

Rail Business Daily: How we're creating a culture that champions mental health and wellbeing

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Mental Health Awareness Week

9 - 15 May 2022



Gill Brabham, Head of HR at Business Daily Group discusses why mental health will always be top of the agenda

This year's Mental Health Awareness Week has come at a good time. I'm just a few weeks into my role of Head of HR at Business Daily Group, and it's been a perfect opportunity to pause and consider where we are in our quest to build a culture in which our teams' mental health and wellbeing can flourish.

There's a myriad of guidance around on how to best support mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, and it can be dizzying as an HR professional to negotiate the workshops, articles, reports, podcasts and webinars that all claim to have the secrets. At the heart of much of it, though, is evidence-based, common-sense reasoning that really does make a difference, and this is what is guiding our thinking.

What are we doing?

We're showing our teams that their mental health and wellbeing is a priority by signing up to Mind's Mental Health at Work Commitment (a framework of standards employers can follow to improve and support the mental health of their people). And we're talking more about mental health, normalising it in the hope that people feel able and safe to speak out.

We're discouraging the 'always on' culture that some businesses have. Sometimes a project or event will require out-of-hours work, but we want our colleagues to feel they have a right to disconnect outside their usual office hours or on annual leave. It's vital that we foster genuine breaks from work and enable people to have a good work/life balance.

We're further encouraging a healthy work/life balance by expanding our annual leave offering, giving people an extra day off on their birthday as well as extra days between Christmas and New Year, to give plenty of opportunities to switch off, rest and refresh throughout the year.

We're formulating a hybrid working policy for those who are usually office based, as we understand that choice and flexibility bring important benefits to all, enabling us to support our teams to do their best work and better balance their work and home lives, while maximising their performance and productivity. We also know that what works for some won't work for others, so we're keeping this in mind.

We're looking at ways of building and strengthening communication across the business – our people are spread out over a number of office and home locations – as we recognise the value of staying connected and having opportunities to be heard. A fantastic new intranet is being launched to give a platform for team and individual exchanges and collaboration, two-way feedback, knowledge sharing and lots of social, non-business interactions (it's not just about work for us, we want people to feel comfortable being their whole selves). Sitting alongside the intranet is a new phone system and messaging platform, providing other routes for quick, easy collaboration and connection.

We're reviewing our policies, procedures and systems to consider their impact on mental health and wellbeing and to bring greater clarity, organisation, certainty and efficiency to daily operations. We know things like clear expectations, ways of working and a work environment that's easy to navigate make a big difference to mental health and wellbeing. Part of this has been introducing a new user-friendly HR system with features such as straightforward holiday, absence and performance management, document and personal information organisation as well as a way for colleagues to give and receive kudos, which can have a powerful effect on mental health.

We're supporting people when they're too ill to work by improving our company sick pay scheme. Our talented teams work incredibly hard for the company, so when they're not able to work due to sickness, we want to look after them as much as we can, giving them time to recover properly without worrying about their finances – and we know this is better for mental health.

This is just a start – my list is long, and we recognise that this is an ongoing, evolving process of listening, learning and adjusting. But, what a start! It's amazing what can be achieved in just a few weeks when everyone in a business, from the top down, is on the same page regarding what's most important. At Business Daily Group, it's definitely the people. Watch this space.

Gill Brabham, head of HR at Rail Business Daily