

THE NATIONAL LAW REVIEW

World Mental Health Day

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The news today will be full of stories about mental health, aimed at raising awareness of this critical issue. Similarly, many companies will be running events to support employees' mental health, encouraging them to feel comfortable disclosing their any issues and to seek support. This is all very laudable and forms an important part of the ongoing efforts to end the stigma of mental illness. However, mental health is not an issue for one day of the year alone. It is a whole year, whole company issue, which deserves to form a permanent part of the wellbeing agenda and which should not need a 'business case' to make.

So, what does that mean? Well, it starts with engagement. Not just at employee level, or line manager level, but at the most senior levels of a business. One good example of this is of António Horta-Osório, Lloyds Banking Group Chief Executive, who has been open about his struggles with his mental health (here is his [piece](#) in the Guardian Online from 1 May this year)

Why is this senior-level engagement important? In addition to making employees feel comfortable disclosing their own issues, it also gives line managers comfort that they can be supportive to their own staff. Line managers are of course often concerned about their own performance, which is intimately tied to the performance of their team. They may therefore not want to enquire about their team's wellbeing, for fear of 'opening a can of worms'....but if they suspect someone is struggling and they don't, then the impact on the team (and potentially their own position) will be far greater.

Now, engagement is great, but there are times when, no matter how supportive and open the employer, employees will feel unable to open up. In such situations, it's vital that line managers and other co-workers are actively engaging with their colleagues about how they're doing.

MIND have a great line - "What's the most important question in the world?", they ask. And the answer?

"How are you?"

Equally important is listening to the answer...if your normally chirpy colleague has been silent and withdrawn for a few days, check on them. You're not expected to be a medical or mental health expert, but if you do suspect that someone is struggling, then just point them in the right direction - HR, EAP, the Company doctor, etc. But even if they reject all of these options, as is their right, you have at least let them know you're there for them.

None of the above will be new to our regular readers, many of whom will also likely have attended our mental health training sessions. However I am and have been speaking at a number of events around World Mental Health Day on these specific issues, and the number of people attending these sessions for the first time demonstrates that there's a long way still to go.

Some final thoughts:

- The Stephenson/ Farmer [Thriving at Work](#) Report of last year estimated the cost to the UK economy of poor mental health to be up to £99bn, with the cost to employers alone being some £42bn;
- Equally, a report referenced in the Telegraph [today](#) found that FTSE 100 companies whose websites demonstrated efforts to tackle poor mental health in their employees were statistically significantly more



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profitable than those that did not.

There should be no need for HR/ Wellbeing teams to go 'cap in hand' to the Board to make their business case for mental health to be taken seriously. The figures do it for them.

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