

Productivity and Wellness – The Best Of Both Worlds:

Healthy Organisations, Proactive Managers & Supportive Leadership

In this interview Dr Peter Stebbins, Organisational Psychologist and Corporate Partner with PsyCare (www.psycare.com.au), speaks to Simon Thatcher about people leadership and regulatory challenges managers and directors of both small and larger organisations face in maximising productivity and wellness in their organisations.



Introduction

ST Whilst there is a need for organisations to maximise profit, there is also a need for staff to find the right work/life balance, and there seems to be a fine line between productivity pressures and wellness. Peter, how well do you think workplaces are currently responding to achieving balance?

PS *Thanks Simon, one of the interesting points about what you're saying is reflected in the newspapers, with articles referring to company managers, owners, and shareholders, and the concept of 'value', including the expectations of organisations today. We talk about things like double digit growth and 20% return and there is an increased emphasis now on value and investment. However, sometimes what we don't see is underneath the bonnet of the vehicle in terms of the human cost. In improving profitability, we have to improve productivity and, naturally, that's going to mean people need to be doing more, and doing more of it, more consistently and efficiently.*

On top of that, there are changes in legislation in safety and wellness. There has been an evolution in our requirements, of what is expected of us as organisations and what responsibilities we have, and we have increased pressure to make sure we have safe, supportive workplaces. There is also the issue of labour market shortage. I find it interesting now that, beyond the other demands of productivity and of legal compliance, we just can't find "good staff" anymore, and so there are a number of pressures that really focus us on getting things right in terms of maximising productivity and wellness.

ST One of the other things I like about this concept, Peter, is that it reinforces the concept of humanity in the workplace.

PS *It's funny, or ironic if you like, that all of this demand on productivity in the pursuit of profit, combined with skill shortages, creates this dynamic where we're now facing the issue of needing to be supportive to staff in order to be profitable. If we don't have 'state of the art' healthy and supportive workplaces, we literally die from unprofitable businesses and skills shortages.*

ST I get the impression, Peter, that most workplaces are adapting well to these new demands, but is that your perception? Is there flexibility in the workplace that you are seeing now, where employers are providing systems and support to promote the wellbeing of their employees?

PS Well, on the whole, that is definitely the case, but what is really interesting about this is that there are at least three different motivations for employers to adapt. The first one is that people are motivated by profit – a necessity for commercial success in term of directors and shareholder expectations. This is, indirectly, a great motivator to have a safe and healthy workplace. The second motivator, with the current labour market, is retention. People are adapting their workplaces and work-life balance for retention reasons. The third motivator is the issues of risk, negligence and protecting ourselves. Different organisations are adapting at different rates for different motivations.

For example, for a lot of smaller professional organisations such as lawyers, medicos, and HR consulting groups, retention is key for them to survive - they must retain highly skilled staff delivering high quality outputs. So, based on the motivation of retention, they are getting into work-life balance, share plans, equity schemes - they are doing lots of things to be really leading edge. Another example would be the area of legal risk. A lot of larger industrial based organisations are adapting well to these new demands because they want to mitigate risk. They are motivated to avoid lost time injury. They don't want accidents, and that's driving some really great proactive behaviour. Finally, of course, is profitability, and a good example of this is larger listed retailers that make profit through high functioning teams and lots of output/sales. Once again, this is a motivator that helps them adapt to these demands and build healthy organisations and wellness strategies for staff.

Proactive Management Strategies

ST Clearly, you could safely say that passive management styles would be disastrous for most employers. In relation to a proactive management style, what are some of the best ways that we can proactively prevent workplace stress and further enhance productivity?

PS I think that is a really great question and a very large topic to do justice to! Perhaps we can discuss this across 3 areas of our business. The first is the front end of our business. When we're talking about preventing workplace stress and enhancing productivity, what do we do when we bring people in? What's our selection, recruitment, job design? What are we doing there? The second area, once people are into the day to day of our business, is our operational management and supportive leadership. We know so much about how having a supportive culture and supportive leaders mitigates the effects of stress and helps people adapt to change. Finally, of course, there is this issue of work-life balance, flexible work practices and helping people through difficult times either work related or non-work related.

Job Design: Recruitment & Selection

ST Well, Peter, let's talk about those 3 key areas - the first one being recruitment and selection and matching the right person to the right job.

PS There are a couple of key issues here. The first issue is emotional intelligence. There has been a lot of talk lately about this concept and about Daniel Goldman's book on emotional intelligence. In the past, we spent all our time on IQ or intellectuals. We would always be assessing and recruiting people based on their level of experience, their technical skill and their qualifications. We weren't so concerned, however, about what we call the EQ, the emotional intelligence fit. Accordingly, we would find people who were technically extremely good at their jobs, but we would have this very much hit and miss result. This was because we didn't understand the EQ, the emotional intelligence fit. We weren't even assessing the job

in the first place. We weren't asking ourselves what characteristics, personality style, values and preferences would best fit the job. It is essential to understand these job requirements and to measure potential employee EQ so that we get the right fit. Most of us know people, or have had the experience ourselves, where we've wound up in a job that is technically a 'no-brainer', but, ultimately, the culture is not right. For example, there is not enough people interaction or there is too much people interaction. We end up feeling unstable – feeling as though we don't belong. This also frustrates our boss and can't be maintained. Equally, situations exist where the person may or may not currently possess all knowledge requirements of the job, but they fit well into the position. An example of this was a colleague of mine who was interviewed by a panel who ended up saying to her, 'Look, we're not sure you've got all the necessary skills, but we can teach you that. What we're feeling confident about is that you seem to fit in well here' and that worked well for her. In sum, it's essential to measure the EQ, not just the IQ.

ST In relation to EQ, Peter, what are we talking about here? Are we talking about personality?

PS *Absolutely*

ST Right, and how can personality be assessed in relation to matching the right person to the right job?

PS

Well, before answering that question, I need to add in a proviso that personality is just one aspect of a number of important considerations. It is not appropriate to focus on personality alone in assessment. However, it can give some reassurance that people will fit in. Regarding personality, there are several models or theories. The one I like the most, and the one that seems the easiest to grasp and the most clinically robust, is something called the 5-Factor Model. This theory is essentially saying that each person has different amounts of traits across 5 domains. The first domain is the classic introversion-extroversion concept, and I'm sure we can all relate to that one. We may already see ourselves as more extroverted or introverted compared with other people we know. The second domain is openness and closeness. This is very much about people's openness to experience. For some people, and in some job positions, it is a real asset to be constantly open to new ideas. Equally, being able to work in a time limited specific role, a feature of the closeness style, can also be important. This third domain is agreeableness versus independence (or as it is sometimes negatively labelled – stubbornness). The fourth area is conscientiousness, compared with a more laissez-faire or careless style. And, finally, the fifth area focuses on emotionality – that is how easily upset people are compared with how pragmatic or stoic they are. Examining these 5 domains can provide us with a quite thorough assessment of both the demands of the job position in question, and the people who will potentially fill the position - a bit like the hand and the glove.

ST Are there services available to employers, i.e. through organisational psychologists, to be able to tap into and assess features of potential job seekers?

PS *Absolutely. These features can be assessed not only by using complex personality profiling, but also with more simple brief assessment tools and behavioural interview questions. Despite this, there has been reluctance amongst employers to examine and address EQ, even though, clearly, different roles require different technical skills and personal attributes.*

For example, a technical research scientist works in a laboratory and has to be very clear on what they're doing. They have to be able to follow instructions and have a good technical head. On a personality level we're talking about someone who may be a bit more introverted than extroverted, someone who likes working on their own and is laissez-faire, very comfortable with that, and obviously someone pretty conscientious so they can perform and get their data right. In contrast, someone more extroverted may feel they're going crazy being locked in a lab with no one to talk to. Similarly, someone who is more laissez-faire, who is always adapting to change but forgets things, is not going to be a fit for this role. However, these traits can be really beneficial in other job roles. For example, people in sales management roles interact extensively with people, so have to be extroverted. If they were introverts they'd become exhausted and burn out. Similarly, while sales managers need to be conscientious workers, they also need to be constantly closing deals and making relationships, so we may want other people to follow up on the very specific details there. So, in summary, there is no bad personality and, in a sense, there is no good personality, just as there is no bad job or good job. What there is, is a whole bunch of unique and positive features in every person and the right jobs for them to fit into.

Supportive Leadership Strategies

ST Peter, we've already touched on a little about the dangers of passive management. The opposite of that, I would assume, would be supportive leadership, which you've already referenced once in this discussion. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

PS Absolutely. As I've said, *doing nothing is worse than doing something. An important quote relevant to this topic was made by ancient military general, Sun Tzu, in his classic book 'The Art of War'. He talked about never letting your troops stand still - always keeping them in manoeuvre, always keeping them busy. Anchoring this to the issue of passive management, we can see that whether you're running an army, or an organisation, or even a small team, being passive is the most destructive thing you can do – 'idle minds...' and all those sayings. Clearly, the reverse of passivity is about leadership, about some degree of action. There is a time and a place for different levels of directions, but supportive leadership is very much the front line of where we need to be going now to prevent workplace stress and promote healthy organisations.*

ST And when we talk about supportive leadership, obviously, I would imagine, we are making sure that that doesn't extend into an employer being over-involved in the workload and in the manner in which their employees conduct their work.

PS Absolutely, because, *while we speak negatively about passivity, this issue of being a micromanager, or overly interfering, can be equally as destructive. Supportive leadership as a concept has stemmed out of what we call the organisational health research area, and there are a couple of key people involved in that - Dr Peter Cotton, Professor Nick Forster, and a bunch of US researchers. What these key people have been doing is looking at the behaviour patterns of thousands of managers and workers and asking, 'Who are the managers that you respect?' and 'What are the things that they do?' From this research, in a nutshell, supportive leadership, (which, at times, for me is quite an esoteric concept), is really about 2 things. It is about having positive person power, which is essentially self-confidence*

and self-control. It is also about the 7 key attributes displayed by managers and leaders.

ST Peter, tell us a little bit more about this concept of personal power.

PS Well, at first, I found personal power difficult to grasp. I kept thinking about it in terms of the 'Power' of Wonder Woman or the Bionic Man or, conversely, the deceitfulness of Machiavellian politics. Really, personal power is just one of the 5 main types of power in organisations. These include personal power, expert power (encompassing technical competencies), reward power, positional power (the title a person has), and cohesive power (being able to bring people together). All these forms of power are important in terms of organisational outcomes and leadership. What we're finding increasingly, though, is that positive personal power far outstrips those other forms of power in predicting who is going to be able to lead an organisation. To illustrate – think back to a crisis in your family or organisation or even at school. What you'll find in these situations is that people will often gravitate to the person with the highest personal power. This is not always the teacher up the front at school, or the senior manager at work, or the traditional head of the family at home. Being involved in, or by observing stressful situations, we can see personal power in effect. We tend to gravitate towards and want to involve people with higher levels of personal power because we feel reassured by their self-confidence and sense of self-control.

ST The nice message that comes out of that, Peter, if I've heard you correctly, is that if a manager out there who is listening, wants to know how they can ground their team, they first need to be grounded themselves.

PS And that is a really positive message, but, also, in some ways, it is also a very bitter pill, because there is so much self-development involved. As they say 'You cannot give what you do not have', so for people listening to this, if you are on a journey yourself and really working hard at your own integrity, your own self-control and your own conduct, be encouraged, personal power is with you and will grow with you.

ST So, Peter, after having developed this personal power, which really, as you said, is just a reflection of self-confidence and self-control, how can we then manifest that in the workplace?

PS A more practical level of research suggests 7 key attributes which we can identify in supportive leadership. The first one is honesty and integrity. It is so important for high leaders that we respect to display a sense of integrity and honesty. The second one is competence and credibility. This is related to expert power. It is essential that leaders know what they are doing. One of the things I like about this is the discipline of it. When we are managers and leaders, there is so much we have to learn all the time, and if we remember the importance of competence, it keeps us sharp and it keeps us searching. The third is vision and forward planning, and in this respect a supportive leader can be a visionary. They need the ability to think ahead. Anyone who is running a business will know that in terms of their budgets, in terms of their people, they start to think a month, 2 months, 3 months and even a year ahead. There is always one part of them that is thinking about how everything will come out in the future. This is what we look for in a supportive leader. The fourth area - inspiration and motivation – is related to being able to encourage people, to engage them and get them to do things. A supportive leader has to be able to get people to do things that they don't necessarily want to do and to push them out of their comfort zones. Getting people to move when they may not want to move is still supportive

leadership. The fifth area is fair mindedness and equality. Managers need to treat people equally and really work at being seen to be fair. This is not just being fair but communicating that fairness. The sixth area is communication that appeals to other people's hopes and dreams. People need to have a level of belief that managers know what their goals are, and that being in the managers group is useful for them. Finally, and my favourite one, the seventh one, is adding value - and we talk about this in other domains. Do you add value to people's lives? I find this such a great one to reflect on when managing my own team and also when I'm working with other clients. Did I add value to them today? Did I help their lives? How are they different? What did I do or not do that added value? A supportive leader can generally answer these questions.

Work Life Balance

ST Peter, one of the other concepts that we're hearing a lot about now is this concept of work/life balance. What does this really mean? What is this about?

PS I've struggled with this concept so much, Simon. When I first heard about work/life balance, I remember, as a psychologist, thinking 'time management'. I sat there and looked at my own schedule involving running a busy, growing firm and all the things I had to do as both a psychologist and a business owner. I remember thinking, 'I have no time. I can't preach about this. I don't really know what it is about'. It is a good leadership characteristic to be honest, so at least that got me thinking. Then, because I was striving for the competency trait involved in the 7 key attributes of supportive management, I went to research it. I had to go experience it and deal with it. One of the most profound things I found about understanding this concept of work/life balance is letting go of time. It is completely unrealistic for most people, who often work 8 hours in the office and have 8 hours of sleep per night, to get this balance going and to have high quality day-to-day interactions with their families within this limited time frame. Life doesn't work like that. However, one of the things we have learnt from existential research, why people feel happy and sad and why they find meaning and purpose, is that there are both positive and negative pressures. From this perspective, having work/life balance can be viewed as having lots of positive pressures in your life, lots of positive family time, positive relationships, positive self-reflection time, as well as positive experiences at work. If the definition of work-life balance is finding positive pressure in different areas of your life, it becomes achievable. What people have to do is increase the quality of the time that they have, not necessarily the quantity. To illustrate, we all know people who are long term unemployed or going through very difficult organisational changes where the quality of their time drops. They might have a lot of time, but they are not necessarily feeling balanced or happy.

ST Yes, so not only are we talking about quality and quantity, but we're also talking about flexibility – would that be fair to say?

PS Definitely. If we apply this work-life balance concept into preventing workplace stress and maintaining wellness, two key issues emerge. The first is designing roles and responsibilities that maximise positive pressure, meaning and purpose. The second area, as you've said, Simon, is promoting flexible workplace practices to allow people to customise their work timeframes and locations to their individual family needs.

ST So when we talk about flexible workplace practices, what are we talking about here?

PS *One of the buzz words that I'm picking up on at the moment is 'connectivity', and this, to me, encapsulated a home/office system - we can work from home and we can go to the office. So connectivity is the first thing about flexible work practices. Where do people actually have to do their work? Another example is how we finance projects and people and whether we can budget for times when things are really busy. Can we get extra admin support or pull people in from other teams? Have we got project teams or regional teams? A further example is the old 4 day week or 9 day fortnight, as well as leave purchasing schemes, buy-back schemes, child care etc. There are so many things we can do to promote flexible work practises. Similarly with designing roles and responsibilities, the more structured our roles are, the more we know what we're doing, and the more appraisal and recognition matches the goals. There is congruence. We're being communicative and we know what is going on. Another one is professional development. We need to bear in mind positive meaning and consider how people are being challenged and are growing. Mentoring and coaching is a further consideration. Organisations can give these things to people, which can increase profitability. They don't have to be onerous tasks.*

Early Intervention & Rehabilitation

ST Peter, in relation to all of these strategies, as you know as a psychologist, when you put a group of people in one place together, who are working side-by-side 5 days a week, even with the most effective and transparent of proactive strategies, there can still be some variability in human behaviour that leads to some breakdowns in communication and so forth. I can imagine when that occurs the value of early intervention becomes most important. But what do we mean by early intervention?

PS *You're right. We can do all we can as supportive leaders, but we are still dealing with personalities and roles that don't always fit together, and when things start to break down, or we notice problems, we have to get in early. We have to - both for legal reasons, as well as productivity reasons. So early intervention is really about a timeframe, it's about preventing the breakdown, or being involved immediately after an incident, for example, when someone has ceased work or taken some time off. On the other hand, early intervention is also a tool. Often we talk about early intervention as though it's this pill that people take, but what we're really talking about is a couple of key strategies. These include individual counselling regarding stress and coping, manager coaching and feedback, changes to work load and mediation and conflict resolution. It's about an individual approach – picking the right tools for each particular situation.*

ST Peter, we know from a legal perspective the value of documenting our efforts as managers for health, safety and performance issues. Would that be important in these rehabilitation/early intervention scenarios as well?

PS *Definitely, given that so much of what we're talking about today works out of a legislative framework. There is an employer obligation to prevent stress, to take reasonable management action. This leads us to another concept – 'How do I prove I was reasonable?' One of the most powerful ways you can do this is to document what you are doing, document the steps that you take. In early intervention, documentation is good not only for legal protection, in terms of stress claims, but also in terms of educating the organisation about the benefits of looking after others. As an example, we've just finished a year-long pilot with a government department where we've conducted a flexible early intervention program. In some cases we were coaching a manager, in others we were conducting mediation and facilitations, sometimes we were doing one-on-one stress and coping type counselling, and*

sometimes it was a mixture of all three, but we got in early, we worked effectively and it was very cost effective for the organisation as well.

In terms of outcome, the year before we got involved with this group, they had 1500 days lost because of stress. The year that we have been involved is now finished and this number has dropped from 1500 days down to 54 days. That's over 1400 days saved, and if you multiply that by \$200-\$300 a day, you're starting to get some big numbers. Not only did they make gains productivity wise and cash wise from no lost time, they also had a 28% reduction on their premium with Workers' Compensation, which is a major saving. Furthermore, they had a 66% reduction in Psychological Injury Claims. People often ask, 'Well - what are we talking about dollar wise? '. The total budget for the program was between \$18,000-\$22,000 for thousands and thousands of staff. The total saving was in excess of \$750,000. So for all the people who have to deal with accounts, and high level managers who think this is all soft and fluffy, spending \$21,000 to save \$750,000 to me is quite a compelling reason to get involved in early intervention. The rolling savings over the next 3 years are projected to be 2-3million dollars from early intervention alone.

ST Peter, another concept that is important here is the concept of rehabilitation and return to work programs. Can you explain this further, including what are the factors we should consider when designing return to work programs for chronic stress conditions?

PS. *When we are talking about rehabilitation and return to work programs for chronic stress conditions, there are two issues to consider. The first involves the circumstances of the event and the person's condition. The second is the planning and the interface between them and what the organisation can offer to help them get back to work. Regarding the first issue, we are looking at the circumstances of their stress claim, including how long they have been away from work. Research shows that the longer people are away from work, the less likely it is that we'll actually get them back. We're also examining whether their claim is compensable. Do they have Workers' Compensation entitlement, or are they non-compensable? Are they financially distressed? Have they run out of sick leave? We also need to consider the level of treatment. Often people aren't getting the treatment they need, particularly when it comes to stress. Sometimes that's because they don't want to see a psychologist and get help, other times it's because they can't afford it if their claim is non-compensable. Another issue that we often overlook is - prior to the stress issues what was their performance and behaviour like? Often there is a problem there. Sometimes it is a by-product of their illness, other times it has involved them underperforming and being managed for that, which is naturally upsetting. So we need to understand any pre-existing issues and also their family circumstance. For example, often if they are financially distressed and the other partner goes back to work, they have to do the kid run. There are some really practical things that will give us much better success, if we just stop and assess them.*

ST Let's talk about getting people back to work and suitable duties programs. What are some of your ideas there, Peter?

PS *One of the things about stress is the notion that it is 'in the head'. We're used to seeing people with a plaster cast on their arm or leg, and knowing that they either can't walk or run or use that arm for a while. It is so much harder for us to grasp this issue of stress, because it's not necessarily easy to see. It's on the inside or invisible as we say. But just as we're able to measure people's load lift capacity after back injuries (can they lift 5kgs, 20kgs etc?) and dictate what restrictions they will need with injured arms, legs and necks, we can also measure their stress. The first thing*

we need to do is measure what we call their social tolerance - that is: How long can they interact with people before they get really fatigued? We also need to measure their cognitive tolerance. For example, how long can they maintain concentration? With conditions such as depression and anxiety, typically people are more socially withdrawn and perhaps physically tense, and at times have poor concentration, so where people are in their recovery is key.

To make it more practical, there are really just four things to consider – First, the duties of the person in developing suitable duties plans or return to work plans; second, the hours that they work, when they work those hours and the rate at which you would increase those hours; third, the location (obviously when there is traumatic stress, there has been an incident, so where do people go back to?); fourth is people. As we've mentioned, one of the big problems with depression is that employers expect people to get quickly back up to their normal speed or normal amount of hours too soon. People will get well at their own pace and we have to be flexible there.

ST I would imagine, Peter, that at the other end of that example, though, there would be some workers who really enjoy their suitable duties and see them as being something far more attractive than their original position and show some sort of resistance to eventually going back there.

PS *That can be a real issue, and the key is keeping suitable duties/return to work programs temporary. We don't spend enough time reinforcing that with people. So whether people are going from one location to another, working from home, working in the office, whether their hours are lower or greater, whether the people they work with are old friends or new people who can support them and are more neutral to the situation, or whether their duties are modified – it's all about keeping them temporary, keeping it flexible, but never losing sight that we're returning them to their PPP – previous principal position.*

Issues for Large and Small Organisations

ST Peter, these strategies and concepts that we have been talking about, are they applicable to both large and small organisations?

PS *Absolutely. Sometimes getting things right in productivity and wellness seem like the bane of a small employer's existence. They hear about their responsibilities in this area and all the wonderful things about supportive leadership, and all they can see is dollars - and dollars that they don't have. The good news for smaller organisations that don't have those resources is there is so much you can do. Let's look at a couple of things quickly. We talked about person-job matching and EQ, before, and you can do this through personality profiling and extensive recruitment selection. You can also do this during the interview by asking the potential employee about their hobbies and interests. You'll get information about their preferences and values and interests there. So you can also do this by just doing some reading, some professional development, and save money by actually doing the majority of the work yourself. I get all our staff to participate in all the tests that we use with people we work with. I get them all on site and, where possible, actually doing the various jobs. That doesn't cost an employer much to get key people to actually experience and understand the roles in their organisation, to get a feel for it – or, if they are a large employer, just pick a couple of different levels.*

ST So, Peter, what we're talking about here is fostering a willingness in employers to take the perspective of their employees.

PS *Exactly, and that is so consistent with supportive leadership. This is where it all comes together for us now, because in order to be a supportive leader, I also need to have integrity and competence, so I need to know what I'm talking about. I need to be able to walk in other people's shoes. Talking about that though, supportive leadership is another big issue that small employers typically feel quite distressed about. They feel as though they can't afford it, that they can't do anything about it, but they can buy books on emotional intelligence and hand them out, they can print information off the web, they can keep all their managers behind and have a tool box talk and in-service on leadership. It doesn't have to cost any money. They can also get in some coaches and get a coaching program going.*

There are so many things small employers can do if they are prepared to be flexible. Regarding flexible work practice, small employers can move the desks around, they can change the environment a little bit, get everyone onto lap tops, organise tasks so some can be done from home or from the office, they can change things around a bit. Regarding early intervention, small employers can talk to the local counsellor and the local GP before they need them so that they've got people to roll in if they need them. They can also have a peer support officer, someone who is prepared to take on that role. These things don't cost you much money.

Finally, regarding suitable duties – as we have said, hours can be moved around. They may not have the flexibility of a larger employer, but they can still be flexible. They may introduce or change duties, make small adjustments. We know that the quality of the changes, the quality of what is done to show people that you care, is more important than the quantity. My wife can attest to that after I brought home plastic flowers one night. Real flowers may be smaller, they may only be one rose, but just that one thing, that small thing of a high quality, is better than the big plastic bunch, and we can apply that to small employers. Just do one thing and do it well.

ST So, Peter, I assume then that it is also about fostering an air of authenticity in the workplace, and I guess we can best do that by using a model that is standardised, but also transparent.

PS *That's right, and by having a standardised model, we show consistency. Coming back to those 7 attributes of leaders, we show competency, we show integrity, we show equality more than anything else, and having transparency within this model just reinforces a supportive approach.*

Taking the Next Steps – Action Planning

ST Peter, when an employer considers the legal requirements of their workplace and psychological vulnerabilities of their employees, they could be forgiven for thinking that it is all just too hard. Do you think this is true, or is it just the case that we need to simplify the processes involved and provide action strategies, such as you have discussed, directly to managers and supervisors?

PS *Well I can relate to that last point that you've raised because, as an employer, I know how overwhelmed I can get sometimes with pay roll responsibilities and with staffing issues. As an organisational psychologist working in this area, I'm also aware of what we practise and preach, and I see that, at times, there could be a perception that it is all too hard and I can understand that. I can empathise with that as a business owner.*

As I wrap up our discussion around this, I think I would like to leave everyone with three steps, three key things they can do, because it's not that complicated when you get it all down to the basic ingredients.

The first step is to remember that all businesses run better when systems are documented and manualised – and that is the e-myth concept, Michael Gerber's book, a great resource for people. When we are talking about maintaining employee wellness, policies and procedures are absolutely critical, as is the training and the delivery to make sure the managers can be supportive and can display the right behaviours and document things accordingly.

The second step is ensuring that all front line managers across all levels of your business, no matter where they are, have very good supportive leadership skills – remember personal power and those 7 attributes. Make mentoring and training in this area the cornerstone of your internal business philosophy. See it permeate your business and link supportive leadership to the key drivers of profit and performance.

And finally, step three, as Sun Tzu, said in The Art of War, 'treat your troops with respect, integrity and equality' - recognise achievement and reward productive and profitable actions whenever possible, as well as promoting flexible work practices. Also, and most importantly, don't be afraid to manage negative performance, but when you do, be clear, specific and reasonable in your feedback, document issues and follow your policies

ST Peter, thankyou for your time. In brief, it would seem that to more effectively manage wellness at work and enhance productivity, a shift in mindset is required from thinking about this topic in terms of costs and risks of stress, to thinking of the value of wellness in terms of improved productivity and profitability for both the individuals and the organisation.