

Mentally Healthy - A Policy

Introduction

Mental health is becoming a growing challenge for many people. The number of prescriptions is increasing, the number of diagnoses are increasing, and our awareness of it as an overall health issue is on the rise. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that it's become any easier to talk about, that we're addressing its origins and sources or that the solution is there for us to simply 'purchase'. At work (highly likely to be one of the causes – especially in the creative industry, it affects everything from performance to working relationships. Even more importantly, it doesn't just stay in the workplace, it can affect home and family life as well.

In a factory, businesses are supposed to put everything they can into keeping their workplace safe for the people who work there. They don't want people cutting things off, breaking things and not being able to use their limbs to do their job.

At <insert company here>, we like our people to use their brains. So it makes sense that we do everything we can to help keep them in working order, if not tip top shape. You could argue that the less efficient your brain, the longer it takes to do something, the harder it is to 'be creative' and as a result the longer the hours you work, and the worse you feel, until your brain just runs out of steam and turns into a deflated, dehydrated, empty blob. Ok that's extreme, and this is no trivial matter, but it helps to visualise these things.

So, we've developed this set of principles and initiatives to start our fight for a more positive and accepted future for mental health. We will reduce the stigma, stop it being ignored and improve the conditions for everyone to thrive and everyone can contribute – not just at <insert company here>, but in our industry and hopefully beyond.

It's f*\$%#ing normal

Mental health will be talked about in the same way we talk about diet and exercise. It's fine to say I'm feeling a bit fat or overweight at the moment, and that I'm exercising and going on a diet. So we're making it fine to say I feel frazzled at the moment, really anxious about tomorrow's meeting, and I'm going for a walk.

We want <insert company here> to be a safe place to talk about this stuff. No one is going to be treated like a leper for buying tim tams and chips, so they're not going to be treated that way for taking a day off to get their head straight. Of course, things can be much more serious, and

require much more treatment, but let's start with framing this as what it is. A health issue in the same way we can get a cold or something more serious.

- Speak up if you're feeling crap. Someone will help. This is incredibly hard to do, and we recognise that. It will take time for this to be seen as normal and part of everyday language and asking someone "How ya doing?" – but we want you to know that this is the environment we want to create here. To help with this, we'll create a slack channel #headsup. It's an easy non-confronting, non-judgemental way to just let people know how you're feeling, whether it's up or down. People will also be encouraged to share any positive or negative feelings they have about the upcoming week in our team stand ups on a Monday morning.
- Speak up if you see someone struggling – offer to go for a coffee, help out on their project, or just recognise that they're not feeling great.
- Take some time out. If you need some time out, take it. Go for a walk, a coffee, get out of the office, take a day or two. None of us will raise an eyebrow. Of course, we'd like to know so that we can help out, but the last thing you need to worry about is work. So, we're giving an extra 1 week a year in no questions asked leave to make it easier for you to take the time you need to keep tip top.

Don't just ask "are you ok?"

It's fantastic to show that you care and to raise the awareness of mental health. But if you're just going to ask 'Are you ok', you might as well be just turning the kettle on and never making a cup of tea. Mental health is clearly on the agenda now. Many people are aware. But as we know in our industry, the awareness argument is starting to lose its strength. We need action, demonstration, participation.

We're going to prepare everyone for THAT conversation.

- By the end of the year we aim to have put every member of the team through Mental Health First Aid training. It's not just one person's job. We're not talking about a fire warden here. We're talking about everyone looking out for everyone else.
- Anyone new who joins will also go through Mental Health First Aid training as well as part of their induction.

For this, we are a family

If we're going to get this right, we need to be a family. They say you can't choose your family. But in this case, we can choose to make them better. We're in this together, and if something affects one of us, it's more than likely to affect all of us – and that's we want. We don't want suffering in silence, in the same way we don't want joy in isolation. Party of one, said no-one. Ever.

So we're taking a group approach to the problem.

- Once a <insert time frame here>, we will bring a mental health coach into <insert company here>. It will be treated with the same expectations as any other team activity at the company, like book club, stand up or wrap up.
- It will give us a chance to get together as a group and discuss any challenges we're experiencing and how to overcome them.
- We'll also keep them around for (paid for) one on one 30 min sessions for anyone who wants to, to continue talking or speak about things on a more personal level.
- Finally, we'll also put front and centre all the other benefits that are available to you through the public health system. Like the government's mental health care plan, which includes medicare subsidised counselling for up to 10 one on one sessions. We'll also get experts in to educate us on the implications of mental health disclosure on income / life insurance if you have it.

Never Not Creative

We don't think we'll have as big an impact if we just do this in our own little bubble. Our hypothesis is this. The cost to our people and our businesses far outweighs the cost of doing something about the problem. We need to tackle this from 2 sides. We have to accept that our businesses, our clients and our industry has contributed to some of this problem. So we have to tackle those already affected, as well as be proactive in reducing the likelihood of the problem occurring more often. The following steps are initiatives that we will explore as part of the Never Not Creative initiative.

- A mental health evaluation of our business. From the reality of how many of us are diagnosed / undiagnosed, the contribution to absenteeism, any differences in types of roles or seniority etc.
- Contributions to a mental health fund for the creative industry. We will collaborate with other businesses to help establish a central fund for people in the creative industry to access counselling with a selection of participating therapists / practices. The fund may also cover part of overall health-related services such as gym, yoga, meditation etc. The amount paid into this fund, and how often it is topped up is to be discussed with other businesses. Also, up for discussion is the selection process of therapists / practices, administration and governance of the fund, and restrictions, if any, on entitlements for those who use it.
- A mental health disbursement. It used to be that agencies would charge clients between 5-10% for disbursements. This was to cover cabs, paper, printing, some of the expenses incurred in doing work for them. Slowly this has been reduced across the industry and is seen as just a cost of doing business by many clients. In reality, the administration in hours probably cost twice as much compared to getting back the expenses. However, what isn't a cost of doing business, it is our mental health. Client demands, quick turnarounds, moving deadlines, and in more extreme cases the treatment of agencies by

clients is NOT a cost of doing business. To work long hours and weekends without additional tangible reward is sometimes necessary, but should not be an expected or accepted badge of honour. At the same time, we have great relationships with our clients and many become friends. So we're investigating bringing back the disbursement mechanism. Not for pens and paper clips. But for part-funding each business' contribution to the mental health fund and the efforts of the businesses involved to improve the overall health of the creative industry.