



So, we are going back to work, a lot of people will be feeling some form of anxiety about returning. Some more than others, this depends on our current appetite for risk, and that appetite depends on the context of the situation says James Macpherson GGF director of health and safety



What's the context? Well, there are loads; our personal situations, our physical and mental health, our attitudes, work culture, the list goes on. But no matter what, these are stressful and anxious times. How can we mitigate that now we are returning to work?

Some simple tricks I have seen during this pandemic that I liked:

- Communicating changes to the workforce before they return. Maybe a video of what the factory looks like so it's not a surprise.
- Have open Q&A calls with senior leaders to allow staff to ask questions.
- Regular updates, I love the relaxed selfie-style video from senior leaders.

One of the best solutions is simple, not easy but simple. It's talking, open, honest, and supportive conversations. The catch here though is that it isn't a one size fits all solution. Stress and mental health, is like a dog walking through a muddy puddle. My dog is a very tall Standard Poodle, he walks through a puddle and just his paws get wet. My mum's dog a Cocker Spaniel, not very tall, gets soaked. The point is that different people react and are impacted in different ways. So you, and your managers need to be trying to have conversations with all your employees. Discussions where you listen to your team's concerns, try to have empathy, try to understand the context, and most importantly don't judge. Remember you are talking to collaborate and find solutions.

As business leaders or managers we feel the need to always have the answer, but right now, no one has the answer, this is new to us all, so don't try to fix it yourself. Use the largest and most diverse asset in your business, your employees. Cognitive diversity in your employees is one of the biggest untapped resources in our businesses (that's for another article though). Ask your employees

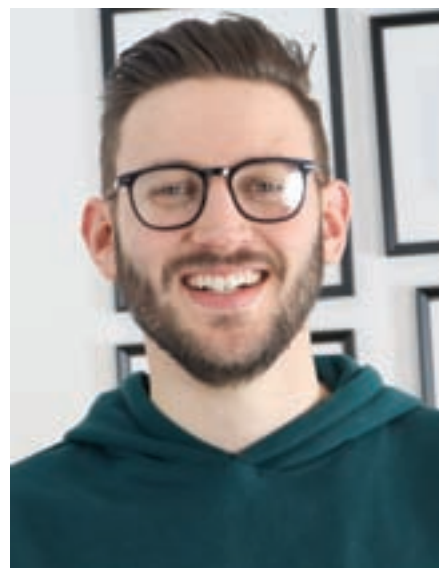
what they think, do they have any ideas of how to manage this risk?

Encourage and facilitate positivity; I was taught the three P's by David McLean, an ex-Marine turned psychotherapist: positive thoughts, positive interaction, and physical exercise. All of these unlock the good chemicals in your brain and when you feel good you work better, you are healthier. You can have

lunchtime workouts or encourage walking to work but of course, you can't control people's thoughts. However, you can control the environment that they are in. That environment may be contributing to your employees' thoughts; are they positive or negative? Do your teams have positive interactions, or is it all transactional? Do you ask your employee "how are you doing?", then immediately follow up with, "have you got that job done yet?" Because that's transactional, try to ask how people are and listen to their answer.

These are all powerful tips for managing mental health and stress. But it's hard to have positive interactions right now because of social distancing, it may even be hard to have positive thoughts right now. But when we are returning to work it is so important that we listen to our team's concerns and hear what they are saying. If you have spent your business life looking for accountability this is how you get it. Engage, and involve your teams, be interested in them, help them succeed because when they succeed you succeed and then, sit back and watch them choose to be accountable.

When it comes to managing stress and wellbeing, I don't have all the answers and I am far from a psychologist or an expert, but I have found that we have two ears and one mouth so we should probably act accordingly. □



James Macpherson