



# Are you being intrusive or supportive? 8 tips for asking staff about their wellbeing

Last week, one of our all-time favourite coaching clients dropped us a note saying how much he loved reading our articles and to keep them coming.

Feeling that others enjoy our writing, think highly of us and feel better because of our efforts brings us nicely to our first wellbeing insight:

**Giving and receiving real appreciation is one of the most powerful and untapped energies available to us.**

Real appreciation is the deliberate, proactive and sincere valuing of others and what they bring to the table, letting them know in concrete ways that they matter and are important.

Meaningful praise, compliments, and appreciation have been shown to:

- Create a positive environment
- Convey respect and gratitude
- Boost belief in our abilities to succeed or 'self-efficacy'

- Enhance feelings of competence, ability, mastery, autonomy and motivation
- Increase wellbeing, 'feelgood' factor and happiness (for giver and receiver)

Here's a test - how about this week you practise giving your colleagues and family some extra special compliments and see what happens? Mind you, if you don't usually give many compliments, you might do well to remember a little can go a long way.

And our second wellbeing insight:

## How to ask staff about their wellbeing

We've often been asked for our thoughts about how to approach talking about staff wellbeing.

### Wellbeing and mental health – leaders, note the difference!

When we talk about 'wellbeing', it's important firstly to think of wellbeing in its broadest possible sense, rather than mental health specifically.

Whilst the terms are not synonymous, we know concerns about mental health might feel especially uncomfortable for many managers, and it can certainly be tough to know what to do or say when someone in your team is experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression, or other mental health issues.

Supporting a staff member who is experiencing symptoms of mental health issues at work can make an enormous difference to their recovery.

Here in Australia, we are lucky to have many specialist providers, who offer a range of mental health first aid face-to-face skills sessions, as well as some online learning, instructor training, information and support for managers and employees.

### What are the signs that someone's wellbeing may be off-balance?

Wellbeing is a broad term that implies a subtle balancing act between an individual's social, emotional, psychological and physical assets (resources) available to them and the particular social, emotional, psychological and physical liabilities (challenges) they are facing in life and work at any one time. When an individual's challenges are out of balance with the resources they have available to them, their wellbeing will suffer.

Given wellbeing's inherent breadth, managers need to have their eyes and ears open. The signs of someone being out of kilter can be vast and varied, and not all of them easy to spot.

Our GLWS Wellbeing Framework can be used to help increase managers' own knowledge about wellbeing and awareness of the different drivers of wellbeing. It's also a prompt to take a sufficiently wide perspective when thinking about what wellbeing looks like for different team members, times or contexts.

### Practise what you (want to) preach

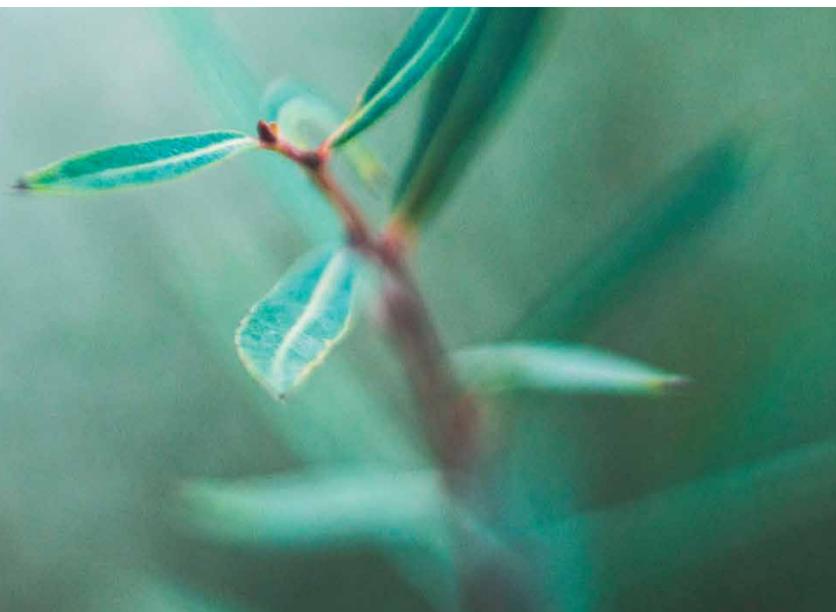
The first thing that we would stress is to 'put your own oxygen mask on first before trying to help others'.

Prioritising your own wellbeing as a leader helps create a culture where wellbeing is a legitimate and valued focus for the team.

Here are some constructive and appropriate ways to be a positive influencer and role model:

- Knowing what you need to energise, sustain and look after yourself
- Operating with the discipline and habits aligned to these needs
- Embedding positive wellbeing behaviours such as:
  - taking breaks,
  - limiting meeting hours,
  - upholding reasonable working hours,
  - exercising regularly,
  - disconnecting when on leave,
  - and demonstrating vulnerability rather than stoicism.

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## How does a manager assist without being intrusive?

Here are eight guidelines to help strike the right balance between being supportive and accountable without being intrusive:

- 1. Educate your staff about wellbeing in the workplace.** Talk about the links between wellbeing, satisfaction, happiness and performance with your team. Encourage each team member to find and sign up to a different news feed on wellbeing, and each person to share tips.
- 2. Communicate regularly with your team about their wellbeing.** Include check-ins about wellbeing in team and 1-to-1 meetings; talk openly about wellbeing at work and encourage others to do the same. Instigate an 'RU OK?' buddy system. Encourage positive talk to build optimism and a sense of perspective to help with stress.
- 3. Build a culture of inclusion and psychological safety** that enables team members to openly share their ideas, concerns and challenges – with no stigma attached to wellbeing issues. Promote understanding, acceptance and normalising of individual differences in wellbeing i.e. everyone can do things in a different way and that's OK.
- 4. Recognise and avoid subtle and indirect drains on the wellbeing of others** such as unmanageable workloads, expectations or encouragement to take on more, and tacit or explicit approval of those who do.
- 5. Encourage team members to proactively manage their energy and pace.** Ban 'busy talk' and replace with a focus on energy and outcomes. Explore and agree clear respectful expectations of communications and responsiveness (e.g. after hours) with the team and stick to them. Introduce 'pause and stop' moments and 'downtimes' during the day, week and month. Proactively promote social connection and fun within your team.
- 6. Improve work design by addressing potential workplace wellbeing detractors.** Influence peers and senior stakeholders as required to promote changes to wellbeing goals, processes and practices. Promote responsible flexible work practices to enable team members to meet their wellbeing needs.
- 7. Raise specific wellbeing concerns with a team member in private,** without forcing or shaming, without offering advice or helpful hints, without judging and without monitoring it as you would a performance issue. Remember, your colleague may already feel uncomfortable, despite any joking or self-deprecation - so be sensitive, empathic and thoughtful. Speak about health, wellbeing and your feelings of concern, and that you are speaking to them because you care about and respect them. Period.
- 8. Work with your team to develop a wellbeing plan** – encourage and reward positive wellbeing actions in the team - and talk to us about using the fabulous GLWS Team Report.

As one senior leader put it to us recently:

**'A wellbeing strategy, policy and processes can all help nudge wellbeing in the right direction, but you can't legislate improved wellbeing in an organisation – it takes real leaders to get behind the idea, to bring the human touch and understanding, to tailor to each business, team and individual's needs – you can have all the policies in the world, but if the leaders don't get it and aren't behind it 100%, it's going nowhere.'**

Wise words. Wellbeing is truly a collaborative effort and thrives best in welcoming and empathic workplaces.