

# Why workplace wellbeing should be your highest priority

Who is it that actually creates and delivers the products the world needs? Who is it that actually provides the service that the customer enjoys? Who is it at the end of the phone attending to the demands of a happy, or not so happy, customer? On whose efforts does your business thrive? You know the answer, of course, it is “your people”.

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You may well be reading this as the founder of your rapidly growing business and thinking to yourself, “Hang on, it was my idea in the first place. It was my investment and hard work that got it off the ground”! Good on you, but, who do you need now to also buy in to your dream and make real?

You could be the leader of an established business. You’ve done well... up to now. The world has changed and you now also find that people are wanting more; more purpose, more meaning, more connection... The “great resignation” bites. People are hard to find and the ones that remain are now super stressed.

Stress undermines autonomy, proficiency, purpose & pleasure. It is estimated by the Centre for Mental Health that stress costs business in the UK over £34.9B per year – that’s a crazy number. Expand that globally and the damage

and loss through stress is mind-numbing in its scale, but not just the damage to income and profit, but the human cost too. But worse, stress is not just caused by problems within the organisational environment, but can lead us to perceive those problems, leading to a vicious cycle of stress and perceiving issues at work. Stress causes stress. *Poor wellbeing leads to poorer wellbeing.*

Our leadership mistake, particularly in tough times or when performance is dropping, is to over focus on the task in hand. When the pressure is on, we hone in on the task with a laser focus eliminating our leadership peripheral vision. This is deeply flawed.

“But I have a job to do, stuff to make, services to give”? I hear you reply. “I can’t stop. We must work harder”

Wrong, wrong, wrong. It is a potentially fatal error that compounds the problems of stress and poor workplace wellbeing and leads us on a path of ever increasing decline. We spiral out of control – performance drops, we crack the whip harder, so performance drops and we crack the whip harder still... to only one conclusion; like George Orwell’s horse in Animal Farm “I must work harder, I must work harder”... until they drop.

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## So what can we, the leaders, change? What should we do?

We must change our focus and lead with compassion. We need to balance our leadership to ensure we include workforce wellbeing in our leadership intent and activities. To help explain that I will introduce the beautifully elegant model of leadership by John Adair that he calls “Action Centred Leadership”. It further reinforces why leadership time spent on workplace wellbeing is the best investment you can make.

To describe John Adair’s model, think of a triangle of 3 overlapping circles labelled Task, Team & Individual – these represent the areas that a leader’s activities are applied. The actions of leadership enable us to “achieve the task”, “build the team” and “develop the individual”.

Think about it. If you have a loosely aligned team of stressed people, then achieving the task is going to be hard work. But, if you invest the time in your people, look after them, build not only their capability but tap into their self-worth to gain their commitment. Help them on their personal journeys in life

and align their core sense of self with your journey to live a life of meaning and purpose. Now, individually, they are the best they can be, so bring them together with a strong sense of collaboration, meaning and purpose. Collectively align their personal journeys, remove the sources of stress, spend time in creating a bond and a team spirit. Now you have the power of “collective brilliance” where it is not just your leadership efforts that reduce workplace stress, but it is their own collaborative, relationship and compassionate spirit that will also build that positive spiral to resilience and success. Now, you and your team can achieve anything. Your deliberate, conscious and compassionate focus to develop the individuals and build the team has created the competence and commitment to change the world

By making workplace wellbeing your highest leadership priority you have given yourself, your people and your organisation not only the best chance to succeed, but also the permission and the possibility to sustain and accelerate that success.

Workplace wellbeing is the enabler of workplace success

Balance your compassionate leadership focus and enjoy the journey!

Manley Hopkinson is the founder of renowned leadership consultancy *The Compassionate Leadership Academy* and author of *Compassionate Leadership*.