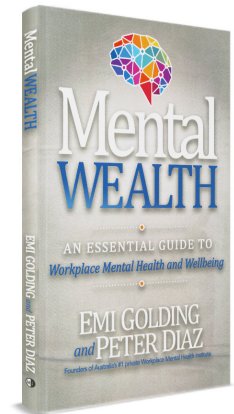


Mental Wealth

An Essential Guide to Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing

by **Emi Golding and Peter Diaz**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Each year, one in four people suffer from a mental disorder. Suicide rates are on the rise. Average psychological injury claims in Western countries average \$250,000 and are climbing. It's clear that whatever we've been doing to address this issue is not working. As a business leader, it's time to do something about it. There is a direct and powerful link between a team's mental health and the quality and quantity of output for a business. Mental Wealth is this link between a team's mental health and the bottom line.

In *Mental Wealth: An Essential Guide to Workplace Mental Health and Well-being*, authors Emi Golding and Peter Diaz show business leaders how to transform workplaces into happy, healthy, and psychologically safe places. A manager with the ability to join the dots and see how taking care of his or her team's mental health impacts the bottom line will be able to build happy, resilient, high-performing teams.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why mental health impacts the bottom line of an organization.
- How managers play a key role in the mental wealth of their team and organization.
- What a mentally wealthy workplace looks and feels like.
- Seven characteristics of a mentally wealthy workplace.

Managers are the Key to Mental Wealth

Managers are pivotal to a team's mental health. Research has shown time and again that people leave bosses, not jobs. That means you are massively influential - for better or worse. As a manager you are best placed to spot the warning signs of mental distress and take action before things get out of control. And if you're responsible for getting the best out of your team in a high-pressure environment, why shouldn't you be given the tools to build and maintain resilience? Bad mental health is very bad for you and your business, costing the economy billions of dollars every year. Good mental health is fun and means lots of good returns for you and your business. While poor managerial practices equal bad mental health, managers with good mental-health practices have extraordinary teams.

In the workplace, it is not the manager's role to be a counselor or therapist but the principles of respect, dignity, and choice are most certainly applicable. This is particularly important right now because mental health issues in the workplace appear to be getting worse. Not only that, but they come with a great cost - for the organizations that people work for as well as the people experiencing mental distress themselves. To define and, therefore, help managers build mental wealth in their organizations they can use pillars that were created to answer the question, 'What does a mentally healthy workplace look like?'

The 7 Pillars of a Mentally Wealthy Workplace

Workplace mental wealth describes the business potential of an organization in terms of being the direct result of how well the organization fosters the mental health of its people. It's a measure of your organization's ability to create, collaborate, problem-solve, and take initiative. It's a measure of your team's resilience and ability to keep going when things are tough and uncertain.

Mentally wealthy workplaces display the following characteristics:

- People are focused, creative, and highly productive, and free of debilitating chronic stress and anxiety.
- The dynamic between people is one of respect and inclusion, where people feel free to voice opinions and contribute ideas, for which they are valued as an employee and as a person.

- Leaders truly recognize the value of people and encourage diversity in values and styles. They actively curtail behaviors that diminish or demean each other.
- There is a positive organizational climate, absent of bullying and harassment, mental injury and stress claims, and mental health crises.

To define, and therefore help managers build mental wealth in their organizations, they should implement the 7 Pillars of a Mentally Wealthy Workplace.

Pillar 1: We Not You

Mentally healthy workplaces think in terms of 'we' not 'you'. This means that the focus is not on 'those' individuals with a mental health problem, but on the health and wellbeing of all employees, managers included. It recognizes that mental health problems can affect anyone, and that we all go through challenges in life and work at one time or another.

At the individual level, the question is not: 'What do YOU need to do to get better.' It's 'What can WE do, together, to be healthy and perform?' At the organizational level, it's about creating policies and procedures that work for any of us, should WE become unwell or need assistance at any point in time.

Using 'us' and 'them' language can be a sign of existing stigma within the organization. A mentally wealthy workplace displays unconditional positive regard. This is a term from psychology which describes a position where the help provider has an unwavering respect and appreciation for the person receiving help as a good and worthy human being, regardless of that person's particular behaviors or demeanor. In an organization demonstrating unconditional positive regard, people are convinced that managers value and appreciate them as contributing members despite their mental health challenges and, at times, even because of them.

Pillar 2: Organizational Plasticity

Organizational plasticity is a key trait of mentally wealthy workplaces, where authentic flexibility replaces fear and rigidity. The modern workplace recognizes the benefits of a diverse workforce, where each employee brings their unique blend of skills, talents, and background to the job at hand. No longer is the employee expected to fulfil the role of a machine in exactly the same way the next person would. Instead, employees are expected to think, problem-solve, show initiative, and so on. But in return for these demands, and when recruiting a diverse workforce, we must be willing to

Learn what works for them to feel good at work. . . You don't have to read their minds. You can simply ask them.

cater to the different and unique needs and styles of those employees. We need to be flexible to accommodate and get the best out of different people.

Managers can apply this pillar by getting to know your own mental health filter, or unconscious way that you view mental health. Knowing your own filter, be it medical, spiritual or something else, allows you to see your own bias and then be careful not to push it onto your employees. You also need to get to know individual employees that report to you. Learn what works for them to feel good at work. Find out the ways the organization can be more flexible and better accommodate the needs of employees. You don't have to read their minds. You can simply ask them. At the organizational level, this means offering a range of avenues for support that cover different filters. For example, for people with a trauma filter, do you have information about various support groups in the area? For people with a diet and exercise filter, do you offer subsidized gym memberships? As you explore the different filters, you start to expand the range of options which you can offer employees, so they can select the things that will help them.

Pillar 3: Nothing About Me Without Me

Mentally wealthy workplaces practice dignified inclusion rather than secrecy. Many people who have recovered from severe mental ill-health have said that one of the things that made their recovery so difficult was when so called professionals and people trying to help them made decisions about their life without their involvement. Some common decisions that people with mental health problems have had made for them by others are things like when they will be hospitalized and released, what medication and how much of it they will take, and what they are capable of doing or not. When you remove a person's ability to make decisions for themselves, they become more and more disempowered, and more and more incapable of making those decisions for themselves in the future.

This pillar is about respecting the dignity of the person, and including them, rather than creating secrecy and distrust.

In short, no conversation is to take place, and no decisions are to be made, within including the person whom they're about. Managers can apply this pillar simply by making a commitment to include the person in any conversations about their mental health and wellbeing or their career. At the organizational level, it is about making sure there is true engagement of stakeholders at all levels of decision-making about mental health. For example, this could mean including people with an experience of mental ill health in the design of workplace mental health policies and seeking their input when it comes to planning and implementing activities related to mental health and wellbeing.

Pillar 4: Total Integration

Mentally wealthy organizations see resilience and wellbeing as an integral part of their culture, not just an add-on. To have a mentally healthy workplace, an organization can't simply bolt on some mental health policies, procedures, or activities. It needs to integrate these into existing processes. For example, the Wellbeing Committee plans an event where everyone comes together, talks about how important mental health is, and that's it for another year. When these events occur in isolation, they are usually seen as being tokenistic, even if that wasn't the intention. Mental health and wellbeing need to permeate your policies and how you move the organization.

At the managerial level, this is about consistency in your interactions with every person. You can't say you care about mental health one minute, and then take actions that are not helpful for a person's mental health the next. At the organizational level, this will mean reviewing existing policies and processes and planning your framework with ongoing commitment, not just a one-off event.

Pillar 5: Mutual Responsibility

Mutual responsibility is about moving from a culture of blame to one of mutual concern, where everyone is seeking a positive outcome. Everyone shares responsibility for mental health - their own and their team members'. In a culture of blame, people pass the buck. A manager may think, 'It's not my problem - people should leave their personal prob-

lems at home.’ That’s simply not going to happen. People are people, not robots. It can be very difficult for people to simply ‘switch off’ whatever else is going on for them outside of work. And besides, who’s to say that the issue originated at home? Workplaces can themselves be toxic and, oftentimes, no amount of self-care on the part of the unwell person is going to make a difference if the environment they come to everyday is full of bullies, unrealistic expectations, or constantly shifting goalposts.

This pillar empowers individuals to take action. At the individual level, it’s about supporting the person to do what they need to do to stay well. For organizations, it’s about taking responsibility for their legal and moral requirements.

Pillar 6: Understanding Complexity

This pillar recognizes that we need to move from very simplistic understandings of mental health to really appreciating the complexity of the topic. When we think we know enough about something ourselves, rather than seeking expert advice we risk complacency. Even if you’ve been through a mental health issue yourself, or have supported someone with one, it doesn’t mean you have the full picture when it comes to all potential issues, especially as they relate to the workplace. By recognizing that people and situations are complex, taking a step back, and coming at the problem with an enquiring mind, and an intention to help the individual, you can achieve a lot.

At the individual level, we can apply this pillar by recognizing the unique circumstances and explanations of each person, and not trying to ‘solve’ the mental health issue for the employee. Know the limits of your role and expertise and don’t be afraid to ask for help if you need it. For the organization, it is about seeking expert advice in the planning and

delivery of workplace mental health activities, so the really do get desired outcomes for the business and employees.

Pillar 7: Wrap-around Strategies

A preference for integrating mental health initiatives over applying Band-Aid solutions demonstrates an organization’s commitment to ‘wrap-around strategies.’ Awareness programs, identifying ‘first responders’ that employees can speak to when needed, and Employee Assistance Programs are all good initiatives, but they are often offered as the only strategy. You don’t want a situation where there needs to be a crisis before we put some plans or activities in place. You need a combination of prevention, early intervention, and elegant response systems.

Managers need to make sure they have all the stages covered in terms of how they look after all team members’ wellbeing in the absence of any problems, how they identify stress early if any team member is struggling, and how they respond for an early intervention or in a crisis situation. Organizations need prevention strategies like resilience programs, supportive policies, and management training that will save time, money, and suffering for everyone.

As a manager, you are called to action. Building a mentally wealthy culture requires you to ensure the psychological needs of a diverse workforce are catered for. It is well worth the effort in the form of more profit, a better culture, more creativity and innovation, and the moral benefits of knowing you’ve done the right thing. Commit to taking one action today that will improve the mental health or wellbeing of your team or organization.



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