- Work environment

The importance of mental health in the workplace

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NOW more than ever, it's important to prepare yourself and your team to remain mentally healthy.

Starting, growing and sustaining a business can be a rewarding experience. However, it's not always an easy journey. Running a business is a bit like riding a rollercoaster; it's full of highs and lows. It's important to know how to cope when inevitable challenges arise.

At first it may not be obvious how the pressure of running a business will affect a person's mental health. Understanding this can help a business owner identify early on when additional assistance is needed to keep functioning at an optimum level.

What do we mean by mental health?

The term 'mental health' is frequently misunderstood. It is often used as a substitute for mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety conditions, schizophrenia and others. But according to the World Health Organisation, mental health is "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community".

What is mental health in the workplace?

When we talk about mental health in the workplace, we are looking at how the business environment affects us – either positively or negatively – as well as the effect our mental health has on our ability to do our jobs.

Thinking about creating a mentally healthy workplace is just as important as thinking about your approach to marketing or finance. What will you do to ensure you and your team develop a level of resilience that you can draw upon when needed? Taking a proactive approach to mental health in your workplace is a great investment for everyone who is involved in the business and everyone has a role to play, both in looking after their own mental health and creating a mentally healthy workplace. There are two key areas you can address to ensure you have a mentally healthy workplace. They are:

As the business owner identifying your own mental health priorities; and

If you employ people – creating a mentally healthy workspace for them.

Be proactive about your mental health. There are a number of things you can do to care for your mental health. This may include:

- Make time to exercise each day
- Practice mindfulness
- Adopt work/life boundaries
- Connect with others

Look out for mental health red flags. It's important to know the mental health indicators that may require attention. These include:

- Physical signs
- Changes in behaviour
- Unclear thinking

• Feeling sad or anxious regularly
• Disconnecting from others
• Feeling overwhelmed

Mental health challenges in business are quite common, and help is available. With good support it's possible to overcome them and continue to operate your small business. Here are some steps you can take:

• Talk to someone
• Check out online resources available
• Stay connected
• Get physical
• Create a mental health strategic plan

Create a mentally healthy workspace for others by normalising mental health in the workplace. It helps to reduce stigma and creates a space where it's safe to talk about and address mental health challenges. People often work closely together so it's important to create a workplace that respects individual experiences.

Provide your staff with access to mental health resources, share information and tips about managing mental health, and make sure local support service details are readily available. Also embrace workplace campaigns like 'R U OK? Day' to get your team talking about workplace mental health.

For more information visit mgatma. com.au/ma-resources/mental-healthin-the-workplace