

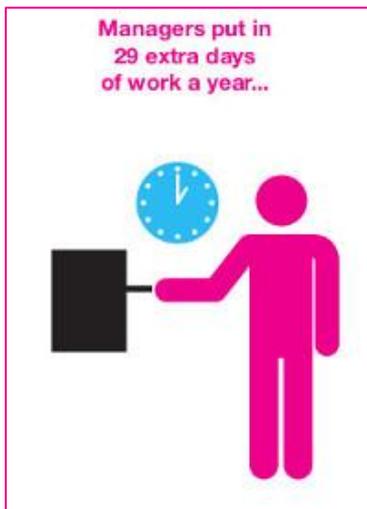
STAFF WELFARE AND WELL-BEING.

Checklist 279

» INTRODUCTION

Health and safety management has been a core part of a manager's responsibilities for many years, but staff welfare and well-being goes beyond the physical working environment. Although the prevention of accidents and injuries is of course a fundamental element of maintaining employee well-being, it has become increasingly important to consider the impact of emotional and mental issues too. Physical, emotional and mental concerns can arise within and outside the workplace, and managers need to take a proactive step in identifying the cause of a loss of well-being, as well as finding a workable solution to it.

When an employee's well-being and welfare is compromised this can lead to poor or underperformance; a change in attitude or behaviour; a failing of duties, or a loss in ability to interact and work well with others. A general feeling of malaise and dissatisfaction with the job, colleagues and/or the organisation will have a detrimental impact not only on the employee concerned, but on the wider team too.



Recognising the cause of an employee's loss of vigour is important to prevent a destructive pattern from occurring. Acting swiftly is paramount for restoring well-being. It is also important to be seen by others to be proactive in your approach; demonstrating your commitment to promoting and maintaining the welfare of your staff. Managers should be seen to operate an open-door policy and be ready and available to listen at all times without judgement. Strive for a happy and healthy team, and commit to your duties as a line manager by creating the best environment and culture possible in order for your staff to thrive. High levels of well-being will lead to increased productivity, lower instances of absence, retention of

talented employees and attraction of new ones, happier customers, and a generally more engaged workforce. Good news for employees, managers and organisations. Well-being, motivation and employee engagement go hand in hand, and line managers have a central role in getting this dynamic right.

This checklist highlights some of the causes of workplace dissatisfaction, and provides guidance for addressing such issues in order to positively promote and maintain the well-being and welfare of your staff.

* All images from CMI Quality of Working Life Infographic 2016

» DEFINITION

Well-being is an individual's state of comfort, happiness, fortunes and health. The higher the levels are, the more productive, engaged, motivated and happy an employee is likely to be. Staff welfare concerns itself with providing the right support to enhance well-being; ensuring a positive and healthy individual employee,

team and/or organisation. The well-being of staff includes their physical, emotional and mental states. It is the responsibility of line managers to seek the best ways of making certain none of these are compromised, and if they are, to offer the right support to redress the situation.

» ACTION CHECKLIST

1. Identify the factors affecting staff well-being and welfare

The welfare of your employees can be affected by a range of different factors, both within and outside of the workplace. Physical, emotional and mental issues can all impact on how a member of your team feels about their work and about themselves. When welfare isn't given priority, you may notice a decline in employee motivation, performance, and a general apathy occurring.

Identifying and understanding the reasons why a member of staff may not appear as content or be performing as they should, is a key part of being a good manager. Commit to improving their general welfare by identifying the cause of their discontent and be proactive in helping them restore a feeling of positive well-being. Show your employees that you care about their welfare and that you understand your obligation to make things better.

“...staff welfare goes beyond health and safety management.”

Identifying the causes of discontent can be challenging, especially if you don't have a close working relationship with the person involved. However, there are ways to help you to investigate what the problem might be:

- Arrange regular one-to-one sessions with team members
- Create a culture of openness and honesty
- Build a good relationship with your team
- Work closely with your HR department
- Arrange social events and/or provide an informal environment that encourages open conversation
- If appropriate, approach a third party such as another team member who may be privy to information. Always be mindful though of confidentiality and never abuse the trust of another.

Ultimately, you can't force someone to disclose personal information or to discuss issues that are concerning them. However, what you can do is create the right environment and the right opportunity to encourage open discussions to take place.

2. Create a safe working environment

Although staff welfare goes beyond health and safety management, creating a physically safe and comfortable environment for your employees is paramount for promoting and maintaining their well-being. Understand your legal health and safety obligations; making sure these practices are in place and fully transparent. Areas such as entry and exit points, plant and equipment, and storage and handling are among the core things to consider. Carry out a thorough risk assessment and highlight issues as soon as they transpire. Report injuries and take the appropriate action promptly.

As well concerning yourself with the physical safety of your staff, it's also important to provide a comfortable workplace too. This includes general things such as keeping communal areas like toilets and kitchenettes clean, providing canteen facilities or a drinks machine, and setting aside a room or area where staff can go to relax during rest breaks. Outdoor space is also a bonus during the warmer months. A clean and tidy environment does a lot to improve staff morale and welfare, with freshly painted walls and carpets free from dirt contributing to the overall comfort of the working environment. Modern and fully functioning equipment is also a key part of maintaining a happy workforce. Inadequate resources and equipment constantly breaking down will only lead to employee stress and angst, as well as a dip in productivity. Ensure a safe and

comfortable working environment is maintained and promoted at all times, and encourage your team to keep their own work spaces clean and tidy.

3. Recognise the impact of stress

Stress is a common everyday emotion felt by everyone to some extent. While stress can be a healthy and motivating force, it can also be a destructive one too. It can manifest itself physically as insomnia and high blood pressure; emotionally as tearfulness or anger, or mentally as panic attacks and depression. It's important to recognise when a member of your team is unduly stressed as this can have negative consequences for their personal welfare and well-being.

Stress in the workplace can occur for various reasons. Workload is a common cause, when employees feel overburdened by the sheer amount of work that needs doing. The constant 24/7 accessibility to mobile phones and emails can also cause extra stress as employees find themselves checking digital devices outside their contracted working hours and thus literally never 'switch off'. Paradoxically, an employee may be bored or feel apathetic because they aren't being challenged enough. A change of job role, line manager, a tumultuous working relationship with a colleague, or a lack of control/authority can all lead to undue stress. Understand what is at the root cause of an employee's high stress levels and seek to find a solution that works for both of you. More training, longer deadlines, more or less responsibility – work together; readily suggesting ideas to redress the situation and encouraging the employee for their input too. Empowering your staff goes a long way to improving their sense of well-being.



4. Understand the impact of an employee's personal life

While private lives and working lives shouldn't interfere with one another, inevitably the lines can blur between the two. As such, an employee's personal life may be having a detrimental impact on their well-being. This can in turn reflect on their demeanour, behaviour and/or performance at work. Although you aren't responsible for managing their personal lives, it is important to recognise and make allowances for known personal problems. For example, if an employee is struggling with childcare duties, consider how you can accommodate their needs for flexible working practices. If they are experiencing an especially difficult time such as a recent bereavement or divorce, show empathy and make allowances for any dip in their work or concentration levels. The cause may be emotional, physical or mental and the 'recovery' time required long or short.

Employees may be reticent to discuss their private lives with their manager. Approach personal issues with sympathy and demonstrate that you are a good listener if they want to talk to you. The way you handle sensitive or personal problems will be largely determined by the nature of your relationship with the person in question. If you suspect or know of a problem but don't feel it appropriate to handle the matter on your own, consider seeking the advice of your HR department for support.

5. Understand the link between poor performance and well-being

When we perform well, we feel confident in our ability to do a good job. We welcome praise and thrive when others tell us we are doing well. Our confidence and self-esteem receives a welcome boost and we are more inclined to take on extra or new projects as we feel like a valued member of the team.

Paradoxically, when we perform poorly in our duties our confidence levels take a hit and with it our self-esteem. Constantly underperforming can have a detrimental impact on employee well-being. An annual performance appraisal is a good opportunity to discuss poor performance but it may not always be the most appropriate time to do so. As a manager, you need to recognise swiftly when someone is not performing to

the best of their abilities and seek to find out why.

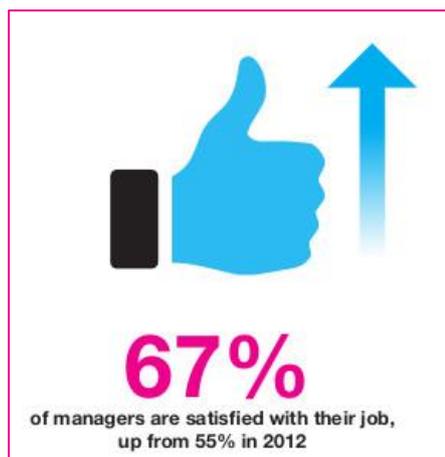
Poor performance is a broad brushstroke term that can relate to many things:

- Prolonged periods of absence
- Poor time-keeping
- Failure to complete work on time
- Failure to meet the standards expected for the job
- Poor attitude or behavior.

Poor performance may be the fault of the employee e.g. bad work ethic or bad attitude. However, underperformance can relate to many other issues which you are able to help redress. Stress, problems at home, lack of training, support etc. can all account for an employee seemingly underperforming. Support them in the best way possible to suit their specific situation. Set small, short-term manageable targets and meet regularly to review their work. Note even the most minor improvements and be sure to offer praise and encouragement. If work is still not improving, ask the employee what help they consider they need to change the status quo. Be open to ideas, within reason, and be willing to help them to help themselves.

If a member of your team has suffered a period of underperformance, it will take a while to restore their confidence in their own ability, as well as yours in them. Give them simple tasks to begin with until you and they are confident of taking the next step. Setting unachievable goals will only serve to further compound an employee's feelings of inadequacy and disengagement.

6. Seek to improve job satisfaction



A happy employee is one who is satisfied with their role; gaining challenge, enjoyment and stimulus from their work. Conversely, when an employee is dissatisfied with their job this can adversely affect their well-being. Undue stress, boredom, frustration, and even anger can all arise if someone isn't happy with their work. If you suspect that such a situation has arisen, seek to identify why this may be. A promotion or demotion, change of job role, sudden increase or decrease in workload, lack of challenge, repetitive work – all such things can impact on our enjoyment of work. Sometimes job roles change slowly and organically as the nature of the organisation or industry changes. Other times the focus of a job changes quickly when a new senior manager is appointed and/or the focus of the organisation takes a sudden turn. A job that was once enjoyable may become dull,

mundane or even too difficult. Talk to the employee to determine what the cause of their job dissatisfaction may be and seek to find an agreeable solution. We all need to feel we are making a positive contribution through our work so be sure to highlight how the individual's job role is impacting on the overall objectives of the team, department and wider organisation.

7. Address the physical when improving well-being

The nature of the job will determine how physically fit your employees need to be in order to perform their duties. However, all your staff will need to have a degree of good health to maintain a standard of work. Health issues and accidents can affect the performance of an employee so it's important to recognise when a potential health issue is having an adverse effect on staff well-being. For short-term physical injuries such as a broken leg, make the necessary arrangements to accommodate the needs of your employee like allocating a desk on the ground floor or assigning light duties. Conversely if an illness or injury is a long-term issue, then your HR department will need to become involved and a workable solution found. This could be a period of absence, a reduction in duties, or a reduction in working hours. If an employee has recently returned to work following an illness or injury sit down with them to discuss how they are feeling and whether they are capable of resuming their duties straightaway. Even if they have been given a 'fit note' by their doctor, it can take time

to get back into the swing of things during a period of absence so make allowances for a settling in period.

Encourage the healthy practices of your employees by introducing free or reduced membership of a local gym, or providing subsidised meals. If you have an onsite canteen, make sure it is stocked with healthy and nutritious dishes rather than fatty, convenient foods. Invite local healthcare providers to offer free health checks for your employees with things like weigh-ins, cholesterol and blood pressure checks carried out on site. Set up a fitness class or running club after work or during the lunchtime for staff to get involved with; providing facilities for freshening up afterwards. There are lots of free or inexpensive ways to help your staff retain their health and fitness levels during working hours that'll not only improve their sense of well-being, but also improve their motivation and energy levels too.

“a fraught working relationship with our colleagues, peers or bosses can have a major impact on our general well-being.”

8. Stamp out bullying, harassment and conflict

Bullying and/or harassment is a sensitive issue in the workplace and often goes unnoticed for too long. A member of staff suffering in this way will have their well-being and welfare seriously compromised. If you suspect that such behaviour is taking place, it's fundamental that you are seen to act upon it without delay. Consult the organisation's policy on bullying and harassment and follow the guidelines to the letter. It may be really difficult for a member of staff to admit to being bullied – through fear for their own job or reputation, or a fear of the perpetrator. They may also be reluctant to report such negative behaviour for fear of being exposed, judged or seen as weak or vulnerable by others. Bullying and harassment is a serious issue that needs to be stamped out immediately. Take the appropriate course of action and be seen to be proactive by others.

Although workplace conflict may not be as serious as bullying, a fraught working relationship with our colleagues, peers or bosses can have a major impact on our general well-being. If you notice that there is discord between members of your team, seek to address the issue with the parties concerned before matters

escalate out of hand.

9. Promote a good work/life balance

We all strive for a work/life balance and many of us are attracted to job roles which offer the flexibility to achieve this. There are many ways to improve someone's work/life balance, and in turn improve their welfare and well-being. Ways in which many firms seek to do this include:

- Offering flexi-time
- Providing generous annual leave allowances
- Operating standard working hours i.e. not expecting their employees to work overtime
- Offering sociable working hours i.e. within the standard working day/week
- Offering time off in lieu of hours worked above those contracted
- Honouring an employee's request to reduce their hours (with good reason)
- Planning staff social events and away-days for teams
- Restricting out-of-hours email access.

The nature of the business will determine how feasible all or any of the above may be, but it is important to recognise that your employees are entitled to a life outside of work. Working them unduly hard will only lead to stress, or even burnout and could ultimately result in a talented employee seeking work elsewhere.

Understand the terms of employee contracts and never expect your staff to do above and beyond the written T&Cs. The advent of technological advances means that we can be contacted 24/7. Encourage employees to turn off phones and digital devices outside of contracted hours to help maintain a healthy work/life balance.

10. Build a good relationship with your team

Promote employee well-being and welfare by encouraging a culture of open and honest conversation. Only by building good communication skills and a positive working relationship with your team will you be effective in your role of ensuring everyone is happy in the workplace. The more open you are and the better your relationship with your staff, the more likely they are to share their concerns with you. Trust is fundamental and you should operate an open-door policy where no subject is off limits.

Make it clear that confidentiality is key and never abuse a member of your team's trust if they disclose a sensitive or personal matter with you. If the issue requires the involvement of a third party such as your HR department, be sure to inform the employee in question before taking any necessary steps.

11. Offer additional third-party support

Some issues may be too difficult or personal for a member of your team to be able to disclose to you. Or the matter may require more expert handling than you personally can offer. An occupational therapist may be consulted when an individual's health issue prevents them from carrying out daily activities. A counselling service also offers independent support that can help improve a staff member's mental or emotional well-being. Alternatively, a mentoring or peer system can help support an employee through guidance, training or general support during a difficult time. Such external and/or impartial services can effectively improve the welfare of a member of staff, which will ultimately be to their benefit as well as yours. If you feel that the situation warrants such third-party intervention, flag it as a possible support mechanism and encourage the member of your team to consider the benefits of doing so.

» POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Managers should avoid:

- › Ignoring health and safety procedures
- › Underestimating the impact of stress
- › Tackling personal problems in an intrusive or insensitive manner
- › Disclosing confidential information to a third party without consent
- › Failing to act upon an employee's change of attitude/behaviour or drop in performance levels
- › Failing to create a culture of openness
- › Being unsupportive and unresponsive to an employee's situation.

» ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CMI RESEARCH

Quality of working life: exploring managers' wellbeing, motivation and productivity, Les Worrall and others

London: Chartered Management Institute, January 2016

BOOKS

The off switch: leave work on time, relax your mind but still get more done, Mark Cropley

London: Virgin Books, 2015

The fulfilling workplace: the organization's role in achieving individual and organizational health,

Ronald J. Burke and Cary L. Cooper

Farnham: Gower, 2013

A day in the life of a happy worker, Arnold B. Bakker and Kevin Daniels
London: Psychology Press, 2013

The happy manifesto: make your organization a great workplace, Henry Stewart
London: Kogan page, 2012 [available as an e-book]

Well-being: productivity and happiness at work, Ivan Robertson and Cary Cooper
Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011 [available as an e-book]

JOURNAL ARTICLES

The wellness paradox, Andrew Saunders
Management Today, May 2015, pp48-51

Developing individual and organisational work-life balance strategies to improve employee health and wellbeing, Connie Zheng and others
Employee Relations, 2015, Vol. 37 no 3, pp354-379

RELATED CHECKLISTS

- 048** Empowerment
- 193** Work life balance
- 245** Understanding employee engagement
- 278** Developing resilience

INTERNET RESOURCES

ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) provides advice on health and well-being in the workplace - <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1361>



NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

This checklist has relevance for the following standards:

- › Unit DB9 Promote staff wellbeing
- › Unit DC5 Help individuals address problems affecting their performance



MORE INFORMATION

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