

Well-being @ Sapphire

Today is Time to Talk Day and it provides a great opportunity to reflect on mental health and our well-being and the well-being of colleagues, friends and family. One in four people will experience a mental health problem this year, yet the shame and silence can be as bad as the mental health problem itself. It's time to change, it's time to talk.

We see and hear so much in the press and social media about mental health and well-being and often for a moment, we pay attention but turn and think well that's not about me, there is nothing wrong with my mental health.

People believe that there is a stigma around the words mental health, society and our industry, especially, creates a culture of "stop complaining", "life's hard, get on with it" and many more throw away statements, that deflect from the truth.

Mental health is a catch-all phrase covering a multitude of topics and issues, many of which can be simply addressed through the available support networks that exist around us. So let's move the focus from the words 'mental health' and focus on the phrase 'well-being'. If you had a broken arm, people would want to know how you were, people would offer to help, phrases like "let me carry that" "Let me open that door for you", "Let me drive you" would be used and offers of help would be greatly accepted.

So why do people readily offer help and why do people happily accept that help when you have a broken arm? Well the answer is simple, firstly people can see the plaster on your arm, they can see that you need help. Secondly, in general, people want to help, we are conditioned to support each other and it is obvious what needs doing. We can all figure out the impact of having an arm in plaster and how it restricts your ability to function. Thirdly we do not mind accepting help, we do not perceive a broken arm as a sign of weakness, after all it's a temporary injury isn't it.

So why is our well-being any different? Across our society, people are suffering in silence, stress, anxiety, debt, relationship problems, child access, drugs or alcohol are only a few of the things that are causing people to be unhappy and these are not including other problems such as depression or anxiety, to name but two.

So, what can we do about it? There are many experts out there, there are great charities and support networks, we have our Employee Assistance Programme, which can provide support and advice around the clock and of course, we have the NHS.

Our Employee Assistance Programme Helpline – 0800 030 5182

However, often the causes and effects are hidden, people keep themselves to themselves. Our culture is one where we do not want to share our thoughts, we don't want to expose

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our emotions, we do not have a plaster cast to signal that all is not well. We need to change this; we need to reinforce that it is 'ok not to be ok'. So how as a responsible employer do we bring about this change? The first thing we need to do is change the environment within which we live and work, our approach to this throughout 2020 will be delivered through 3 key steps:

1. Every employee and subcontractor/ partner employee who works with us will attend a workshop, during which we will address 3 key topics:
 - a. *How to recognise when a chat is required, we will aim to help to give everyone the skills to identify when someone has a problem, how do you know when a person is bottling up their emotions? How do you recognise that there may be something that a friend or colleague is struggling with?*
 - b. *Once you recognise that a chat is needed, then the second area to be covered by the workshop will be to equip you with the skills and abilities to approach the individual and to start a conversation. The workshop will also highlight what you can do to help you hear what is being said and support the individual to express themselves.*
 - c. *The third element to be addressed by the workshops, will be to identify the next steps. We recognise that once the issues have been discussed that there will be different options on what to do next. We are not expecting people to be able to provide the specialist help or support that may be required, but we will help you by clearly providing the follow-on options for people who need support, guidance and advice.*
2. The second strand of our strategy is to train up a large number as many as one in ten 'Well-being Champions'. Those that are willing and able to support, will be offered the chance to attend a two day accredited Mental Health First Aider Course, providing them with the necessary skills to help and support others. By creating this network of Well-being Champions across the business, we are aiming to not only create an environment where people can talk and share their problems, but to put help and support as close as possible to the front line, making it easily accessible. Whilst we already have Mental Health First Aiders in the business, our plans to drastically increase the numbers and to make them easier to engage with, will help to change the lives of people and hopefully change the culture of our industry.
3. Thirdly, we will then provide a shorter course to follow on from the workshop, that everyone will be invited to attend, to help provide more knowledge and enable people to act as intermediaries. Our goal is for one in five employees to receive this training.
4. The final strand of our strategy is to have a clear communications strategy, where we have an ongoing calendar of events to maintain a focus on all of the key messages. By partnering with both local and national charities, we can share the great work that is being done helping people to access support where it is required.

I look forward to working with you over the coming months as we roll out our strategy.



Colin Kelly