

ARE YOU AWARE OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN YOUR WORKPLACE ?

Andrew Northcott | Director

An important meeting with the bank, an exam, a difficult conversation with an employee or customer. We've all felt the anxiety around these moments in our working lives. We are our own worst enemies, weighing in that these moments will make or break our professional lives.

Talking from personal experience, some stress I have recognised as a good thing. It means you're challenging yourself. However, imagine this anxiety over a prolonged period. If this is you, or a colleague, and it is negatively affecting work and/or personal lives, it needs to be addressed.

According to Jill McCrum from JEM Training, the stigma surrounding those suffering from mental health conditions in the workplace is something that needs to be talked about more often amongst small business owners.

I attended a cracking session run by Jill, alongside my fellow Directors and Managers, earlier in the year to help assist the leaders of our practice to tackle mental health issues in the workplace.

There was much covered, however **three key takeaways** I was most interested in were:

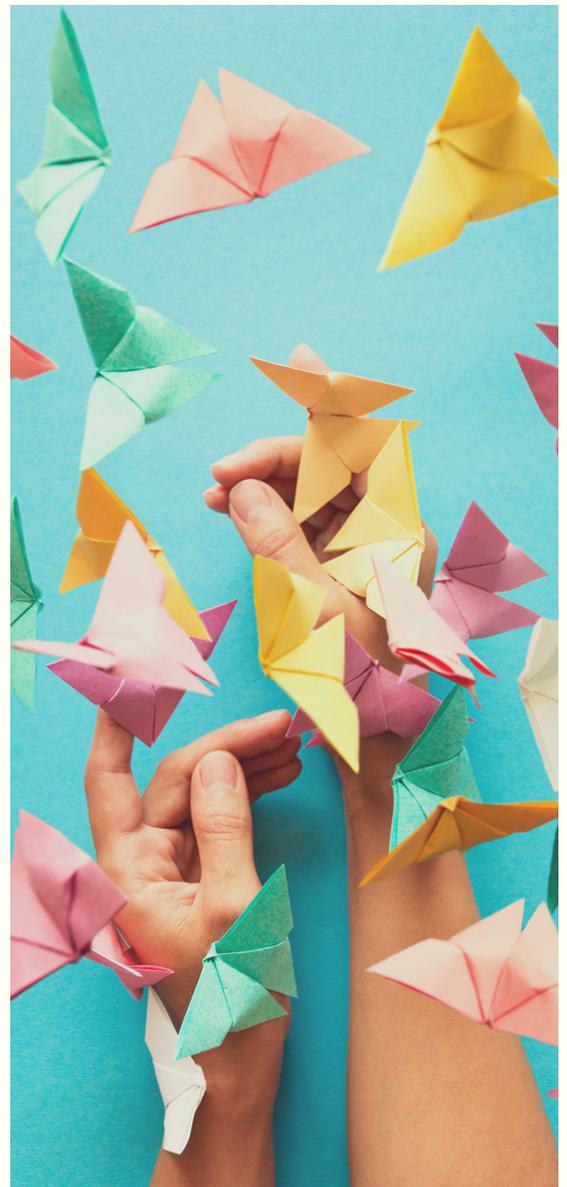
1. Be observant

For those in more senior roles, you have to get to know your staff. Engage with staff consistently and build relationships from day one. This is a risk reduction strategy, as you engage with staff more often, you are more likely to notice the signs of a staff member struggling.

Some key signs:

- Absenteeism – greater than expected sick days
- Productivity - not being present (Presenteeism)
- Unusual mood swings or disengagement

We do not bear the responsibility of diagnosing a mental illness, however we can do more good than bad, by being aware of the typical signs.





“

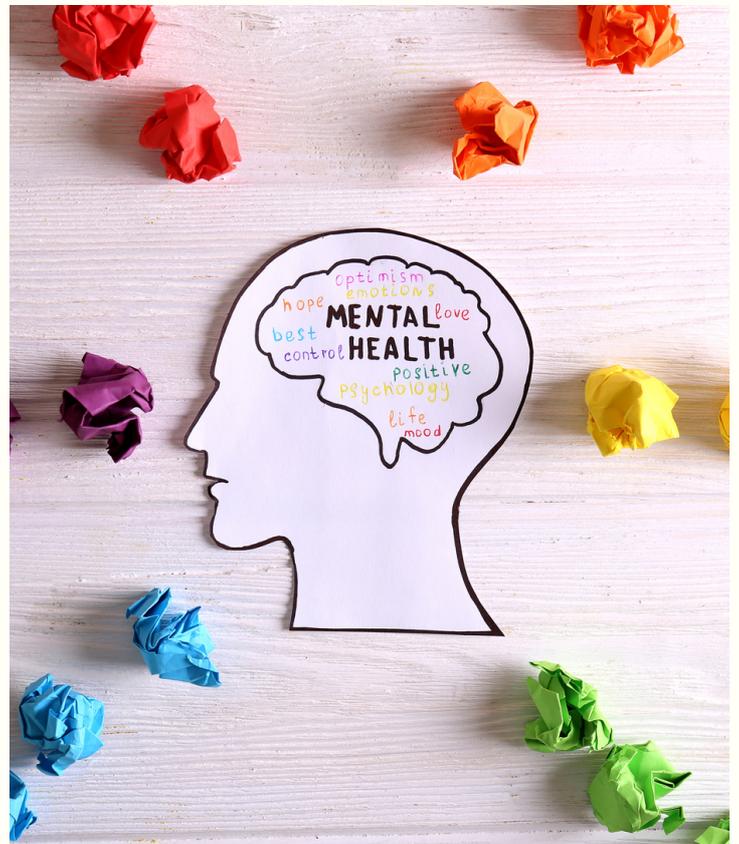
We are our own worst enemies, weighing in that these moments will make or break our professional lives.

”

3. The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 is far-reaching.

As part of this legislation employers are mandated to make reasonable adjustments to support workers with a disability. This includes those diagnosed with a mental health condition. Provided the employee can fulfill the 'inherent requirements' of the job, employers cannot sit on their hands and do nothing or terminate the employee because it is all too hard.

From our session with Jill, I've come away with an increased awareness of mental health issues in the workplace and encourage any of our clients, business associates and friends to get an understanding of the impacts this illness has and what we in business can do.



2. Sensitive conversations are ok!

If a colleague or staff member approaches you with a sensitive issue to discuss, this is ok. You may want to consider remembering the three A's to assist you with these tricky conversations.

Acknowledge the situation. Talk about changes you've noticed in a person's behaviours/actions and acknowledge where appropriate, for example "that must be tough for you".

Ask and assist. The power is in the question, so consider phrasing a question such as "just wondering what's going on for you and how can I/we help?"

Appropriate referral and response. Suggest that advice from a family GP is often helpful. Consider resources you may have at hand such as contact details at Beyond Blue, Lifeline, Black Dog Institute to name a few.