



Mental Health in the
Recruitment Sector

Introduction



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Ten years ago, when I was first supporting businesses as a Director at the CBI, workplace mental health issues weren't seen as a major boardroom issue. Since then, there has been a sea change and mental health has risen up the boardroom agenda rapidly, led by some impressive openness from business leaders themselves.

The UK has a good record on looking after workers. When the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HASAWA) was introduced, it focused on employers protecting the 'health, safety and welfare' of their workers. In those, more industrial, days much of the focus was on preventing physical injury – and huge progress was made.

Today, however, the nature of work has completely changed for many people and the primary risk in the majority of workplaces is mental health.

One in four people will experience mental health issues in any given year and stress is the number one cause of long-term workplace sickness absence.

Mental health issues are not good for employees or business. The government's 'Thriving at Work' report into mental health estimated the cost of poor mental health to UK business at between £33 billion and £42 billion a year. It also found that 300,000 people with a long-term mental health problem lose their jobs each year.

The recruitment industry is known for its competitive and driven nature. Research has found that recruitment is amongst the most stressful jobs in the UK.

How can recruitment firms better support the mental wellbeing of their workforce? What policies and protection are needed? How can we stop treating mental health issues in a reactive, 'band aid' way and put in place preventative strategies that tackle root causes?

In Mental Health Awareness Week (13-20th May 2019), the REC partnered with Howden Employee Benefits & Wellbeing to host a joint round table focused on mental health issues in the recruitment sector.

Our guest speaker, **Mark Hashimi**, a senior consultant and director of strategic wellbeing shared his guidance on how recruiters can identify stress triggers, remove the stigma around mental illness and offer better support for their employees. Here, we share these insights.

Pressure Versus Stress

We all need a little bit of pressure to feel motivated and productive at work. It avoids us feeling bored and enables us to reach our peak performance. But, as this diagram shows, there is a fine line between 'healthy pressure' and stress – where we feel overloaded and overwhelmed. If allowed to escalate, stress can lead to people feeling exhausted, burnt out and lead to developing mental and physical health problems.

Every employer wants to create an environment where people can deliver their optimum performance. But, in a fast-paced, commercially focused industry like recruitment this can be a challenge.

The first step to tackling this is for companies to be able to identify the stress triggers of employees and how to help employees become more self-aware of the impact of stress and pressure. This can support stress management and prevention.

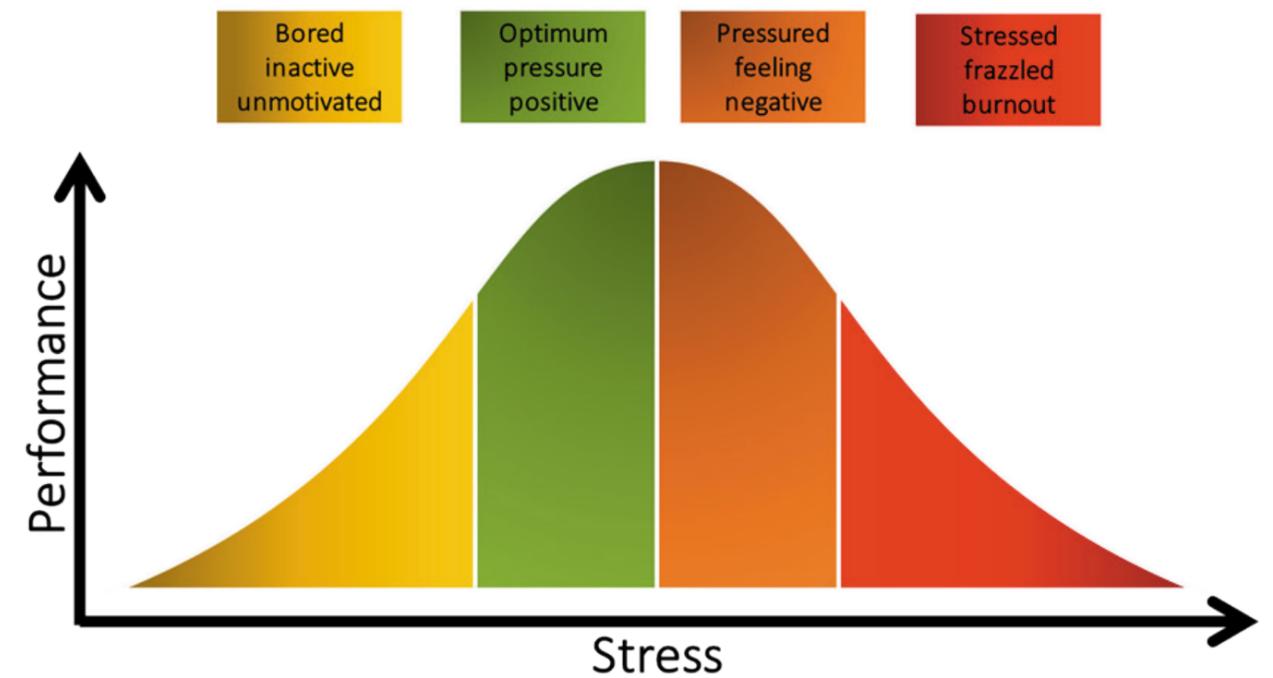


Image Source - Strategic Wellbeing

Mark Hashimi said: "It's as simple as asking employees three questions to understand their personal "stress signature". These are:

1. Triggers

What are your stress triggers at work?

2. Signs

What signs should we both look out for if you're feeling stressed?

3. Actions

What actions can you take to stay well?
What actions can I take to help you?

Line managers can also be trained to spot the signs of stress individually (as we all react differently) ensuring they are asking the right questions to take a proactive approach to managing stress.

This is a great team exercise too, breaking down the stigma on the subject and promoting peer support. Whilst I always encourage employers to proactively use these types of questions, they also work extremely well when managing disclosure."

The Triggers of stress

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has identified six key triggers for stress and leading mental health charity, Mind suggests they are a helpful checklist for companies to understand how their employees are feeling and how they are responding to pressure.

- **Demands**
Busy workloads, difficult work patterns and environment.
- **Control**
How much say the person has in the way they work.
- **Support**
What help, encouragement, and resources, both internally and externally, are available.
- **Relationships**
This includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict.
- **Role**
Whether people understand their role, purpose and value within the organisation.
- **Change**
Job insecurity and how change is managed and communicated in the organisation.

The Elephant in the Room

Avoiding the Stigma Trap

How can recruitment firms remove the stigma around mental health and create a positive environment where people feel they can talk safely and openly about mental health issues?

In many companies, there is still a stigma around mental health. A report from Breathe (a cloud-based HR software solution for SMEs), 'Sick Report 2019: the state of health and well-being in British SMEs', which surveyed over 1,500 employees and SME business leaders, highlighted that unexplained sick days are costing the UK economy £1.4bn annually.

It highlighted that British workers are still uncomfortable disclosing mental health issues or burnout, as nearly a quarter (23 percent) admit they would rather take an unexplained sick day than discuss their issues with their employers.

A holistic approach:
The 3 Cs of culture change - wellbeing strategy

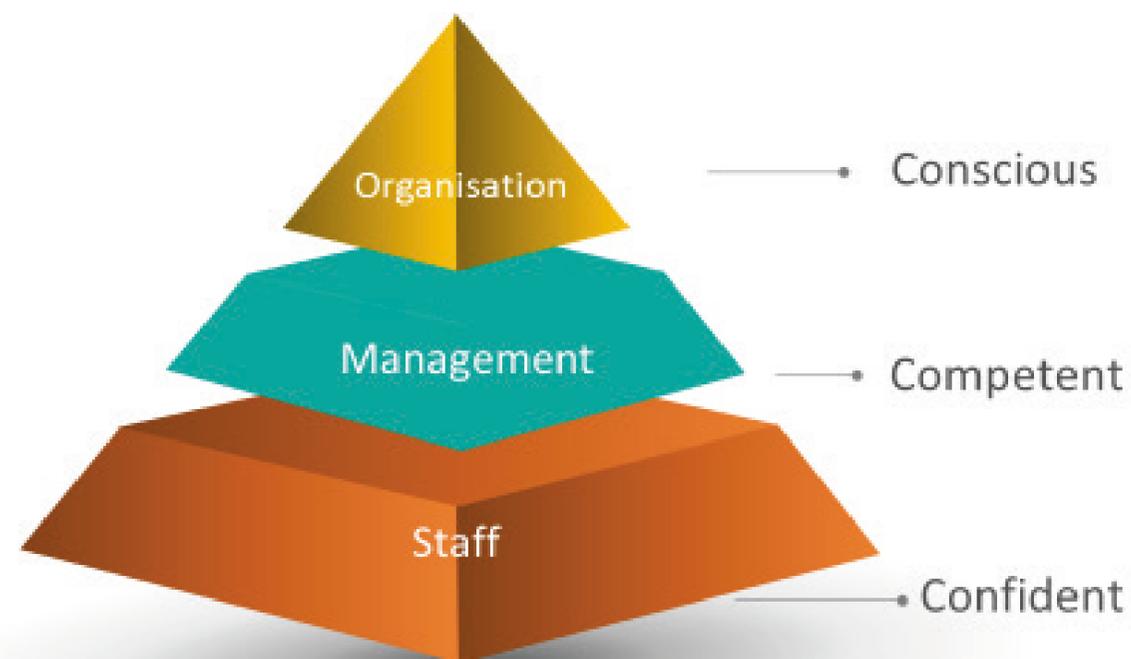


Image Source - Strategic Wellbeing

To create an effective strategy for mental health, it must be embedded into the culture. Mark Hashimi recommends the '3C's Culture Change model', a holistic framework that looks at the whole organisation whilst also including the core and enhanced standards as recommended in the thriving at work assessment:



Conscious Organisation

This includes:

- Ensuring the business is aware of the roles and responsibilities of all staff and support available as outlined in a mental health policy,
- A well defined wellbeing strategy,
- A passionate steering group consisting of a mix of employees dedicated to improving culture around wellbeing and driving any actions through to completion,
- Champions/advocates at senior level leading by example, sharing their stories and a framework for reporting on wellbeing



Competent Management Team

This includes:

- Training line managers to proactively spot the signs of mental ill health and stress,
- Knowing how to have open conversations, managing disclosure, sickness absence,
- Promoting wellbeing and ensuring wellbeing check-ins are on every relevant agenda including one-to-ones and appraisals



Confident Staff

This includes:

- A series of awareness-raising and wellbeing initiatives that are staff-led throughout the year (not just on awareness days once or twice a year)
- A regular quarterly staff survey
- Stress testing the organisation
- Providing staff with a voice to raise ideas
- Suggestions for the steering group to action
- Clear processes around managing disclosure
- Promoting peer-to-peer support and work-life balance

Mark Hashimi said, "Organisations need to embed mental health into their culture – ensure the policies and support for mental health is part of any employee induction. From day one people will know what resources are available for them throughout their career with the company and that their employer takes their mental health seriously."

Support & Resources to Manage Mental Health

Addressing mental health issues in their early stages is the best way of preventing them. All businesses should have a long-term strategy in place for recognising the signs and providing services to help.

These can include:

✓ Create a Wellness Action Plan for everyone

To help companies manage mental health issues, Mind offers many free resources for companies to do this including its Wellness Action Plans, which are available for line managers and employees.

Wellness Actions Plans (WAPs) are an easy, practical way for employers to encourage people to manage their own mental health at work, and for managers to support the mental health of their teams.

The WAPs are personalised, practical tools that everyone can use – whether they have a mental health problem or not. They help people identify what keeps them well at work, what causes them to become unwell, and how to address a mental health problem at work should they be experiencing one. They give people a framework to talk about mental health which is key.

✓ Promote your Employee Assistance Programme

Most UK employers offer an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), such as telephone and face to face counselling, but EAPs are often under used and under promoted. Make sure everyone knows what support is available through the EAP and that line managers also understand they can use them to discuss any concerns they have managing an employee with stress.

✓ Invest in training

Training programmes for line managers and HR personnel have become increasingly popular and can assist in tackling some of the stigma around mental health. Health and Safety Executive and ACAS are good places to look for advice and guidance on risk assessment and training.

✓ Improve staff satisfaction and culture

Staff satisfaction and culture has an impact on employee wellbeing. Ensuring there are regular staff surveys and forums, where employees can address concerns, is one way that management can understand some of the issues their workforce faces.

✓ Consider flexible working

Flexible working is one of the main practices used to help support employees with mental health issues and can be useful in assisting employees to better manage their work-life balance and wellbeing.

✓ Check policies to see what services are offered

Often critical illness and group income protection policies provide a range of nurse-led services or support from registered counsellors, including confidential mental health support. Check what services your company has in place and make sure your employees understand what is available.

Five ways to good employee mental health

- 1. Connect**
Talk, listen and be there. Feel connected.
- 2. Be Active**
Do what you can. enjoy what you do. move your mood.
- 3. Take Notice**
Remember the simple things that give you joy.
- 4. Keep Learning**
Embrace new experiences, see opportunities. Surprise yourself.
- 5. Give** your time, your words, your presence.

Top tips to help you look after your employees' mental wellbeing

✓ **Talk about mental health regularly at work** - use Wellness Action Plans to encourage conversations about mental wellbeing, check in with people to find out how they are feeling and encourage people to be open about any issues they might have.

✓ **You don't need a large budget** to create an effective mental health strategy. Make the most of free resources out there to support employees. Mental Health at Work has free resources available for employers of every size. The resources include policies, toolkits for different businesses, advice and guidance and case studies.

✓ **Listen** – listening is often the best support that employers can give to their staff. Create space for them to talk and for you to listen. Take time to ask people how they are and ask again. Make conversations around mental health habitual. Overdo it if necessary, so conversations become automatic.

✓ **Workshops, training, listen and learn lunches** are great ways for an employer to better support mental wellbeing. Hosting such events can break down barriers and stigmas around mental health and demonstrate that mental wellbeing is important to the business.

✓ **Encourage everyone** to be mindful and conscious of mental health issues so they notice if their colleagues may not be feeling great and they can sign post them to available support.

Remember you can't fix everyone's issues. Recruitment as an industry won't be for everyone. Some might be in the wrong job or haven't found the right job for them yet.

We can't change the nature of recruitment – it is an industry where demands and pressures are always present. However, as employers we can all change the level of support and investment we make in the mental wellbeing of our staff.

Case Study – Tangent International

Tangent International, a recruitment firm specialising in communications & technology, has prioritised the mental wellbeing of its staff for a while.



Simon Dear

CEO, Tangent International



The company says focusing on employee engagement and wellbeing is not only good for employees, it is good for business. Simon Dear, CEO, Tangent International said, "We believe prevention is far better than cure. I am evangelical about promoting wellbeing – it is not just a process here – it is part and parcel of everything we do. We have an empathetic approach to management and although we want to make money, we are not driven by profit. We manage with a high level of emotional intelligence (EQ) and we listen to our staff."

"Our aim is to create a brilliant working environment for staff, to ensure their true engagement and give them a proper platform for development. We know this leads to lower incidences of poor mental health. We all face outside pressures and as a community we think that if we treat members with a degree of empathy we will feel better about ourselves and it's good for business."

"We now have 90 staff and wellbeing means different things to different people. It can be yoga, salary, training and development or flexible working – we all have different drivers and we try to provide a holistic environment, where everyone can thrive and enjoy a positive working life – this results in lower incidences of poor mental health and higher productivity."

"I suffered from mental health issues in my early twenties and I finally saw a clinical psychologist who cured me in four sessions. Based on this experience, we direct people to seek appropriate healthcare if they need it. We have trained managers to identify mental health issues and signs of stress and to be able to talk openly about it. There is no stigma here. In every sales meeting, we talk about targets and then we ask how people are feeling and we ask twice to ensure we really know."

"Mental health training is part of our staff induction and we have conversations about what might apply additional or unwanted pressure on them. Everyone has mental health self-awareness training, so they know how to manage their stress and what they need to do to stay well."

"In recruitment there are pressures, it's a sales role and some people aren't suited to it. But our approach is to praise loudly and to blame softly – our managers know that any criticism must be constructive. We have created a safe environment where people can express themselves and it has benefitted our people and our business. Every business line has increased by 50% this year."

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About Us

REC Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC)

REC is the professional body for the UK recruitment industry

The REC is all about brilliant recruitment, which drives our economy and delivers opportunity to millions. As the voice of the recruitment industry, we champion high standards, speak up for great recruiters, and help them grow. Recruitment is a powerful tool for companies and candidates to build better futures for themselves and a strong economy for the UK.

Only the REC gives recruitment businesses the mark of quality which tells their clients they strive to deliver the right people every time, that they care about what they do and have an unmatched level of professionalism.

<https://www.rec.uk.com/>



Mark Hashimi

Mark is Director of Strategic Wellbeing. Having previously held a number of senior management positions over the last ten years, Mark has significant experience when dealing with mental health and work related issues, as head of workplace wellbeing at HF Mind, senior revenue manager at EDF Energy, as a counsellor, trainer, public speaker, mental health first aid instructor and from his own personal experiences.

Mark facilitates mental health sessions with a strong focus on proactive intervention and long-term

sustainability, challenging stigma and effective communication. Alongside corporate training and consultancy, Mark works as a psychotherapist and counsellor specialising in workplace issues and trauma. Mark also designed and delivered the "Trauma and Bereavement" training for those impacted by the Grenfell tragedy; the Met police "Managing mental health at work" training; and Mind's core workplace wellbeing training programme.

<https://www.strategicwellbeing.com/>

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Howden Employee Benefits & Wellbeing work with clients of all sizes – both in the UK and globally - to provide dedicated employee benefits & wellbeing consultancy. We've won many industry awards for our work and are widely recognised for our innovative and creative approach to benefit design.

We have worked with the REC for many years and help members to build the right benefits strategy to meet their individual needs, workforce and budget and can advise on all aspects of employee benefits.

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Looking after employees' health and wellbeing is a priority for many businesses. And an effective employee benefits strategy can help you recruit and retain talent.

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