

A place you trust

You cannot teach wellbeing in the workplace, but you can create a culture and conditions that will help employees maintain or develop physical and mental wellbeing, and help them look after themselves, says Professor Carol Black.

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❓ How would you define wellbeing

There are many definitions of wellbeing, but for me wellbeing is a sense of contentment. Contentment is made up of mental health, physical health and a feeling that where you are at any time is a good place to be. That good place can, and should be, the workplace.

❓ How would you measure wellbeing

Measuring wellbeing isn't easy. The government has set up the 'What Works Centre for Wellbeing', and they have developed tools for assessing how policy or programmes impact upon people's wellbeing. They also measure cost-effectiveness of interventions. If you think about the components of wellbeing – mental health, physical health and a sense of being in the right place – then you can partially measure it through sickness absence levels, since this is how absence is often caused.



You can measure wellbeing by reviewing staff turnover figures, because if the staff are not content with a workplace, they leave



You can also measure it by reviewing staff turnover figures, because if staff are not content with a workplace, they leave. Additionally, you can measure engagement scores. You can also measure productivity loss, by adding presenteeism and absence levels.

❓ What are the main drivers of employee wellbeing

In my opinion, there are three key drivers. Firstly, having leaders of the organisation who clearly care about employee wellbeing. Then having a non-executive director on the board taking an interest in employee health and wellbeing. That person might sit on the health and wellbeing committee, sample the organisation's activities, and most importantly must report back regularly to the board, most likely with the support of the HR manager, about the health and wellbeing of staff. The board needs

to pay attention to these reports, just as they would if the report was on finance. Board engagement is crucial.

The third driver of employee wellbeing is having good line managers, trained to support their people. We usually get promoted for technical competence, but that doesn't necessarily mean being good with people. So, the organisation needs to support your line managers' capability in this area. I would also add to this some broad mental health training. I want every line manager to understand when an employee is not well and to know where to find advice and help.

❓ What is the relationship between wellbeing and mental health

This is a complex issue because mental health is part of wellbeing. So, it is difficult to maintain a state of wellbeing unless you have good mental health. The two things are related. If you improve or support someone's mental health proactively by providing them with an environment at work that promotes good work, then you will improve that person's sense of wellbeing.

If you want to improve productivity, you need to remember that psychological wellbeing is responsible for up to 25 per cent of such an increase.

❓ What are the sources of support and advice for employers wishing to embrace wellbeing

There are many sources of support for such employers. The difficult thing is knowing where to go and what to choose. Mental Health First Aid is now very common in companies around the country. There's the voluntary Mindful Employer Charter, where employers can sign up to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their workforce. There are also several toolkits, such as those produced by Acas, Business in the Community and Public Health England.

Business in the Community (BITC), working with Public Health England, have prepared toolkits on mental health and suicide. There are training courses to enhance resilience, as resilience is often an important component of wellbeing.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) has lots of material on this topic. There are many different types of line manager training, from organisations such as CIPD and the Chartered Management Institute.

If you are a small company and want to support your employees' health and wellbeing, you can get some informative toolkits online, as well as comprehensive training for line managers to help them understand how a good leader should act.

❓ Why is ensuring the wellbeing of employees now more important than it has ever been

There are lots of things going on now that make people anxious, such as the uncertainty of Brexit and whether we will have enough workers to fill vacancies. Who will remain? How will we cope? There is a sense of anxiety that didn't exist before. There are certain sectors, such as the NHS, where 1.3 million people are working under intense pressure, with health workers feeling demoralised, anxious and overworked. So, there's no better time than now to say that we must support the staff we've got because we don't know how many of them we're going to have in the future. Furthermore, we should be ensuring that the staff we now have are well, and we need to help them be resilient and positive.

❓ What is the role of senior line managers in promoting wellbeing

Firstly, you must persuade line managers that it is an important topic, since they have many business priorities, such as delivering a certain level of productivity or bottom line for their bosses. You have to help them understand that if they support their workforce and its wellbeing, this will lead to a reduction in presenteeism, which is costlier to a company than absence.

In addition, they need to understand that supporting their staff is going to give them a more engaged and productive workforce. You must enable them to do this. It's not just about giving managers courses of training, but also ensuring that they can maintain these skills and are

supported by the top of the house in this area, because they can be under a huge amount of stress.

What incentives can be given to line managers and senior managers to take up responsibility for wellbeing

You could incentivise them through their appraisal. In many companies, appraisals are linked to promotion and remuneration. Some organisations' appraisals expect managers to meet certain requirements relating to the health and wellbeing of their staff. You can also incentivise managers financially.

However, you would hope that one of the best incentives for a line manager is seeing that their staff are doing extremely well and that the company is performing well because of improvements in wellbeing. Managers could be rewarded by getting promoted for this.

How would you measure the effectiveness of such incentives

Overall, we tend to be quite bad at measuring things in the workplace. However, if you introduce an employee survey you can find out what employees think about any subject.

For example, the Britain's Healthiest Workplace Survey, an annual survey run by Vitality throughout Europe, which last year involved 167 companies, has questions not only about wellbeing but also about line managers' effectiveness.

You can also look at the engagement of employees and productivity. You can examine secondary factors to see whether, having incentivised your line

managers, the behaviour and actions of your employees have changed.

How can employers equip their staff to look after their mental wellbeing

If you want to encourage an employee to be more caring about their own health and wellbeing in the workplace, you have to get them into 'the right space'. Many employees will say that various wellbeing schemes are not for them. So, you must use your staff, particularly those with managerial responsibilities, to help the people they manage do the right thing. You can do that if there is a sense of trust, a sense that these people care about their staff and that they have the right things on offer.



There needs to be a sense of trust, a sense that managers care about their staff and that they have the right things on offer



A company can have low participation rates in all kinds of schemes, such as a cycle-to-work scheme, subsidised gym membership, healthy food in the canteen or an online resilience course. So, you have to work hard to change this. You could encourage and support some champions, small groups of people or even teams to lead these initiatives and encourage others to participate. Once people see their friends participating in the wellbeing schemes, they will be more likely to join in.

Do small companies require a special approach and different strategies in relation to workplace wellbeing

Small companies are difficult to engage with regarding workplace health and wellbeing. Many SMEs are very small and have limited resources, no occupational health and no HR function. All of this means that anything you're going to offer them has to be easily and quickly accessible. You can't give them a large, however impressive, toolkit and expect them to read it. It has to be available online. For example, if someone in a small company is feeling depressed and the boss is concerned, it would be very helpful if they could go online and with one click access first-hand advice.

I know a small company in Cornwall with 20 employees, which looks at a different wellbeing topic every month. For example, in January, after Christmas, the subject is usually alcohol, and the company uses whatever information Public Health England and their local organisation have about it. Sometimes, they bring the police in to talk about alcohol and driving. During their 'heart month', they used the British Heart Foundation's resources. They have little money to spend on health and wellbeing, but they bought pedometers for staff and launched a pedometer challenge.

As I said at the beginning, you cannot teach people wellbeing in the workplace because it is a composite of several factors, such as mental and physical health and a sense of being in a good place, where people care about you. However, you can help people become more resilient and teach them coping mechanisms and techniques. Moreover, you can incentivise line managers and senior executive teams to create a culture in their organisation that supports wellbeing.



What works wellbeing at:

whatworkswellbeing.org

Public Health England blogs on wellbeing at:

publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/category/hwb

Acas advice on health and wellbeing at:

www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1361



Organisations can create a culture that helps employees to maintain or develop physical and mental wellbeing. Photograph: iStock/bowdenimages

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