

How music can help to ease anxiety at work?

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THESE LAST FEW YEARS HAVE SEEN US DIGGING DEEP TO DEAL WITH UNRELENTING CHANGE – BUSHFIRES, FLOODS, PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS, WORK CHANGES, HOME SCHOOLING – ALL PUTTING PRESSURE ON OUR MENTAL HEALTH, WELLBEING, AND PRODUCTIVITY.

In any one year, one in five of us is not doing ok, to the point where we have a diagnosable mental illness. Lifestyle diseases like depression, anxiety and Type 2 Diabetes are skyrocketing around the world. And these challenges are affecting our family, friends, and colleagues.

Over the last few years HR has done a great job to destigmatise mental illness at work and bring mental health education to the fore. Now is the time to build upon that foundation and shift the conversation from the reactive to the proactive, and from preventative to promotive strategies with resilience and wellbeing.

Wellbeing isn't a nice to have, it is necessary

Many of our organisations and leaders still operate with the belief that wellbeing is a reward for results. Once we have worked hard and achieved our targets, we can then have some time for 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%.

High performance isn't sustainable unless it is healthy

For wellbeing to work we need to flip the workplace cultural paradigm from busyness and burnout to healthy, sustainable, high performance. This can only be achieved by balancing up time with down time. Down time is the rest and recovery phase vital to boosting productivity in up times.

Wellbeing is not one size fits all

The word wellbeing is used in many places and in many different ways. Some definitions emphasise feeling good, while others stress meaning, purpose or functioning well.

Then there are a multitude of factors that influence wellbeing. Think of your own life. The way you 'feel and function' will most likely be affected by what's going on with your friends, family, health, financial circumstances, and the level of choice you do or don't have in certain situations.

There is no universally agreed definition of wellbeing or one-size fits all approach to wellbeing that works for everyone. So, HR has a vital role in helping your organisation to define, scope and socialise what wellbeing means and how it will be supported, embedded, and measured.

Four strategies for building wellbeing at work that works

1. Committed CEO and aligned executive team

For wellbeing to work leaders need to create a supportive environment that encourages individuals to talk about their mental health and wellbeing, take up opportunities to participate in wellbeing programs during work hours, and openly encourage wellbeing practices with their teams.

Focus on engaging your executive team in piloting wellbeing initiatives, sharing their experiences with their teams, and modelling healthy behaviours and boundaries to encourage others in positive practices.

2. Personalised wellbeing

HR has a vital role in bringing your unique insights about the demographic and diverse makeup of your workforce and their different needs to the executive discussion on wellbeing strategy.

Wellbeing to a new parent with a brand-new baby will involve flexibility. Wellbeing for a graduate starting their first job will be more about mastering work skills and fitting in to social networks.

What are your workforce wellbeing expectations? What do people care about? What will keep people? What will people leave for? Ask them.

Then curate a menu of wellbeing choices, where employees are empowered to establish their own wellbeing goals and engage in the initiatives that will best suit them.

3. Support your supporters

The responsibility for ensuring a safe, supportive, and healthy work environment sits with your leaders and people managers. But this is also the group experiencing the most pressure on their own wellbeing. Pressure to perform, pressure to deliver results, pressure to support their staff.

HR as trusted advisor can empathise with and encourage leaders (and yourself!) to prioritise their own wellbeing and daily self-care to manage their energy. You can't help others until you first help yourself.

Then provide training that will build your leaders mental health and resilience skills to enable them to empower and support their teams.

4. Facilitate belonging and connection

Social connection and social resources is the number one protective factor for mental health and the number one promotive factor for wellbeing. At work a sense of belonging, feeling valued and having supportive social relationships is critical to wellbeing.

Remote and blended ways of work supports wellbeing with the thriving factors of flexibility and autonomy. But this has also put pressure on connection, loneliness and belonging.

HR has a key role with redefining hybrid work strategies and practices to boost the way organisations connect from the onboarding experience of remote employees through to helping leaders create team office days that focus on connection, fun, collaboration, and relationship building.

Wellbeing is fundamental to healthy, high performance

Wellbeing is necessary for our health, energy, connection, creativity, relationships, performance, and this list goes on.

Your employees are your biggest asset, so you want to enable them to do their best. Enhancing organisational wellbeing requires a well-rounded approach that incorporates both protection for mental health and the promotion of resilience and wellbeing skills. HR has an exciting and transformational role to play in creating a high performing culture that has wellbeing as the foundation.

Fleur Heazlewood is the author of Resilience Recipes: Making Space for Wellbeing that Works