



# LEADING WELL

Strategies for resilience and wellbeing during times of uncertainty



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People that are well, do well. But we are doing a lot of doing, and not enough well.

These last few years have seen us digging deep to deal with unrelenting change – floods, pandemic restrictions, work changes, home schooling – all putting pressure on our wellbeing and productivity. Which has in turn brought additional stress and uncertainty for people, and the potential for burn-out for leaders and managers who are trying to balance it all.

Then on top of that, in a work context we still operate with the industrial age belief that if we work hard and achieve our targets, we then deserve wellbeing and happiness.

But this equation is wrong and can lead to burnout. Over 10-years of research shows that if we prioritise our health, wellbeing, and happiness first – our productivity, problem solving, innovation, creativity and achievement increases by up to 30%.

## **Wired and over-tired**

Yet most of the leaders I work with are caught up in the busyness treadmill, continuously rushed for time, and not getting through their never-ending to-do-lists.

And with change and disruption happening faster, more frequently and more dramatically than we are used to, it can be literally too hard to see the wood for the trees.

With our bodies in a constant state of fight or flight our brains are prioritising survival, and continuously pumping out adrenalin and cortisol. This is at the expense of our cognitive processing abilities. To boost our survival resources, the brain deprioritises other important functions like perspective-taking, problem solving, and rest.

And current mental health trends show that more of us are struggling and not doing so well.

## **Stress plays out differently for different people**

Stress and anxiety affect different people differently – some people will crave order, over plan to exert control and find comfort in rules. Other people will rebel, act out or lash out. Some people will comfort eat while other people will stop eating. Some people will struggle with sleep, others will sleep more.

It is important to take the time to identify your

own stress triggers and behavioural patterns when under pressure. Also don't assume that others will think, feel, and react the same way as you do to uncertainty, challenge, and change.

Once we understand people's feelings, we can then match our leadership and communications strategy to meet them with where they need us to be to be able to move forward.

### **There is no one size fits all solution to wellbeing, but there is a wellbeing solution for all**

Many of us hope for a one-size fits all approach to wellbeing and lose motivation when something doesn't work for us or our team members. Which doesn't make sense.

Each one of us is unique, so our wellbeing definitions and resilience needs are unique too. No two people have the exact same values, beliefs, life circumstances, priorities, and dreams.

Wellbeing to a first-time parent with a brand-new baby will most likely involve more sleep and help around the house. Wellbeing for a graduate starting their first full time job will find the mastery of work skills and fitting in to social networks more important.

So, our starting point is as simple as asking each of our team members how they are and what they care about. In your one-on-one catch ups, instead of starting by reviewing their tasks in progress, try taking the first 5-minutes to ask them how they are? And what is important to their wellbeing?

What does wellbeing mean to you?

What is working well for your wellbeing at work?

What are your stressors? What helps when you are experiencing pressure?

What support would you like for your wellbeing?

The good news is that research shows that the simple act of asking and talking about wellbeing, is a wellbeing boost in its own right! And supporting your team members' wellbeing is more straightforward than you may think.

Providing opportunities for autonomy, flexibility, connection, and the ability to grow and develop skills, are all proven ways to support wellbeing at work.

### **Leading well, begins with being well**

Most of us are familiar with the airline safety instructions which direct us in an emergency to "put on our own oxygen mask before helping others". Most leaders I work with know this, but very few are putting it into practice, as they are too busy focusing their attention on supporting everyone around them!

If you aren't taking care of yourself how can you take care of your team?

And if you tell your team members to make time for breaks and attend important family events, but aren't doing it yourself, will your team believe that you really value wellbeing? Will your team members feel empowered and supported to prioritise their health and wellbeing?

Leading well starts with prioritising your own self-care and modelling your own wellbeing practices.

### **Making resilience work for you**

Prolonged stress takes its toll on both our mental and physical health. As leaders we need to develop better resilience skill sets for our teams in managing uncertainty, unexpected challenges, and constant change.

We are all born with resilience. It is just our starting levels that are different. You may think your resilience is low because you get burnt out. But actually, you might be great in moments of high stress when others would crumble. Or vice versa. That's because you can be naturally stronger in one area of resilience than another.

I describe resilience as your internal resource for adapting positively to stress, supporting mental wellbeing during adversity, and maintaining health and energy during prolonged uncertainty and change.

### **Resilience and wellbeing skills training works when it is fit-for-purpose**

One of the biggest challenges often shared with me in organisations, is of people's experiences with wellbeing programs that have not worked.

Given that there is no one size fits all definition of wellbeing, why would we expect a one-size fits all wellness program to meet our individual needs?

Research shows that resilience skills training is effective in improving our health, wellbeing, and performance. But the activities we choose to develop the wellbeing needs of ourselves and our teams need to be fit for purpose.

By providing a tool kit of wellbeing and resilience skills, you and your team members are then able to choose the strategy that will best work for what is needed in the moment.

For example, a useful resilience skill to help us manage stress in healthy ways is emotional agility. Mental adaptability and mindfulness can help us better switch between on and off. Daily practices to optimise your energy supports emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing.

### **Increasing resilience is one of the best boosts for our wellbeing.**

When you increase your overall resilience, it's easier to continue to do your best under pressure and maintain a balanced approach to life. Because the reality is that wellbeing isn't a nice to have, it is necessary. It is necessary for our health, energy, connection, creativity, relationships, performance, and this list goes on. [FMCG]

“RESEARCH SHOWS THAT RESILIENCE SKILLS TRAINING IS EFFECTIVE IN IMPROVING OUR HEALTH, WELLBEING, AND PERFORMANCE.”

