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The work-life balance challenge: How to boost wellbeing in your workplace



Author, high-performance expert and founder of the Blueberry Institute, Fleur Heazlewood is passionate about workplace wellbeing and helping people find work-life balance. She joined editor Cec Busby on the [Flying Solo podcast](#) to share her top tips for avoiding burnout and embracing healthy wellbeing habits to help you in your life and business.

Fleur Heazlewood has been helping business leaders achieve wellbeing at work for decades, so it made sense for her to put pen to paper to share some of the most important things she's learned over the years about resilience and wellbeing.

Her new book, ***Resilience Recipes: Making Space for wellbeing that works***, couldn't have come at a better time, with **one in three Aussies suffering from burnout**.

Fleur says, "There's a much more open and growing acceptance that we need help with our mental health and wellbeing, but people still struggle with where to start and whom to speak to.

"In a workplace context, how do you approach this subject with your manager if you're not doing so well? Or, if you're a leader, how do you know what the balance is between professional personal support versus getting *too* personal?"

"I'm hoping to give people the confidence and some language and stories to make those conversations easier."



Recognising burnout in yourself and your staff

Burnout or mental health difficulty can look different for everyone, so catching the warning signs in yourself or your employees early can be a crucial factor in ensuring your team stays mentally well.

“Some of the signs that we should be looking out for will appear in different aspects of our lives,” says Fleur.

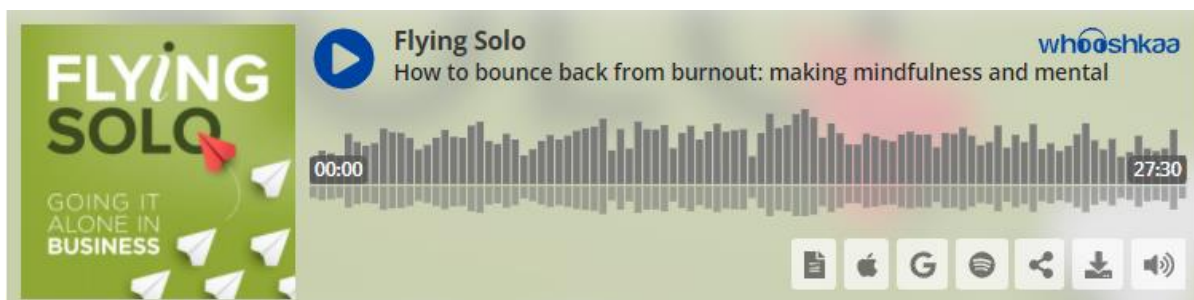
Some examples might be:

- Not presenting or engaging in our life or work the way we usually would.
- Getting emotional over situations or small things that wouldn't usually bother us.
- Finding ourselves increasingly overthinking or ruminating about things more excessively than we usually do.
- Some physical signs might include extra tiredness, or finding it more challenging to get work done or concentrate on work.

“We are looking for changes in our emotional state, differences in how we might mentally process something, and those physical challenges.

“I encourage people to notice when your wheels are starting to get a little bit wobbly, as opposed to waiting until your wheels fall off,” Fleur warns. “It is so much easier to course-correct than to try and do a 360° turn when the Titanic is already powering towards the iceberg.”

Listen to Fleur Heazlewood on the Flying Solo podcast:



How leaders can support employees' mental health

Fleur says that while initiatives like RUOK Day are an effective way to raise awareness of the issue, we should do more in the workplace to support our teammates' mental wellbeing.

"RUOK has been a fantastic mantra for making it acceptable to ask and talk about mental health and wellbeing, but 'are you okay?' in and of itself is not actually a good question.

"There's a big difference between saying, 'Hey, I've noticed you're a little bit quieter than your bubbly self. I'm concerned about you', versus a generic 'are you okay', which can be answered with 'good, fine, busy'.

"Be specific with what you've noticed and use 'I' statements because 'you' statements can make a person feel on the back foot," Fleur suggests. "For example, saying, 'Hey, I've noticed that you're not your usual self and I'm concerned about you' sounds open and caring, versus 'You're usually bubbly at work, what's going on for you?'

"These conversation skills can make a big difference between a caring and courageous leader and someone who's not sure what to do when challenged with someone who's not travelling so well."



Strategies to manage stress and build resilience

Fleur reveals that there are three key resilience areas:

1. **Coping skills** – the skills to be able to manage a crisis moment.
2. **Recovery** – how quickly do we bounce back from adversity? Do we go down for the count, or do we have a natural pause to regroup and pull ourselves back out of it?
3. **How we manage our energy** – the more energy and buffer we have in the tank, the less likely we are to struggle when we come across life's ups and downs.

“Everyone will have some strengths in one of these areas of resilience and some areas where they’re not so great,” says Fleur. “For me, I have fantastic, well-honed coping skills. I’m good at stress and the adrenaline rush that comes with deadlines. But I am quite susceptible to burnout – I’m not as great at managing my energy.

“Look at the areas where you’re not so great and fill in your resilience toolkit around that because resilience can absolutely be built.”

Fleur says a key area in resilience-building is prioritising your own needs.

“It’s important that you put your oxygen mask on before helping others. We need to block out time in our calendar that is sacred – time for us to be able to stop and catch a breath and work out what is important for us. Prioritise that time for your wellbeing, because people who *are* well *do* well.

“We’ve now got ten years’ worth of research that says if we focus on our health, wellbeing and happiness first, then all of the performance metrics that matter – productivity, innovation, creativity, relationships – all these key elements that affect our performance and how well our business runs can improve by up to 30 per cent.

“So know that you are worth it, and then get clear on what will best support you – what wellbeing means to you. Then prioritise one or two of those things,” Fleur suggests.



The power of mindfulness and exercise

Fleur says physical exercise and mindfulness are “superfoods” for general wellbeing. But before you add these to the too-hard pile, there are ways to incorporate both into your daily life without making big changes to your routine.

“Exercise is absolutely up there as a mental health ‘superfood’ that supports you across a broad range of wellbeing categories,” Fleur confirms. “Shifting your body does shift your mental state. If we’re feeling overwhelming emotions or we’re starting to feel overwhelmed with our workload, just getting up and going for a walk around the park for 20 minutes clears our head and helps us to re-establish our emotional baseline.”

As for mindfulness, Fleur says it’s not as hard as it seems.

“Many people associate mindfulness with meditation – they think it’s too hard, or their mind is too busy, or it’s a bit ‘woo woo’,” says Fleur. “Mindfulness is simply a skill that helps you recognise the thoughts that are going on in your head, choose whether they’re helpful or unhelpful, and then be purposeful on how you move forward. It’s very much around clarity and choice.

“Meditation is not the only way that you can achieve mindfulness. For some people, it might be running or swimming – when you are in the moment and just enjoying being there.

“I encourage busy business leaders to think about a hobby or activity where they feel a sense of ‘flow’ and can put down what’s in their head. It’s also a great way of giving your mental and emotional energy a break.”

A quick mindfulness technique to try right now

Need to chill out in a stressful moment or find some last-minute energy? According to Fleur, how you breathe can regulate both your emotional and mental state.

“Breathing is a beautiful tool that’s accessible to all of us, but most of us haven’t been shown how to tune in and regulate our breath to enhance our well-being,” says Fleur.

“A great way of bringing some calm to your body is to slow down, move your breathing from your chest, down into your belly, and focus on the exhale – have a longer exhale than inhale. You’re tapping into your parasympathetic nervous system, which is your ‘rest and digest’ system. In two to three minutes, you can move from stressy, high energy, wired state into something a lot more spacious, calm and quiet.

“On the flip side, if you’re feeling tired and lethargic, take stronger inhaleds and breathe from your chest as you focus on getting as much oxygen into your body as you can. You’re activating the sympathetic nervous system, where your ‘fight and flight’ response – those cortisol and adrenaline boosts – comes from.

Finally, ditch the inner critic

“We’ve all got that inner critic, that internal chit chat going on,” says Fleur. “When you catch yourself beating yourself up over something, just pause and think, ‘If this was my best friend sharing their thoughts with me, what would I say to them?’ Because we are kind, generous, empathetic and supportive of our friends, we allow our internal dialogue to criticise and beat ourselves up.

“Wellbeing is more important than ‘doing well,’” Fleur reminds us. “People who *are* well *do* well, so please prioritise yourself.”