

# A quick glance at the growing trend of wellbeing

## A BRIEF LOOK AT THE BENEFITS OF INVESTING IN EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

Mental health, or rather mental ill health, has been stigmatized and misunderstood for millennia. We have come a long way since 'lunacy' was seen as madness brought on by moonlight and our more recent shameful history of the asylum where depression, homosexuality and schizophrenia were all treated as "illnesses" broadly classified as insanity. Mentally ill people have been ostracised by society in previous generations as incurable embarrassments. Sadly, our shameful past relationship with mental health has not quite been put right yet - it is still tainted with misconception and shame (as evidenced amongst other things by our 'stiff upper lip' culture acting as a powerful inhibitor in men opening up about their emotions and state of mind).

Until recently, Psychology was concerned primarily with what is wrong with the mind, focusing its attention on the treatment of the seriously mentally ill. However, the way mental health is viewed in psychology now has changed a great deal. Our scientific understanding of its implications on not just the individual but our society as a whole has grown significantly. Positive Psychology or what is often referred to as the "fourth wave of Psychology", now focuses on: wellbeing, contentment, excitement, cheerfulness, the pursuit of happiness and finding meaning in life. It is important to mention here that the first (The Disease Model), the second (Behaviorism) and the third (Humanistic Psychology) waves are not to be cast aside. Their role in Psychology's evolution was critical, but crucially, their focus was on what can go wrong with the mind or how the mind generally worked.

This new approach viewed Psychology as something relevant to everyone – it's about helping the individual explore ways of making life the best it can be, in other words helping people flourish. Research has shown that most of us, at some time in our lives, experience states of mental ill health, whether it is in the form of stress, bereavement, depression, anxiety etc. Not all cases are serious, but most cases go unnoticed and tend to be dismissed as "one of those things we all have deal with".

The adverse effects of these "blips" of mental health amongst the healthy population are plainly visible in our public health statistics. In 2016/17 stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 40% of all work-related ill health cases and 49% of all working days lost due to ill health (Health and Safety Executive 2016 – 2017 National Statistics).

The demand for wellbeing interventions, workshops and initiatives is growing rapidly. There has been a drive towards enhancing the country's overall wellbeing, notably with David Cameron announcing in 2010 that "...you've got to take practical steps to make sure government is properly focused on our quality of life as well as our economic growth...". He emphasised the importance of increasing wellbeing due to its positive influence on our society and therefore the economy. In the current challenging economic and political climate, it could be argued that this growing trend has become a necessity.

Until the early 2000's, the day to day functioning of the "healthy person" was overlooked, with pressures due to stress or anxiety regarded as just something that everyone had to put up with. Whilst true to a certain extent, studies have shown that neglecting the well-being of apparently healthy individuals has had adverse effects not only on the individuals themselves but on our society and our economy as well. The combination of stigma directed at both mental health itself (people reluctant to admit they're not OK) and its treatment (with terms such as "loony bin" still commonly used) has had the effect of hindering wellbeing among the general population.

Wellbeing has become a buzzword and initiatives to increase employee wellbeing are becoming more commonplace. This is a good thing, but we have still much to learn about the importance of nurturing wellbeing in the workplace and in people's lives in general and the reasons there has been such a growth in demand for it. Hopefully this will have helped highlight why we as a society still suffer from stigma towards mental health issues and how the growing trend towards wellbeing can benefit the individual, our society and our economy. For more information visit ([www.positivepsychologyprogram.com](http://www.positivepsychologyprogram.com))