



reba

Technical
Training Guide

LEADERSHIP AND WELLBEING



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Editor's welcome



Wellbeing strategies cannot succeed without authentic leaders who are genuinely committed to the happiness and health of their workforce.

REBA's [Employee Wellbeing research 2019](#) showed that 62% of boardrooms are worried about employees' mental health – but at an organisational level, their biggest concern is high-pressure work environments.

There's little doubt that the two are interlinked. Leaders have a fundamental role to play in managing workplace pressure and creating a positive company culture. Simply offering great employee benefits can't compensate for a culture where staff feel unhappy and unable to do their best work.

From exhibiting good behaviours themselves through to championing the company's wellbeing strategy, managers and senior leaders are central to creating a positive company culture. After the initial buzz of a new launch, leaders will also need to keep enthusiasm going for wellbeing and support employees as they build long-term habits that lead to good health. If leaders are prepared to share their own wellbeing experiences and progress towards their personal goals that can inspire other employees to follow suit.

In this guide we explore the wide-ranging role of leadership in a wellbeing strategy. That encompasses helping leaders to look after themselves, the importance of linking wellbeing to wider company objectives and how to support employees' wellbeing through periods of business change.

There are plenty of useful tips and practical information to help every organisation engage its leaders in wellbeing, and in doing so improve the health of the whole workforce.

Maggie Williams
Editor

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Sponsor's comment



From showing their support for a wellbeing strategy or initiative, to setting good examples through healthy practices, business leaders play a pivotal role in workplace wellbeing.

It's encouraging to see wellbeing is increasingly coming to the forefront for leadership. Our research with the CIPD shows that employee wellbeing is on senior leaders' agendas in 61% of organisations, an increase from 55% in 2018¹.

Despite this, leadership buy-in can be a stumbling block for many who put the work into a wellbeing strategy. A key way to gain this buy-in from leadership is to align wellbeing priorities and strategy with the organisation strategy. Currently, only two-fifths of organisations agree or strongly agree that they have a standalone wellbeing strategy in support of their wider organisation strategy¹.

By aligning the two, it means that employee wellbeing can retain the focus and priority it needs within the business. Understanding, agreement and investment from leaders is required to ensure that any wellbeing initiative has the positive impact it needs to launch successfully, and continue to grow and develop.

As well as getting senior leaders on board, it's important to engage leaders at all levels with workplace wellbeing. Just half of organisations agree that line managers are bought into the importance of wellbeing¹. While this is positive, it leaves another 50% of businesses whose line managers might not see the value of looking after wellbeing.

Indeed poor management can be blamed for many health and wellbeing concerns. Main causes of work-related stress include heavy workloads and management style. What appears to be missing is support for line managers themselves. Many managers aren't receiving the training they need to help them identify and manage unhealthy practices. Training provides the basis for the most effective health and wellbeing strategies that have lasting positive impacts on the workplace.

I hope this technical guide will help to demonstrate why business leaders are so important in supporting and promoting wellbeing. And that it provides some food for thought into how you can involve and engage business leaders with employee wellbeing.

Pam Whelan

Director of Corporate at Simplyhealth



¹ CIPD/Simplyhealth Health and Well-being at Work 2019 report



Chapter 1:

Introduction – why leadership matters in wellbeing

Getting boardroom buy-in for health and wellbeing is essential with the most successful strategies driven by an organisation's leaders. But, to inspire as many employees as possible, it's important to focus on the right leadership behaviours and engage leaders in a health and wellbeing strategy.

According to Investors in People, leaders who focus on improving wellbeing tend to have better relationships with their staff. This drives up job satisfaction, improving productivity and reducing absence and turnover.

Certain leadership behaviours will help to drive this positive work culture. Nurturing these will build strong working relationships and inspire others to look after their health and wellbeing.

Honesty and openness are essential. A leader who is able to speak honestly from their own experiences about challenges that the organisation or employees are facing can help to reduce stress and win employee trust.

Good leaders can also nurture a positive work culture by offering plenty of constructive feedback and praise. Research by academic Emily Heaphy and psychologist Marcial Losada² found the optimum number of compliments was 5.6 to every piece of criticism. Where employees were on the receiving end of this ratio, they were happier and performed better.

It's also essential that leaders demonstrate the healthy behaviours they are advocating. Actions such as taking on manageable workloads, working flexibly and only sending emails during working hours show employees what's expected of them and encourages good behaviour.

Five great ideas that really show leadership commitment to wellbeing



Flexible working – allowing employees to make time for everything from their caring responsibilities to gym commitments creates a better work-life balance



Health and wellbeing benefits – offering benefits such as mindfulness apps, gym membership or a health plan demonstrates the organisation cares about its employees



A wellbeing gift – whether it's money to spend on a massage or a day off to walk in the countryside, it's something that employees will value



Management time – taking time out to speak to employees on an informal basis, for instance breakfast meetings over a coffee, shows management cares



Wellbeing updates – formalising the organisation's work on health and wellbeing through regular reports to employees and the public demonstrates commitment

² http://www.factorhappiness.at/downloads/quellen/S8_Losada.pdf



Chapter 2:

How to maintain momentum

A new health and wellbeing strategy can create a buzz in the workplace but keeping up the level of excitement over time can be a challenge. Leaders play a critical role in ensuring that momentum is maintained and health and wellbeing becomes embedded in an organisation's culture.

Linking health and wellbeing to other strategic objectives helps to keep it on the board agenda. By highlighting the connection between employee wellbeing and objectives such as increasing productivity and retaining experience, leaders will continue to support investment into these initiatives.

It's also sensible to make employee health and wellbeing part of leaders' objectives as this ensures it is always at the front of their minds. Similarly, health awareness training can also help to make it part of their remit, as well as benefiting them and their employees.

Developing a health and wellbeing brand also helps to make it more visible. As a positive wellbeing culture is one of the reasons people join organisations, packaging it in this way makes it easier to promote. That could include giving a health and wellbeing programme its own name and identity, as well as making sure that communications are consistently branded in a way that employees will recognise.

Transforming wellbeing from an idea and a series of initiatives into a living, breathing brand also makes it more resilient to organisational change. An ad hoc health campaign can easily be lost as a result of a period of rapid expansion or a new leader coming onboard. It also makes it easy to add new initiatives and expand or change the range of benefits on offer, as these will be seen by employees as part of a wider strategy rather than a standalone change to their benefits.

Making health and wellbeing part of a regular employee engagement survey will also provide a valuable temperature check. This ensures that more work can be done if momentum appears to be slowing but also reminds everyone of the value the organisation puts on health and wellbeing.

Combatting change and uncertainty



Change and uncertainty are a standard part of many organisations, but they can be incredibly unsettling. The Health & Safety Executive recognises them as major causes of workplace stress.



Leaders have a vital role to play in reducing the detrimental effect change and uncertainty can have on employee wellbeing. Honesty is definitely the best policy. Being open and transparent with employees can help to allay their fears.



Listening to employees and providing them with the necessary support to reduce change and uncertainty is also important. As an example, if an employee is struggling with a new project or way of working, allowing them to adjust their workload or providing them with appropriate training can remove this pressure.



Chapter 3:

Wellbeing for leaders

Supporting leaders' own mental and physical health is essential. As well as helping them to cope in even the toughest of times, it sets a good example to employees and underlines the organisation's commitment to health and wellbeing. Where a leader's wellbeing isn't regarded as a priority, it can have major consequences for them, their colleagues and, ultimately, the organisation. Placed under undue pressure, a leader's health and wellbeing can take a battering. They might feel stressed, making them less effective and difficult to work with, and in some instances, they may even go off sick, leaving their team to pick up their workload.

As well as affecting productivity, this can drive up employee turnover with the organisation losing valuable skills and experience at all levels of the business.

To avoid this, leaders must be able to prioritise their own wellbeing. Training plays a key role in this, with courses such as mental health resilience and awareness improving their ability to stay mentally well and cope in difficult situations. It can also help them support employees. By understanding the signs that someone might be developing a mental health problem, a manager will know when to step in.

As discussing health issues can be difficult, communication skills training may be helpful. Being able to show empathy to other employees can make a significant difference, fostering more trust and creating better working relationships.

However, it's also important to recognise that some leaders will always feel uncomfortable in this type of situation. For them, knowing what benefits and services they can recommend to an employee can be just as helpful.

Making employee health a key part of a leader's role will help them prioritise their own wellbeing too. Formalising this, by providing a fund to spend on team wellbeing activities or by making it part of their objectives, will ensure this positive behaviour sticks.

Involving employees in your wellbeing strategy



Management buy-in may be essential for a successful health and wellbeing strategy but it's equally important to involve employees.



Creating engaging communications will pique employee interest, with national health campaigns a useful hook and wellbeing and benefits providers also able to help create compelling content. However, organisations can also give employees a more formal role. Workplace health champions work closely with management and human resources to plan and promote health initiatives to their colleagues. Anyone can be a champion, but they're often employees with an interest in health.



Employees can also get involved by training as mental health first aiders. In this role they provide support to their colleagues, which can be particularly useful when someone doesn't feel able to turn to their manager.



Setting up a health and wellbeing forum can also get employees more involved. By listening to them, and acting on their feedback, employees will feel valued and the organisation will build a more effective health and wellbeing strategy.



Chapter 4:

Promoting good wellbeing culture in teams

Building a link between leadership objectives and team members' wellbeing demonstrates just how valuable employee health is within an organisation. But, while it's a great way to foster a positive wellbeing culture in the workplace, setting the right objectives is essential.

Ideally, objectives should be based around positive changes to employee behaviour. Examples could include an increase in the numbers taking advantage of health and wellbeing benefits, signing up for challenges or arranging walking meetings.

Employee engagement surveys can also be a good way to measure workplace health and wellbeing. However, as sentiment can change from month to month, any leadership objectives should focus on a longer-term improvement.

One common health metric that is best avoided within objectives is absence rates. Although some organisations incentivise staff on keeping absence to a minimum, a fixation with attendance can mask some unhealthy practices.

Where employees feel they can't take a day off sick, organisations will often see a culture of presenteeism take hold. But struggling into work with a bad cold or stomach bug isn't good for the employee or the workplace. As well as slowing down their recovery and reducing their productivity, there's also a risk that they'll infect their colleagues.

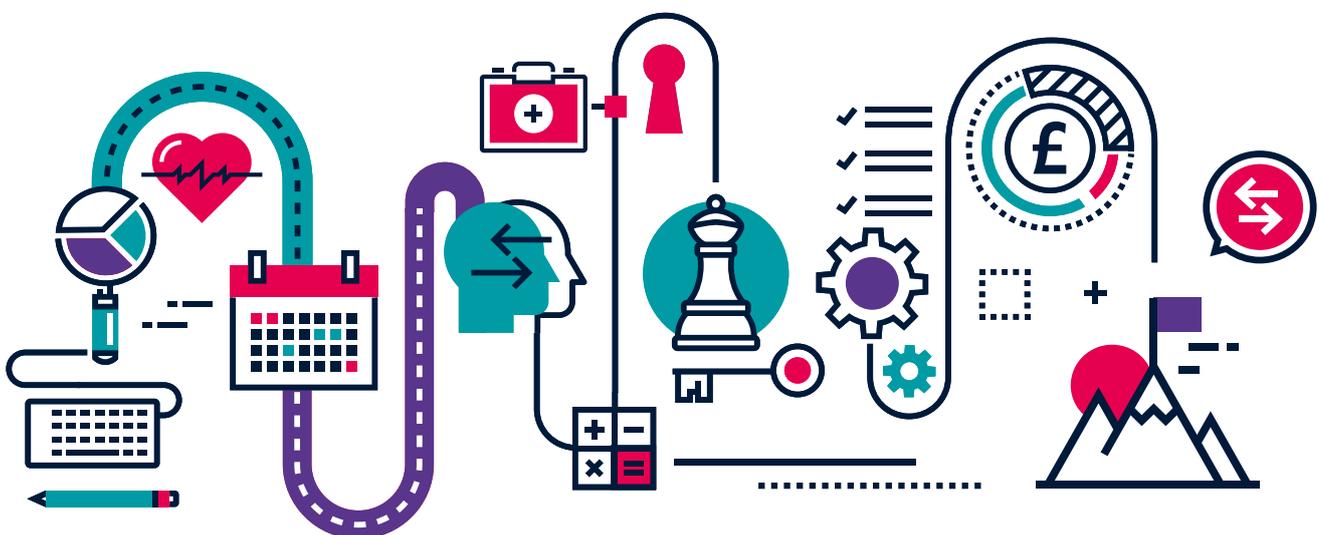
Leavism is another epidemic worth guarding against. Fuelled by an always-on, digital culture, this is the habit of working outside of normal hours, for instance, finishing a project in the evening or at the weekend, or replying to emails while on holiday or off sick.

To help combat these bad habits, it's important that managers lead by example. Practices such as taking time off when sick and only sending emails in working hours send out the right messages about what employees are expected to do.

Good communication skills are also vital. Talking to employees about their workloads as well as their life outside of work will help managers understand the pressures they're under and ensure they can cope.

As an example, say an employee has to arrange for one of their parents to go into a nursing home. By offering them flexible working and access to an employee assistance programme, as well as lending a sympathetic ear, a manager can support them through this stressful time.

Ensuring managers and leaders have these skills and tools to hand, and understand the importance of employees' health, will help to foster a good wellbeing culture throughout an organisation.





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Chapter 5:

Demonstrating ROI and making sure wellbeing is a long-term commitment

Without long-term commitment, wellbeing initiatives can quickly be forgotten and old habits return. Ensuring a health and wellbeing strategy is fresh, effective and meets both the organisation's and employees' needs will deliver long-term results.

Tracking results is a key part of securing this commitment. Not only will it reveal which initiatives are the most effective, it'll enable you to demonstrate the return on investment – something that will keep even the most cynical of finance directors happy.

Plenty of data is available to help you make a business case for employee health and wellbeing. This can include sickness absence statistics; claims rates for health-related insurance such as medical insurance and income protection; and results from employee engagement surveys.

External sources can also provide valuable insight. Anonymous reviews on Glassdoor can reveal what employees really think of your organisation, while firms that secure a ranking on lists such as Great Place to Work's Best Workplaces, Britain's Healthiest Workplace and The Sunday Times' Best Companies to Work For, can monitor their position.

Before kicking off any health and wellbeing strategy, it's sensible to set a baseline from which you can measure improvements. This should include current data but also consider running an employee survey to gauge their views of the organisation's approach to health and wellbeing.

Having this starting point is a great way to show improvements but most boards will also expect you to set timescales for progress. The nature of these will depend on a number of variables, especially the nature of the issue and the level of investment. Something simple like ensuring all managers have mental health awareness training is easy to measure and can be achieved quickly, while moving the dial on sickness absence may take longer.

Once an initiative is underway, the data you collect will show whether you're likely to hit your target but also whether your approach needs finetuning. For example, if your goal is to get at least 60% of your workforce signed up to a health initiative in six months, and three months in, take-up is stuck at 20%, you might want to increase marketing or add new initiatives to reach more employees.

Employee feedback is also critical. Setting up forums to give them a platform to express their views – and listening to them – can shape your strategy while also sending out a strong signal that you value their opinions.





Quiz

1. According to Investors in People, leaders who focus on improving wellbeing have better relationships with staff. What are the potential benefits of this?

- A. Improved job satisfaction.
- B. Higher productivity
- C. Reduced absence
- D. All of these

2. What is the optimum number of compliments to criticisms in the workplace?

- A. 1 – keep it balanced
- B. 2.5 – make it like a sandwich
- C. 3.14 – it's part of a rounded process
- D. 5.6 – we all need positivity

3. How can employers make a health and wellbeing strategy more resilient to organisational change?

- A. Offer employees access to technology such as apps
- B. Keep the same core programmes for at least two years
- C. Create a health and wellbeing brand
- D. Focus on new year's resolutions and public health campaigns

4. Why is a regular employee engagement survey valuable for a health and wellbeing strategy?

- A. It tracks the performance of any health and wellbeing initiatives and reminds employees that the organisation cares
- B. Filling out surveys makes employees more honest about their working environment
- C. A regular employee survey is expected in our industry
- D. Compiling statistics is the only way to convince the board of the importance of wellbeing

5. Why is it important for leaders to be healthy?

- A. It stops them taking time off sick and losing track of their team performance
- B. It makes them more resilient and sets a good example to other employees
- C. It will stop them from wanting to leave the organisation
- D. They will be less likely to pass illness onto the rest of their team

6. What can make leaders more effective at supporting employees' mental health and wellbeing?

- A. Complete knowledge of current wellbeing apps and other products
- B. Information about health from the latest employee survey
- C. Communication skills, authenticity and mental health awareness training
- D. Access to public health information about wellbeing

7. What is a workplace health champion?

- A. An employee who promotes health initiatives and encourages others to participate
- B. An employee who has a passion for health and wellbeing matters
- C. An employee who has trained as a first aider
- D. An employee who hasn't taken a day off sick for at least 12 months

8. Why should an organisation avoid linking leaders' objectives to absence rates?

- A. It's too difficult to record accurately
- B. Absence rates can mask unhealthy practices such as presenteeism and leavism
- C. Rates can be distorted by one long-term absence or a couple of people who use sick leave as a way of supplementing holiday allowances
- D. Absence rates fluctuate too much, especially when it's winter and the office cold does the rounds

9. What is leavism?

- A. Behaving as if you were on holiday while at work
- B. Supplementing annual leave with sickness absence
- C. Buying additional holiday
- D. Working outside of normal hours or while on holiday

10. What data can employers use to track the success of a health and wellbeing campaign?

- A. Sickness absence rates, employee engagement survey results, feedback on Glassdoor, benefits uptake
- B. Employee average body mass index (BMI) readings
- C. Share price performance
- D. Number of visits to health information websites promoted in employee newsletters

1. D, 2. D, 3. C, 4. A, 5. B, 6. C, 7. A, 8. B, 9. D, 10. A
Quiz: The answers



Who we are

About our sponsor: Simplyhealth

Since 1872, we've been helping people get healthcare through our health plans, charity partnerships and by being a voice in healthcare. Today we're delighted to be the UK's leading provider of health and dental plans, which help individuals, families, employees to get support with their health when they need it.

What Simplyhealth does:

Our health cash plans enable businesses to look after their employees, and make it easy for people to maintain their health and wellbeing, so they can look after the business.

We offer two types of preventative health cash plans:

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In 2017, Simplyhealth and Denplan united under one Simplyhealth brand and today we're proud to be the UK's leading provider of health cash plans, Denplan dental payment plans and pet health plans.

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About us: Reward & Employee Benefits Association

REBA is the professional networking community for reward and benefits practitioners. We make members' working lives easier by saving you time, money and effort through sharing experience, ideas, data and insight with each other. We help members to pursue best practice, increase professionalism in the industry and prepare for upcoming changes. REBA lobbies government on members' behalf.

What REBA does:

- Runs regular conferences and networking events
- Produces benchmarking research, insight & data reports and analysis
- Curates the information you need to know, both online and in our weekly email
- Helps with supplier shortlisting and research

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