

ELFA's Winter Wellbeing Newsletter

Welcome to 2022! I hope you had a great Christmas break and feel well-rested and ready to take on the year ahead. Whilst there is still a lot of ambiguity around the pandemic, it is certain that wellbeing in business is set to become more prominent than ever resulting from an accumulation of nearly two years of uncertainty, overwhelm, and burnout.

In particular, line managers may feel an even greater need for support in 2022 as they carry out the demanding role of supporting and developing those they manage while managing upwards as well as performing their day-to-day role. To support these individuals, I am delighted to announce that an upcoming mental health training in February to support line managers in managing people as well as looking after themselves in everyday life.

Though we continue to face challenges, we can still look for the silver linings of the pandemic. Going through a collective crisis has brought people closer together, making them feel more comfortable talking about their personal circumstances and feelings, which once felt quite taboo. If we can continue to educate employees, raise awareness, and inspire positive change around mental health and wellbeing and all the multiple facets that this includes, then we will have happier, healthier, more loyal, and more productive employees.

This falls in line with my prediction for 2022 that will see businesses continue to show courage and leadership in the ways that they support their employees. This will include subjects such as bereavement, fertility, suicide, divorce, menopause, and toxic masculinity as understanding grows of the impact of personal life events on people's work lives.

A topic that is thankfully becoming more comfortable to discuss in the workplace is women's health. With this in mind, I am delighted that Nicole Downer, Managing Partner of MV Credit, has opened up about her experience of going through the menopause in this quarter's newsletter. She shines a light on the symptoms she experiences and how that affects her at work, which is so important to share to promote awareness and empathy amongst colleagues who may also be going through this or work with someone who is.



Jen Christie
Founder & Director - Rise Well

Raising awareness about these subjects can go a long way to creating an inclusive and empathetic work environment. It can empower colleagues to act as allies to create compassion and support for individuals who may otherwise feel alone.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter and can take away a few helpful hints and tips to motivate you to look after yourself this winter. This year I invite you to look inwards rather than outwards and select just one small change that will improve your wellbeing.

I am wishing you and your loved ones a healthy and happy 2022.

Jen

Jen Christie
Founder & Director - Rise Well



RISE WELL

Introducing happiness in the city

Shining a Light on Mental Health & Wellbeing with... Nicole Downer- Managing Partner MV Credit

Each quarter we meet a member of the ELFA network to shine some light on mental health and learn how they look after their wellbeing whilst working in a high-pressured job.



Nicole Downer- Managing Partner MV Credit

How are you feeling today on a scale of 1-10 and why?

I would say 7-8, and that is partly because it is a Friday and it is sunny outside which always helps! Why isn't it higher? Well, partly work continues to be incredibly busy, it is relentless, and the free time and space you would expect to have more of when working from home definitely doesn't transpire. Then the other part personally is that I am 50 years old, a woman and going through the menopause, so that has all sorts of impacts too.

What does wellbeing mean to you?

To me it means positivity. There are days where I wake up, and I think I could sleep for another 3 hours and think this is not a day I am looking forward to or there is too much to do and not enough time to do it, all of which would negatively impact me.

For me positivity is feeling engaged and looking forward to the day. This could be something as small as looking forward to a TV show on that night or looking forward to speaking with a colleague later that day.

How have you found working over the past 18 months in a different way due to the pandemic?

This concept of hybrid working isn't new to me; I have always worked in this way with MV Credit, so for me it is not really a change, but what has been quite nice is that now everyone has been doing it so there's much more acceptance around it and much more inclusion of people when they work from home.

When there was only one or two of us working from home with everyone else working in the office all the time, you'd have to catch up on what you have missed in the office but now it is far more inclusive of people, and there is a better sense of thinking about the wider team's contribution regardless of where they are based.

On the other hand, when everyone was working from home during the lockdowns, a "call culture" emerged of being on the phone from 8:30-6 with people on back-to-back calls, which was incredibly intense. The transition to hybrid has been slower than I expected because I think it is important to use the physical time in the office to do what is really valuable, which is interact, chat and share views with colleagues as this is where ideas come from. Still, I'm not finding enough time to do that in the office, and instead, I continue to be on back-to-back calls and finding that I might as well be at home! This is incredibly frustrating, especially when your colleagues are walking past your desk and want to grab you for a chat, but you are stuck on calls all day.

What are your day-to-day stressors?

Most of my day-to-day stressors do revolve around work, either around specific work situations or when work impedes on my personal life and I'm not spending enough time with family and friends. Like a lot of people, I work a little too hard and I don't have enough time off and the workload becomes more reactive than proactive, which is not ideal, as it means you are getting things done but not having the leisure of getting to think through the more important or strategic stuff.

Outside of work, I am adjusting to the fact my only daughter has just left home to go to university, so I'm adapting to life without her.

What are the early warning signs you, your colleagues, and your family and friends look out for when you are starting to struggle with your mental wellbeing?

I am pretty self-aware, so I know that I tend to go into myself when I am struggling, become less communicative, a little more irritable, and don't sleep well. I like to vent, but I don't necessarily like to hear solutions - I just want to get things off my chest and walk away, so it is lucky I have a good support system around me!

How do you try and look after your mental health and wellbeing?

If I feel overwhelmed and that there is too much going on, the first thing I do is try to find time. My first go-to is to call my PA – I ask her to move meetings and create space for me to catch up and think, even just for a couple of hours – it makes a world of difference. It is disproportionate to the free time it provides, but it gives me a big sense of relief. Opening my diary on a Monday morning and seeing a whole week of back-to-back meetings can stress me out. I also find it very helpful to colour code things in my diary, so I know one colour means that I have to be somewhere and another colour means I don't have to be there; it is optional. This really helps declutter my mind.

For more specific things, those things that wake you up at 3am – that aren't a big deal but feel like a big deal – I tend to tackle those things quite early on the next day, so it is out of my head space.

In terms of the menopause, after months of ignoring signs and finding little reasons for things that I noticed were different about how I felt, I finally connected the dots and recognised that I might have an issue and decided to speak to my doctor. I had typical symptoms – feeling warmer at night and feeling hotter speaking to people in meetings only to look in the mirror and see that I had a bright red neck. What really got me moving on it was that I started to feel a little bit lethargic and felt like I could stay in bed all day and there were days where I felt a little bit down. It also made me very forgetful – I would forget really basic stuff like the names of people I have known for ages, which is really scary as you don't know when it is going to happen, and it can really knock your confidence because you could be in a meeting and not remember something really basic. I tend to be very upfront about this and say, "I am menopausal, and this happens to me," I think it works.

The menopause is a very badly researched area, and the conversation with my GP about it was very unsatisfactory – my GP basically confirmed that I was menopausal and suggested the only solution was anti-depressants! My best source of information has either been online or via my friends who are also going through it, but it is

difficult because everyone has very different experiences and what helps one person might not be beneficial for another. I have now decided I want to get on HRT and so I will need to monitor my blood pressure and see how I respond in the meantime.

What motto do you live by?

A saying from my idol Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who is such a positive example to all women.

"Fight for the things that you care about but do it in a way that will lead others to join you."

Wellbeing quote

"Sometimes the most productive thing you can do is relax" – Mark Black

Upcoming ELFA Wellbeing Event

Supporting Your Team Whilst Keeping Your Balance – A mental health & wellbeing toolkit for managers

Thursday 3rd February | 16:00pm– 17:00pm | Sign up [here](#)

This virtual one-hour training module is designed for anyone who manages a team and would benefit from guidance on how to have conversations with and support their team with mental health and wellbeing. Participants will also learn how to look after their own wellbeing in this challenging role.

Wellbeing Lab

Click on the image below to watch a short video that will teach you simple techniques to transform your mental health and wellbeing



About Rise Well:

Rise Well is a workplace wellbeing and happiness business, partnering with organisations to transform the culture and health of their employees through consultancy, talent acquisition and wellbeing programmes.

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