The “Mental Health Intervention Framework”:
The CPR equivalent for mental wellbeing

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On the 12th of September it will be R U OK? Day, and while we focus on making sure we check in with friends, family and colleagues, we also need to look at what organisations can do to reduce the risk of mental health issues and suicide amongst its employees.

Last year, in partnership with R U OK? Day, we conducted the Australian Workplace Relationships Survey, which looked at the current quality of relationships at work and its overall impact on our performance and wellbeing. Key findings from this survey included:

- Many Australian managers are lacking the ‘micro’ skills to hold meaningful and sometimes difficult conversations with staff about their work and performance;
- Only half of employees surveyed feel they can talk to their colleagues or managers about personal issues at work;
- For a large majority of our workplace population, an individual’s ability to be emotionally resilient, to handle pressures and demands, and to bounce back from adversity, is low;
- People, when dealing with a workplace relationship issue, are twice as likely to seek outside support (i.e from a health professional like a GP or psychologist) rather than raise the issue with Human Resources; and
- Employees have developed an “avoidance culture”, whereby they avoid dealing with, and talking about, relationship issues in the workplace, for example it found that:
  - 46% of people will start looking for a new job when they perceive they have a workplace relationship issue;
  - 48% of people take days off work when they perceive they have a workplace relationship issue.

So what impact does this have on our organisations...?

With employees becoming more and more likely to cover up relationship issues and the impact that is having on their wellbeing, it is becoming increasingly difficult for supervisors, managers and HR to recognise the symptoms of poor mental health!
Within the workplace we have become good at identifying risks to our physical wellbeing, with risk assessments, WHS committees, CAUTION signs and corrective procedures everywhere we look...

...but where are the policies and procedures on how to recognise someone experiencing symptoms of poor mental health? Where are the colourful posters depicting situations and how to respond when you suspect someone is not travelling well? Where are the Mental Health & Wellbeing First Aid Officers?

The truth is, while your organisation may have a policy in the employee handbook on mental health, this doesn’t necessarily mean people know how to help someone who is exhibiting signs of poor mental health, or even know how to recognise these signs in the first place.

Here, at the Centre for Corporate Health, we believe a holistic approach to managing an organisations’ wellbeing is key, with prevention always the most preferable method rather than the cost of treating a psychological disorder. However, with some individuals more prone to suffering symptoms of poor mental health than others, we would be living in a fantasy if we thought focusing only on prevention was the way forward. Our two pronged approach (detailed below) to managing an organizations’ mental wellbeing is currently being rolling out across numerous law firms, media companies, major retail brands and government agencies all over Australia:
1. **Prevent** – Provide training and coaching on Emotional Resilience, this gives employees the tools to roll with it, ride the wave, and not be as susceptible to symptoms of poor mental health when faced with change or a less than desirable situation.

2. **Manage** – Establish a customised best practice “Mental Health Intervention Framework” to make sure that when an employee starts to experience symptoms of poor mental health, managers, supervisors and HR know what signs to look for and are able to follow a procedure to prevent the situation escalating to from low to high risk. Think of the “Mental Health Intervention Framework” as CPR for someone’s mental/emotional wellbeing.

Putting together a “Mental Health Intervention Framework” is not as easy as printing a step by step poster and displaying it in the communal kitchen, there are various steps to go through to get it up and running.

We work with organisations from the very beginning by tailoring our best practice framework to fit in with their internal lines of communication so it is functional and not a one-size-fits-all approach (I have never been a fan of one size fits all clothing, nor am I partial to an ill-fitted framework for mental health). Once this has been designed, we then provide training to key people from the organization on what sits behind the framework and how to follow it in times of need. In this training we cover:

- **An introduction to mental health**: what is mental health; recognizing the signs at work and how people mask the signs.
- **How to manage high risk situations.** Who is at risk of suicide; what are the warning signs; how to determine if a person is at low, medium or high risk through best practice risk assessment and what is best practice action;
- **A walk through of the customized “Mental Health Intervention Framework”**, including case studies and best practice early intervention strategies;
- **Managing mental health at work**: your role and legal responsibilities.

We recently rolled this out for a top tier law firm, where key managers, Partners and HR all participated in the training. Our support to organizations doesn’t end there. We provide support through all steps of the framework, including Early Intervention Rehabilitation, Independent Psychological Assessments and general coaching assistance when managers and HR need to hold difficult conversations.

So when this year’s R U OK? Day rolls around on the 12th of September and you are starting the conversation, with these three little words, maybe you could consider thinking about what your organisations procedure is regarding managing mental health, should someone turn around and say “No, actually I’m not OK…”

**If you’re interested in finding out more information on our “Mental Health Intervention Framework”** contact us on 02 8243 1500 or email us at admin@cfch.com.au.