns, that might reduce their stress levels
- Think about any referral partners you might have, or any external organisations that can support the employee
- Do you need to talk to Human Resources or other managers to see how you can help?



## What prevents a person from disclosing or talking about a mental health condition?

Several factors can influence the decision a person makes about whether to disclose a mental health condition. These factors can include:

- The stigma which is still attached to mental health
- Being judged
- Impacting chances for career development or progression
- Not being supported by an employer

## When recruiting staff, you need to be aware:

It is important to be aware of mental health and employee wellbeing at all times, it is particularly important that when interviewing, or recruiting for new staff members, you do not ask questions which could breach legislation, or offend an individual.

If you have a responsibility for recruiting staff, it is important to avoid questions such as:

- Do you suffer from any of the following conditions? and then give examples such as bipolar, or depression
- Does anyone in your family have a history of suffering with mental health problems?
- Do you care for or have a responsibility for a person suffering mental ill health?
- Are you on any medication because of mental health problems?

## Mental Health Conditions

### **What is Stress?**

Each one of us will have experienced the feeling of stress, at some point in our lives. We may be feeling the stress in an employment or a personal context but, we will all be able to relate to the feeling of stress.

### **Causes of Stress:**

People often become stressed or associate the feeling of stress, when things are “out of your comfort zone” or differ from what you are used to.

Major changes or events within both your personal and professional life, can lead to the feeling of stress such as:

- Having a family
- A new job or a promotion
- Relationships breakdown
- Moving Home
- Bereavement

### **Dealing with or treating stress:**

If you can recognise the signs or symptoms of stress, then you are well on your way to dealing with some of the impacts or consequences.

If you feel that things are getting on top of you then:

- Look to see what you can change about a situation or circumstance, to relieve the pressure
- Talk to your employer or family to seek support
- Take regular breaks from your work
- Manage your expectations of yourself – Are you putting yourself under pressure?

## **What is Depression?**

Depression is more than simply feeling unhappy or fed up for a few days. There is no one cause of depression and you may develop depression for a variety of different reasons such as a stressful life event, or a bereavement.

Certain personality traits or family history may also be a contributing factor to depression.

**Symptoms:** Depression affects individuals in different ways and can cause a wide variety of symptoms.

These Symptoms can be broken down into three different categories:

### **Psychological Symptoms could include:**

- Feeling irritable and intolerant of others
- Finding it difficult to make decisions
- Being not motivated or interest in things

### **Social Symptoms could include:**

- Finding it hard to do your job or struggling to manage your performance
- Having difficulties in your home and family life
- Avoiding friends or social situations

### **Physical Symptoms could include:**

- Unexplained aches and pains
- Finding it hard to get a good night's sleep or a change in your sleeping pattern
- Moving or speaking more slowly than usual

### **Levels of Depression:**

- Mild Depression has some impact on your daily life
- Moderate Depression has a significant impact on your daily life
- Severe Depression makes it almost impossible to get through daily life

## Post-Traumatic Stress:

Post-Traumatic Stress can often be caused by an event or difficult situation that an individual has faced during their life.

### Examples of situations which may lead to PTSD include:

- Serving in the armed forces
- Serious road traffic accidents
- A violent or dangerous incident

In some cases, PTSD can develop straight after the event but, that is not the case for each person. Often, it can sometimes take years for the impact of a traumatic experience to become evident.

A person who has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder may re-live a frightening or distressing situation, through nightmares or a series of memories like a flashback.

Not everyone who experiences some form of trauma will develop PTSD. Although research has been carried out on the condition, it is not clear why some people develop the condition and other people do not. Research suggests that around 1 in 3 people who experience severe traumatic event, will develop the condition.

PTSD can be treated using a variety of methods, such as different types of therapy, including Eye Movement Desensitisation Reprocessing, known as EMDR.

**Remember:** It is not just war veterans that can experience PTSD. It can impact anyone who has experienced a traumatic event.

## **Bipolar:**

Bipolar disorder was known previously as manic depression. It is a condition which affects an individual's mood. If someone has bipolar disorder, they will experience mood swings which range from feeling depressed (Very low and may have little energy) to manic states whereby they feel very upbeat (high) and overactive.

A person with bipolar disorder may be unaware of being in the manic phase of the condition.

## **Causes of Bipolar Disorder**

The specific causes or reasons for bipolar are not yet fully understood. It is however, thought that a complex combination of social, environmental or physical factors combine to make an individual more likely to experience bipolar disorder.

It is widely believed that chemical imbalances within the brain play a role, as do genetics as bipolar seems to run in families.

## **Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder**

The symptoms of bipolar disorder will be dependent upon which mood the individual is experiencing. Each episode of bipolar disorder can last for different periods of time ranging from weeks, to a prolonged period. Some people may never experience a "consistent" mood.

If the individual is feeling depressed, the symptoms they may display could include:

- Difficulty concentrating and remembering things
- Lack of appetite
- Loss of interest in everyday activities

If the individual is feeling high, or is in a manic phase, then some of the symptoms may include:

- Feeling very happy, elated or overjoyed
- Being easily distracted
- Not eating or loss of appetite

## Treating Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar can be treated through medication, using “mood stabilisers” to help prevent the occurrence of the “mania phase” or helping to deal with depression. Lifestyle advice, such as taking regular exercise and learning to recognise the triggers and signs, are also helpful.

This guide has been produced to help managers and people leaders consider the importance of mental health within the workplace. If you are concerned about an individual or are unsure how to help, we recommend contacting a mental health professional or organisation.

## Mental Health Awareness:

Workplace Diversity Solutions have developed a market leading approach to interactive mental health training. This engaging course empowers your staff to identify behaviours they might witness within the workplace, or when dealing with customers. Attending our mental health course allows your staff to learn information, practical tips, and valuable insights in a relaxed and engaging environment. During our mental health awareness course, we use a range of interactive exercises to support interaction, stimulate conversation and deliver a powerful message.



One of our highly experienced trainers will use a series of theatrical masks to engage your staff and help them to identify different behaviours and reasons for people to react in certain ways.

[You can see a video of this approach by clicking this link.](#)