

WELL OF CONTENTMENT

A WHITE PAPER





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Employee wellbeing used not to be considered an employer's responsibility but now it is a cultural and commercial imperative. IoH considers the most effective ways to nurture a workforce.

Wellbeing is defined as the state of being comfortable, healthy and happy. The events of the past few years have brought wellbeing to the top of our priority list, both for people who work in hospitality and for guests. Consumer demand reflects this; there is a trend for healthier food, a rise in desire for beauty, fitness and spa services, and an overall greater awareness of mental health.

Wellbeing is, however, subjective. For some, the ability to take exercise and remain fit is a priority, for others, having a healthy diet is a must. In addition, time to see family and friends, financial stability, career progression; personal contentment and resilience, ensuring the ability to bounce back; and a good night's sleep might be important. It is also essential for the individual to put aside time to look after their own wellbeing, something that often gets neglected in the desire to put other people first.

So how does the sector cater for the disparate requirements of a workforce that might cover three generations, and a number of socio-economic and religious groups?

If relationships that fail do so primarily because of bad communication and the problems that come out of that, the same is true of businesses. The answer is to start a conversation, to listen and to respond. Ten years ago, such discussions were not on the radar; now, they are crucial to creating a contented, healthy, functioning workforce – and this will have a positive impact on retention. Wellbeing must be an inherent part of company culture.

Eastwell Manor Champneys Hotel & Spa created wellbeing champions, started walk and talk events, and provided posture and stretch classes, particularly for those who spend the day at their desk. Any hotel that has fitness facilities can give free membership to employees. This removes the need for them to travel to work out and allows them to motivate each other to reach fitness goals.

Not everyone is inspired by the inside of a gym but exercise, however gentle, is important and even couch potatoes can be encouraged to move about. Marriott County Hall challenged everyone in the property to walk 10,000 steps to raise money for The Prince's Trust – an excellent way of combining physical wellbeing with supporting a charity, while generating team spirit.

In a staff canteen, there is often food waste attached to providing a full choice every day. One way to mitigate this might be to post weekly menus on internal social media and ask people to indicate which days they may be eating. Not only is this a practical way of dealing with surplus food but because it shows that the company is thinking about employees and cares, it has a positive impact on their motivation and wellbeing.





One common priority across hospitality is people's ability to manage their own time. But a chronic shortage of workers and long hours leads to back-to-back shifts, laying waste balance and flexibility. To run at 110% capacity with 80% of workforce and expect people to be 'on' all the time is not sustainable.

The Burnt Chef Project, a charity set up to tackle the high rates of mental illness in the sector, undertook a study in a restaurant group to assess levels of wellbeing. It turned out 56% of the 141 employees were showing signs of presenteeism – people who spend more hours in the workplace than are required, just to ensure they are seen. As a result, some of them were at medium to critical risk of burnout, so were potentially going to leave either temporarily or permanently.

Not addressing balance and wellbeing was costing that organisation £77,000 per month; turnover and recruitment costs were incurring another £1 million a year. Few businesses can afford this, either financially or reputationally. Creating a culture where employees are nurtured and feel appreciated requires time, dedication and the desire to solve the problem, but it is not as expensive as ignoring it.

Employers have a legal obligation to do a stress risk assessment and this could be done as part of raised awareness of mental health and wellbeing. The simple question, "What in your day causes you stress?" will elicit some surprising answers and if, for example, someone heartily loathes a particular task, there may be others who would love it.



Conversation is the way forward. This should not be part of appraisals, it should comprise dedicated encounters with employees to ask how they are, how is their wellbeing, what in the workplace positively and negatively affects it, and what would contribute to their contentment and peace of mind. Employers should also bear in mind that underemployment and boredom are killer contributors to mental health problems. Make it clear that the company wants to nourish people and retain them; they matter.

This could be something as simple as providing managers with a company mobile phone and giving them permission to turn it off when not on duty. Since the series of lockdowns, many restaurants are open only four or five days a week. In one NHS hospital, nurses asked to work longer hours over a four-day week, giving them three consecutive days off. This is feasible in hospitality, where shifts can be arranged to cover all corners.

Discussing mental health and addressing the factors that make a negative contribution to it may be relatively new but even before Covid drove a coach and horses through our normalities, employees were wanting employers to take their quality of life more seriously. And although Gen Z is more upfront about work-life balance and wellbeing, time at home during lockdowns, when people of all ages had way better control of their time and how they used it, has made many people reassess their priorities.

Good wellbeing in a workforce is no longer an option and if – as it should be – it is part of company culture, it will reflect well on recruitment, retention and, ultimately, the bottom line.

CREDITS

This White Paper has been produced following a panel discussion at Above & Beyond - Shangri-La, the Shard London.

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