

Mental Health

What you can do to take control and nurture your own wellbeing.

Issue #2

Welcome to our second issue of Espresso.

Compassionate Leaders

Improve the health & success of your workplace by practising compassion.

Espresso

From Peony & Magnolia



Your quarterly shot of ideas, collaboration & communication

Welcome

Welcome to **Espresso** #2, this quarter I am bringing to the melting pot the topic of compassion, leadership and wellbeing.

I read a quote in an article, **The Wise Leader**¹ that really resonated with me... 'to lead well, those of us who lead must learn to quieten our egos' the idea that by doing so, you are more attuned, not only to yourself, but others, and are able to build a deeper level of resilience.

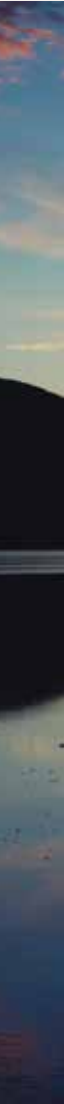
leaders must learn to quieten their egos

These are the types of leaders we need to see more of. Leaders, who understand to cultivate an effective team that it is truly having, as well as demonstrating, compassion to oneself and of others that makes the difference.

Now, some may feel that being a compassionate leader is an oxymoron, how can you be commercially driven, with a focus on competitive advantage, as well as develop a culture that cares and responds to everyone's needs? Is it really that difficult to find a leader that oozes emotional intelligence and really understands what inspires people and sets a vision that others want to follow, especially around the mental health and wellbeing agenda?

In addition, I wanted to explore a few perspectives with regards to wellbeing. You may have read a lot around mental health and wellbeing recently with the national awareness week in May, for me the aim is to make sure we nurture these things continuously. My aim is to leave little nuggets of information that hopefully trigger your own thought process on how you, as the reader, can challenge yourself, on a personal level or how you can influence this within your business to be more compassionate towards this subject.

Finally, I am really delighted with the range of contributors in this issue, I have had some open and frank conversations and challenged my own





use of language, thoughts and reactions to wellbeing and feel, just a little more enriched for it. Enjoy!

Alice

P.S A huge thank you to all of those who read and commented on the first edition of **Espresso**. The vision was always to provide a free resource and a platform for discussion and I am pleased that it was so well received.

P&M Update



What's happened in the last 3 months...

At Peony & Magnolia, the last quarter has been intentionally steady as we transition through the lockdown stages within the UK. Many clients are refocusing on their own next steps on the Covid journey, naturally we have been there to support those conversations and we are still blushing from some of the feedback received!

"Rest assured it's amazing for us to have your knowledge and expertise to run things by and knowing we have you to call on works really well for us"

"Your patience and calming approach in dealing with difficult situations has been a great help in supporting the Company through some difficult times, along with your advice and knowledge. It has been a pleasure working with you"

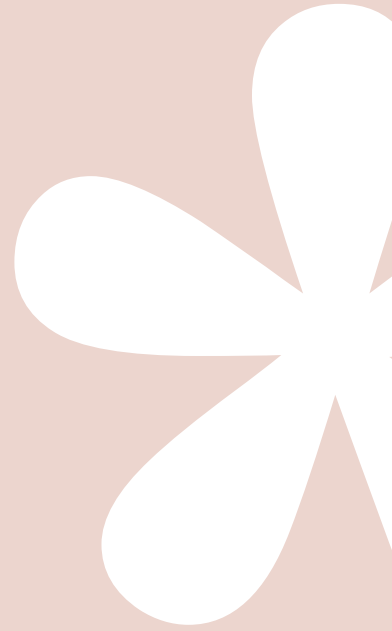
"Highly engaging and a delight to work with/for. Alice has an ability to deliver, her thoroughness and astuteness is exemplary"



P&M assisted the resizing of a growing company, managing a collective consultation in conjunction with the executive team. It takes brave and bold leadership to stop and reassess the business direction and do so with empathy. Retained, since January 2020, P&M feels invested with this client and it is a privilege to support them through these tricky times.



We have welcomed the **Orchid Property Group** to our client base, **Matthew Bennett** the Founder and fellow member of a networking group has greatly expanded his business in the last few years and continues to support the local community in which he operates. P&M are excited to support Matthew and the Orchid team.



P&M continues to attend networking events, **Hemel Networking** and **The Arena** as well as **CIPD HR Indies** and **EIDA** events on a regular basis, all providing such a great source of support and knowledge sharing.



The P&M founder, Alice, certainly practices what she preaches, having invested in her own wellbeing journey after experiencing her own energies starting to be out of sync. A bit of self-compassion came in the form of reiki and neurolinguistic programming from the talented **Trish Webb** at **Health and Healing Flow²**. Over a period of 6 months, many layers have been peeled back allowing a greater focus on the here and now. As a result, Alice is equipped with a bespoke suitcase of visualisations and practices to help keep life on an even keel.

A charity update...



Thank you! We raised £200 for **Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Helpline (HDAH)**, in exchange for an Equality, by P&M candle. It costs £25 per hour to keep the helpline open so this is a fantastic contribution.

We continue to support this charity and have donated an Equality candle, to the Platinum Point Business Networking raffle in June and Alice, will be running on behalf of the HDAH at the St Albans Half Marathon, opting for the fun 5K 'fun run'!

Please feel free to sponsor, or if local, attend and cheer her on!

[Sponsor Alice here](#)

[Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Helpline](#)

[St Albans Half Marathon](#)

Spotlight Feature

It is Time to Talk - Men's Mental Health

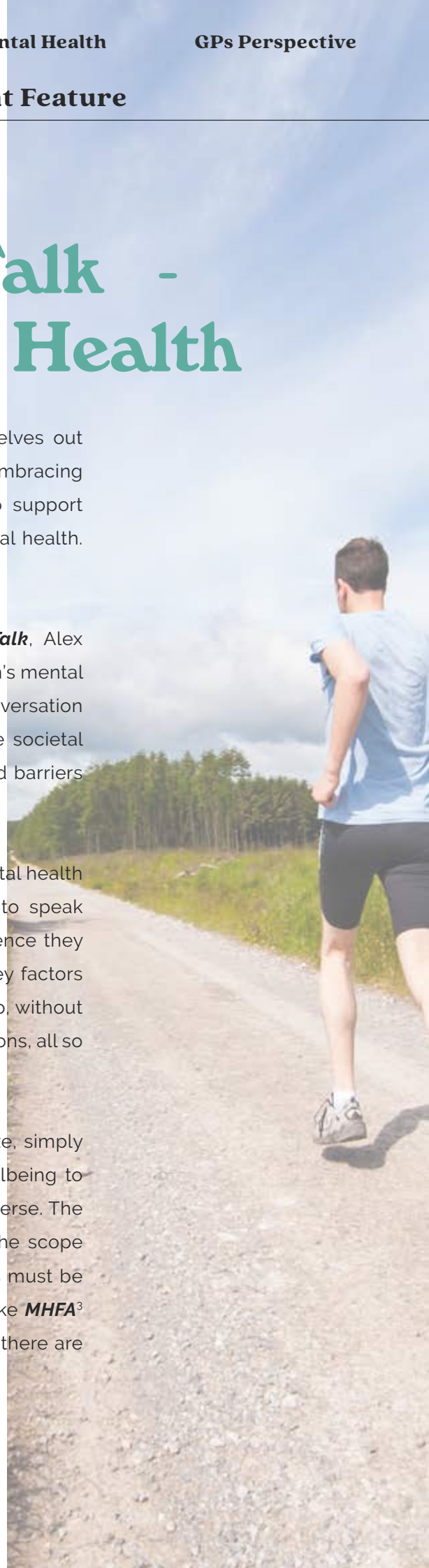
It is rare that you meet someone who puts themselves out there, who can remain modest at the same time as embracing a certain vulnerability. In turn, they then go on to support others by talking, openly and honestly, around mental health.

Meet Alex Holmes...

Through his podcasts and recent book *Time to Talk*, Alex explores a number of myths and stigma's around men's mental health. We had a genuinely thought-provoking conversation around men's mental health, how we can challenge societal concepts of masculinity, and explored and discussed barriers and solutions.

Initially, Alex created the space to discuss men's mental health through his award-winning podcasts with the aim to speak to people who had an interest, related or an experience they wanted to share with the world. This is one of the key factors around mental health, providing a safe space to do so, without judgement, fear or feeling shame. How can organisations, all so different replicate this environment successfully?

Well, a good place to start is to not be lazy! One size, simply will not fit all when bringing mental health and wellbeing to the agenda, how can it be when people are all so diverse. The discussions must be tailored for the environment, the scope of employees, the industry and different specialisms must be considered. Seeking support from trusted sources like **MHFA**³ getting advice and training is a great start, however, there are





...don't be lazy

so many more layers that need proper consideration and this in all honesty can be overwhelming.

Alex considers the significant barriers that prevent men from talking are: -

- * Cost
- * Accessibility
- * Effective support

In his experience, men feel like they need to seek permission to open up and there is a worry, if they do, that this will impact them and their careers. We discussed that women have experienced the sense of the glass ceiling for years, that careers are often impacted, and judgements made.

Spotlight Feature

There is no shame..

Would a man experience the same set of labels and judgements if he put his career on hold for 12 months then returned to flexible working? Should anyone be judged for taking a sabbatical and normalising wanting to look after their own wellbeing or request hybrid working? In a toxic environment, we know what the outcome would be, in a compassionate led environment, these wouldn't even be considerations.

Setting an agenda for any change, we all know has more gravitas if leaders are living and breathing it, a diverse stakeholder team and visionary approach will always be beneficial but transitioning to a new culture will take time and investment as well as some blood, sweat and tears no doubt! Are leaders really willing to challenge the masculine, patriarchal structures that so many organisations are framed around, dent their profit margins, and be bold enough to bring emotional and spiritual wellbeing to the mental health agenda?

If we focus on cost, on average it costs £50 per hour privately to see a counsellor, the NHS are under immense pressure and waiting lists are long. The minimum wage in the UK is £8.91. Economic barriers are very present when seeking professional help unless your organisation invests in a robust mental health agenda.

Positively, it is estimated that a quarter of employers already invest around 10-20% of payroll into employee benefits but how inclusive and relevant is this traditional portfolio, post pandemic.

Budgets will always be a big factor, 86% of respondents surveyed in 2019, stated that monetary constraints is one of the **biggest barriers**⁴ an organisation faces. Another economic hurdle to overcome.

However, with a genuine investment from leaders and a root up approach from employees, really saying what they want with regards to wellbeing benefits and how

£50ph private counselling v £8.91ph minimum wage

their mental health can be supported, maybe we will see the end to free breakfasts being sold as a 'perk of the job' and proper value being added instead.

A louder employee voice also begins to break down the barrier to accessibility, Alex found that there were limited support groups aimed solely at men, until discovering companies like **MenSpeak Men's Group**⁵ and we have seen great examples of industry specific support like **Mates in Mind**⁶, but there is still a long way to go.

*1 in 8 men are considered to have a common mental health problem*⁷.

According to ONS, men accounted for three quarters of suicide rates in 2019, with men aged 45-49 with the highest age **specific deaths**⁸. Sadly, higher rates of male suicide are found in minority communities, race, sexual orientation and class playing key factors in being able to access the right, cultural support. The rates during 2020 are expected to be higher.

Why, maybe because men often feel that they don't have permission to talk about how they are feeling, they don't know where to turn for the right support and are overwhelmed by the myths, stigma's and societal expectations of what a 'strong man' should be. The real strength is recognising what is making you feel vulnerable and seeking support.

There is no shame at all in doing so.

... and Alex's vision for 2031

So where do we see this going in the future? Alex has a vision that all companies will have an inhouse wellbeing coach, a trained therapist who works within the company, permanently ensuring that mental health isn't only managed when in a crisis. That managers all have MHFA training and understood how and when to support. That it is normalised to have a wellbeing conversation, as much as it would be a daily update and wellbeing leave is as common as annual leave. There simply would be no judgement.

We talked about what a company in 10 years would look like if he were CEO. The culture he described was one based on support, that it would be genuine and that people could bring their authentic self to work. This wasn't about bringing your 'whole self' just that you were able to talk openly and bravely about how you feel and how this may impact you at that point in time and how it may impact, output for the day. With the increase in hybrid working, the whole relationship will have to be based on trust.

In terms of leaving a legacy and footprint. For Alex, this is based on being compassionate, being courageous and demonstrating that you can love deeply - yourself and others - be brave in ways that you didn't think were possible.

At P&M we echo these sentiments wholeheartedly.

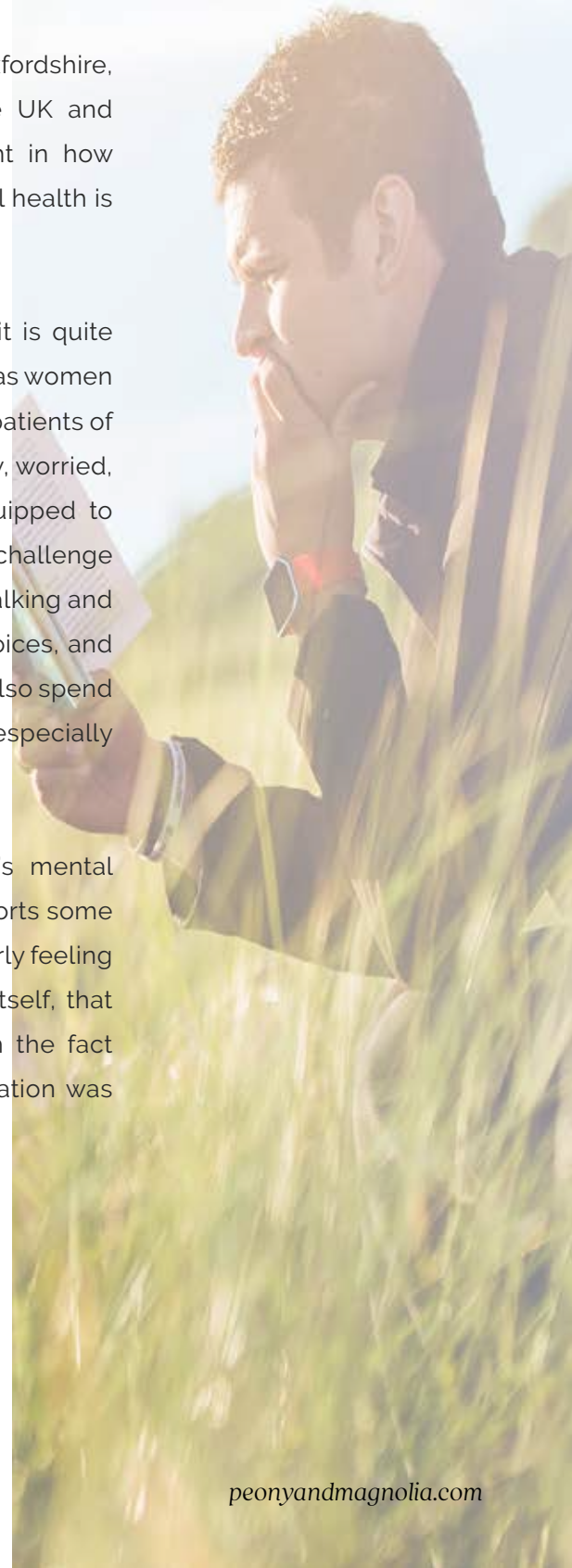
Alex's book ***Time To Talk*** is available on Amazon - and other good booksellers. For more click here www.alexholmes.co⁹

Mental Health - A GPs perspective

Dr Victoria Glover, a GP now based in rural in West Oxfordshire, originally trained in NW London, practiced in the UK and Germany, has contributed a very reassuring insight in how access and support around the topic of men's mental health is gently managed.

"My surgery is semi-rural Oxfordshire town, where it is quite usual for us to consult with men almost as frequently as women on the topic of mental health difficulties. I have male patients of all ages getting in touch because they are feeling low, worried, or experiencing anxiety symptoms they feel ill-equipped to handle. The vast majority of what I do is listen, enquire, challenge gently, and promote positive health behaviours like talking and sharing, good bedtime routines, healthy drinking choices, and encouraging getting out for a walk/ some exercise. I also spend considerable time signposting to useful websites, especially MIND.org.uk and local NHS counselling services."

Mind¹⁰ commissioned a YouGov study into men's mental health in 2009, followed up ten years later, and it reports some interesting findings. 43% of men 2019, reported regularly feeling worried or low (37% in 2009) which is a positive in itself, that men are recognising these emotions, coupled with the fact that their preferred alternative to prescribed medication was face to face therapy and physical activity.



...take a true interest in your staff wellbeing

This is a trend Dr Glover is experiencing and provides a safe, open environment for men to simply start that conversation and explore their options, but having understanding workplaces makes all the difference whilst on this journey.

"If I could change one thing about mental health support in the workplace, it would be encouraging all line managers to take a true interest in their staff and colleagues' wellbeing. If colleagues could ask each other - with genuine enthusiasm for the answer - about their weekend, their families, their pets, their workload, and to encourage each other to participate in physical activity that may prevent many mental health issues festering. If this could be done vertically as well as horizontally in all workplaces, wouldn't that be a hugely compassionate way to make a change for the better?"

The time for change is now...

*This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to reset work for the better – but it will require a different skillset from leaders - says **Natalie Hall** and **Phanella Fine** of **Up Rising**.*

Over the past 12 months, we have coached, trained, and supported over 100 leaders across many sectors, and there are pervasive themes that have emerged which will impact long-term growth, create lasting (and not always positive) micro-cultures and stunt personal development unless addressed: -

* Lack of opportunity to have long term career development conversations virtually as it's harder to access senior sponsors virtually with fully booked diaries.

* Perceived and real concerns about progression in both organisations that are experiencing financial pressures but also for individuals who have found it difficult to step out of their comfort zones this past year as they have been focused on steadying the ship at home together with the perception that those willing to return to the office will be more visible and therefore, prioritised for promotion.

* Fluctuating levels of motivation as teams are reaching points of burnout – with a strong need to reset work life boundaries (more towards life!)

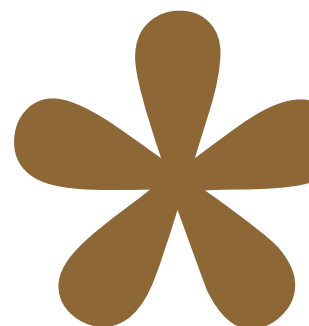
* Broader organisational and cultural norms not being passed down through teams – micro-interactions and the office vibe has been lost and micro-cultures are being created in the void.

Leadership skills have been tested through the pandemic. Much has been asked of leaders and many have felt exposed as they have needed to more formally check-in on virtual teams, demonstrate real empathy, formalise on the job learnings, and communicate with intention and honesty – all whilst managing the challenges of navigating a business through a pandemic.

Leaders in the hybrid model will require more open and honest communication styles, empathy, flexibility, and assertiveness – and importantly the knowledge and ability to have career conversations, wellbeing check-in and a level of mental health awareness. Many will need support with this and that's ok. Recognising that this isn't your innate strength for many is an important step.

Of course, at **Up Rising**, we are happy to guide you as you take those first steps forward.

Natalie and **Phanella** can be found at www.uprisewellbeing.com¹¹



Being a compassionate leader...

There is hope in the HR world that in 2021, positive steps are afoot in understanding what components are really needed in the employer-employee relationship. The basics of the psychological contract has progressed so much since Rousseau first theorised this, and it is important as a leader to stop, review and ensure that you are establishing and maintaining the continuous reciprocal exchanges that make up this key relationship.

... in a creative and inspiring workplace

And what a wonderful time to be a bold leader. The old rule books and repeated ideas pre pandemic, to an extent, can be dismissed; a different perspective is needed and would it not be inspiring to see decisions being driven with compassion at the heart. This way the mutuality that gels the psychological contract as it ebbs and flows through the employee life cycle, would be maintained continuously as it truly will be a relationship built on trust.

So, what is **Compassion**? It is an emotional response, a focus and perception of suffering, it is an authentic desire to help another. If you mix this emotion with **Empathy**, simply defined as 'an automatic mirroring of another person's emotions' would this not bring together a more connected set of employees? Just consider if you created a framework, a culture that puts **Altruistic** methods as a deciding factor. As a result, the company values and benefits genuinely support people through actions. For people to bloom, the environment around them needs to be nurtured.

At P&M, **to always show Compassion** is a value that we live and breathe and this manifests in so many ways, be it the sounding board for business owners, advisors to influence change or simply offering a space for people to talk. We also look at balance, with the vision to maintain an equilibrium so that work is a happy place to be and when things tip one way or the other, we use a variety of tools and our experience to stop, breathe and bring us back to the present.

Learning to have compassion - with yourself

Having followed **Sally Singleton** for a while and seeing some practical and easy tips to bring mindfulness into the everyday, we are really delighted to share these words of wisdom from her.

This past year has been a tough one for most. The pandemic has impacted everyone's lives and although we are getting there, it's not quite over yet. For many, it has caused huge amounts of stress and sabotaged our happiness. This in turn can affect our sleep, concentration and relationships making us feel even worse.

We end up getting stuck in a self-defeating feedback loop, our minds trying to fix problems that we have no control over, churning them over in a hamster wheel and refusing to let go.

If this resonates with you, you are certainly not alone. Our brains are hard-wired to notice threats as a way of protecting ourselves. Our "fight, flight or freeze" button in our brains get pressed any time we feel threatened and that stops us thinking clearly. We feed it with worry, memories and emotional logic (valid or not), persistently trying to think or plan our way out of the problem or by bombarding ourselves with self-critical thoughts in the hope that this will give us the kick up the backside we need to change.

By practicing mindfulness meditation regularly, we can learn to become more aware of these negative thought patterns and move towards self-

compassion. We start to see them more clearly, allowing us to step back and take a more objective and kinder view of ourselves and the situation.

By simply pausing for a moment and perhaps taking a breath to come back to this present moment, we are given the opportunity to ask if what we are thinking about is helpful or even true. We can make a conscious choice as what to do next and ask ourselves "what do I need right now?" or "how can I take care of myself right now?" perhaps offering some kind words or talking to ourselves as we would a good, supportive friend.

**fight,
flight,
freeze**

There is plenty of research evidencing that when we practice mindful self-compassion regularly, it becomes a more natural way of thinking and as such, we become happier and calmer. It is a simple yet powerful tool which can transform our lives.

Next time you notice that inner-critic, it can help to direct your attention away from this thinking mind by taking a few moments to tune into the breath or body, and then take action to support your wellbeing.



To learn more about how you may explore this yourself or bring this into the workplace please reach out to Sally for more information. You can find Sally at www.mindfulinterlude.co.uk¹².

Suggested first steps:

Read: *Red Kite, Apples & Blood Cells*, *Maria Oliver*¹³, has a range of relaxation stories, designed to still the body and mind and can be used to just bring some calm into the day. Designed to be accessible and suitable to be read with children of all ages and a gentle step into mindfulness.

Research: *Mindfulness Interventions at Work*¹⁴. An interesting piece of research that explores mindfulness within the workplace using Headspace as a support tool. Just 10 minutes a day of meditation, relaxation or focusing on being mindful has a hugely positive influence in supporting a health mindset and can be done anywhere, anytime and at little cost.

Achieving a state of alignment

Lindsey Simpson is a communications and engagement specialist at **Spark Team Communications**, trainer, speaker and co-founder of **Workplace Mental Wealth**¹⁵. We talked to her about why taking an off the shelf approach to workplace mental health is simply, a waste of everyone's time!

Lindsey says; 'I've consulted in many companies over twenty years supporting them to create cultural change, improve engagement and business performance. What this ultimately comes down to is improving congruence, one of the most powerful words to describe a successful organisation.

From my perspective, this is what an organisation says about itself, and what its people, customers, and stakeholders experience, it simply all aligns.

This is not about unrealistic expectations of perfection; there will always be issues and challenges, it is about how an organisation operates, as much as what it does.'



Intent V Experience

It is crucially important to not believe you have achieved the right culture without really analysing the acceptance and the understanding of the strategy and policies you have in place.

Many of these strategies and policies might be in existence but are they truly in your values?

All of the following scenarios are coming into sharp focus around workplace mental health.

...shone a light on the need for a joined-up approach

So, how do we reach this heady state of alignment, it starts with a clearly articulated direction of travel that everyone in the business understands.

This links so nicely back into the Wise Leader theory, someone who really gets under the skin of the formal and informal elements of culture as knowing that this shapes what really happens.

The pandemic has shone a light on the need for a joined-up approach and many organisations are refreshing what they do or looking to take first steps. It can feel daunting, but it need not be.

This is about being a good employer and providing good, genuine support, it is not about clinical mental health interventions.

A great place to start is the *Thriving at Work Review's*¹⁶ six mental health core standards. These are backed by government and organisations like Mind.

The standards are something that all organisations 'can and should be able to meet'. It is a solid framework if organisations are looking to progress.

Simply, it is good for your people, your business and the customers you serve and sets you on the right path to find your own state of congruence.

For more information about Workplace Mental Wealth you click - www.workplacementwealth.com¹⁵

1. There is no clear strategy, or if there is one, it is poorly articulated and often not widely shared or understood, sometimes even among senior leaders.
2. Policies and systems are out of date which encourage behaviours that no longer work for the company.
3. There is a policy that would shape a key element of culture, but no-one reads or uses it -! by the time someone refers to it, things have already happened that are out of step and is now a bigger issue to resolve.
4. Managers do not have the awareness, skills or confidence to deliver what is asked of them.

The POWER of unbeneficial benefits

bloom^{mi} are by their own admission not just an employee benefit insurance business and here at P&M we are incredibly pleased they have been able to contribute to this edition of Espresso.

After years spent in the employee benefits insurance sector, without seeing much innovation, Zak Fenton and Christopher Siggery took it upon themselves to go it alone with **bloom^{mi}** – a new employee benefits broker that takes a uniquely scientific approach to health, wellbeing and insurance services, and is specifically out to reduce sickness absence and employee turnover.

A significant percentage of employee benefits packages are having little, if any, benefit at all for the employees (and therefore employers) in question, according to a new data-driven employee benefits broker, **bloom^{mi}**, which has officially launched in the UK.

Zak and Chris are out to knock down barriers to implementing workplace wellbeing and get real results for companies, instead of the unimaginative, and outright utilitarian, renewal cycle the industry has fallen into.

Armed with academic research and feedback from businesses, the duo have managed to tackle some of the recurring problems that have been chipping away at the industry for years, the three main ones being:

1. A strategy that often fails to actually increase workplace wellbeing
2. An approach that isn't scientific or data-driven
3. Insurance products not being utilised in the right way





A refreshing approach

Data insights and theoretical basis are absolutely essential to understand the workforce. **bloom^{mi}** brings a refreshing approach to understanding what makes employees tick – something completely unnatural to most employee benefits brokers.

Having now opened for business in London, Manchester and Bath, **bloom^{mi}** have already started putting their cutting-edge data analysis and scientific knowledge to the test, along with using applied psychology tactics to offer businesses unique data insights that define employee wellbeing strategy. It's fair to say, things are going to change for employers across the UK.

bloom^{mi} Co-founder, Zak Fenton, shared his thoughts with us; *"There's a very gung-ho approach to employee benefits and wellbeing, with employers often thinking they can just pick a mixture of benefits and, hey presto, their entire workforce is hyper-engaged. Sadly, it doesn't work like that. In fact, our research shows that many employee benefits packages, as paradoxical as*

*it sounds, can have zero benefit at all for both the employee and employer. With **bloom^{mi}**, we're out to bring a scientific, highly data-driven – but also fun and refreshing – approach to helping employers get it right, and keep getting it right."*

Zak and Chris can be contacted at www.bloom-mi.com¹⁷



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12. [Mindful Interlude - Website](#)
13. [Maria Oliver - Website](#)
14. [Mindful Interventions - Podcast](#)
15. [Workplace Mental Wealth - Website](#)
16. [Mind's Thriving at Work - Report](#)
17. [Bloom^{mi} - Website](#)



...always show compassion...

The ability to show compassion to oneself, as so eloquently put by our contributors, is so simple but effective and the impact is significant.

As we said, we hope that in the HR world, positive steps are afoot in understanding what components are really needed to make a workplace really shine!

As a leader take a breather, stop, and consider what your culture is really like. We urge you to get under the skin and work out what gels the psychological contract together, this will work wonders aligning the intent to experience and provide a wonderful cushion to implement any change.

It is good to remember that as leaders, we are not experts in everything, and it is more than ok to seek support and a fresh perspective to really understand what your people and workplace need.

Embrace feeling a bit vulnerable and to remind yourself to calm that ego and let's face it, we all experience the feeling of being an 'imposter' at times. The niggling inner voice that doubts every now and then, sometimes is a bit louder than we feel comfortable with, but often there to remind us that we are all human.

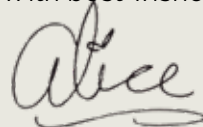
I hope, with the spotlight topic, we have reassured you, that it is more than ok to not be ok, and it simply is time to talk.

Maintaining and balancing a good state of mental health should be as normal as cleaning your teeth, regular care and attention to what your body and mind are telling you. If you do need some support, there are lots of professionals ready to show you empathy and compassion and help you navigate through your journey.

At **Espresso** I just ask you to be brave and bold when exploring what is right for you and your workplace. Start the conversation and listen.

There is little more I need to say other than a heartfelt thank you to all those who have contributed. As a reader I hope it has challenged your own thoughts and opened your mind a little to differing perspectives.

With best wishes,



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Espresso

From Peony & Magnolia