

KEEP WELLBEING IN MIND

Stay well at work with continual consideration, writes Melanie Burgess

9 Nov 2019

EMPLOYERS and employees alike should keep on top of staff wellbeing year round with deliberate use of language and mindfulness activities. The Australian Workplace Mental Health Institute finds one in four suicides are linked to workplace issues and chief executive Peter Diaz says the topic needs ongoing attention, rather than just at specific times such as on R U OK? Day.

Diaz, co-author of *Mental Wealth: An Essential Guide to Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing*, says it is more important than ever that every business, organisation and manager across the country is positioned to deal with mental health issues and understand the warning signs.

“We all need to step up and ensure we are taking care of people,” he says.

Typically, older workers are less likely to talk about mental health with bosses and colleagues, whereas younger workers have normalised the topic.

BespokeHR managing director Paulette Kolarz says the difference between generations has become clearer as more diverse age groups work together.

“People are not retiring as early and we have Generation Z in the workplace now,” she says.

“The younger ones – under 30 – are now more likely to engage in a mental health service and seek help so more likely to potentially talk about it, versus the 45-plus, older age bracket where it is a bit of a taboo.”

Kolarz says it is good to have more people openly discussing mental illness. However, it is important to use the correct language to avoid confusing this with a worker having a single bad day or a large workload, thus trivialising diagnosed illnesses such as depression and anxiety.

“(In some instances) it’s as simple as saying, ‘I need to take personal leave’, as opposed to, ‘I have to take mental health days’,” she says. Clinical psychologist and Smiling Mind chief executive Dr Addie Wootten recommends employers and employees take a proactive approach.

She says mindfulness exercises – such as focusing on breathing – can help workers manage their mental health, stress and emotions in the workplace.

“By being more mindful at work, there are many benefits to the team, the business and the individual person,” she says.

“Mindfulness in the workplace is a simple tool that can allow us to connect to the here and now, it is a tool that can help us to wake up, show up and live all of our moments with greater sense of calm and clarity.”