



A guest blog by Paula Thompson

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A timely reminder that the concerns over work related stress and mental health that gathered momentum during 2018 are here to stay in 2019. I talk to many business owners and the majority have expressed real concern over unrealistic pressures, not only for themselves, but for their employees.

Businesses employ people to carry out roles required for the day to day functionality of the business. Therefore, when the employee/s go off sick there are inevitably issues that will affect productivity, morale and profitability. Often business owners and managers take sickness absence as a natural consequence of running a business. This means they never look as to why their employees are away from work. The risk of just accepting this today could be that your business is just a grievance away from a serious Health and Safety investigation leading to substantial costs and damage to the company's image.

Looking after your employees is more than just paying them at the end of the month. Different people have different motivators, some crave acknowledgement for a good job well done, others may be more about the money, always chasing the bonus. There are some that strive for self-betterment, not just moving up the ladder but a zest to learn more and become the go to guru in their field of speciality.



Q) Are you making the most of your employees?

Q) Do you know what motivates them?

The number of working days lost to stress rose by almost a quarter last year, suggesting that employers need to do more to address this "growing epidemic", the TUC has said.

Workplace health and safety figures released by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) showed that 15.4 million working days were lost to work-related stress in 2017/18, compared with 12.5 million the previous year.



More than half a million people (595,000, compared with 526,000 in 2016/17) suffered from work-related stress, anxiety or depression last year, with such conditions more prevalent in the education, human health, social work, public administration and defence sectors.

Stress, depression and anxiety accounted for 57% of all working days lost in 2017/18, while musculoskeletal disorders represented 25% of working days lost. (Source Personnel Today). Obviously, the stress isn't always work-related, but how do you know if you do not investigate it? Also, it's not just about supporting your employees, you need to protect your business as well. The costs associated with sickness absence really do hit your bottom-line hard.



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This is the cost to employers but the cost to the UK economy is between £74 to £99 billion!

Source Deloitte Mental Health Review

I love what I do, and I've always been a people person, so working within businesses in the areas of stress and mental health in the workplace I've seen how easy it is to turn some employees around from being habitual sickies to keen work driven employees.

70% of all doctors' appointments in the UK last year, were stress related!

So, in simple terms, how many employees have you had off sick in the last 12 months? 70% of them could well have been stress related. What are you doing to meet your obligations for supporting your employees?

Sometimes, it's simple changes to their work environment or workload that makes all the difference. Other times I've identified where the stress comes from and work with the employee to find practical ways of controlling or eliminating it.

Training also has a major effect on wellness in the workplace. Imagine if your line managers were able to spot the tell tail signs of stress in an employee in the early stages and give the correct support to the employee which prevents the stress from developing into a costly long-term sickness.

Did you know that work related stress develops because a person is unable to cope with the demands being placed on them? Stress caused either at work or in personal life, is known to be linked to;

- Presenteeism. (Low productivity and increased errors)
- High levels of sickness absence
- Staff turnover

So, what could you do for employees regarding work related stress?

It's NOT up to you or your managers to diagnose and/or treat stress, it is however up to you and your managers to RECOGNISE the change in behaviours and to take prompt action, taking care not to over react to small changes but take action with prolonged changes. Managing Stress and Mental Health in the workplace comes under health and safety at work and as all employees are responsible for health and safety I would encourage you to engage in training for all staff.

One of the most effective ways to establish the level of stress with your employees would be a stress survey, this is a great tool I offer and is so cost affective yet, enlightening. Having just carried out one of these surveys for a large company, the Directors said that "we have seen a great return on our investment in identifying areas of poor functionality both within business practice and employee activities".

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