

A background image showing the hands and forearms of several people of different ethnicities and skin tones. The hands are positioned around the perimeter of the page, with some reaching towards the center, creating a sense of unity and support. The background is white, and there is a blue triangular graphic in the bottom-left corner.

The H.E.A.R.T. Approach

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Here are some interesting figures for you...

Work-related stress, depression or anxiety accounts for 44% of work-related ill health and 54% of working days lost, in 2018/19 in Britain. (1)

And a recent survey found that 56% of social work respondents were emotionally exhausted and 75% said they were concerned about burnout. (2)

Would you like a happy, less stressful work environment?

Would you like your staff to be better equipped to deal with day to day workplace stress?

The H.E.A.R.T. Approach is About Limiting the Impact of Workplace Stress for Social Workers

Maybe your social work organization is incredibly demanding, continuously connected and always working.

Perhaps your social work staff are frequently stressed, being subjected to some of society's most difficult situations. So absenteeism is high and individuals' performance is sometimes a bit hit and miss.

Possibly some of your staff are regularly stressed out which affects the quality of their work.

Imagine this instead..

Imagine your organisational culture limits workplace stress, employees are happier, healthier and even more engaged. So, there's less sick leave and employee turnover.

What if your organisation enables staff to maintain a more confident mindset, which has a positive impact on the vulnerable adults and children they support?

And imagine your workers are much more resilient, having 'bouncebackability' from hardship and adversity. They bend and adjust better when under pressure.

If that's where you'd like to be, how do you get there?

This guide sets out the H.E.A.R.T. Approach, which is all about changing your social work organisation's culture in a way that reduces the effect of stress on staff.



Why change the culture...

Whether it's the 24-hour news cycle or work-related calls in our off-hours, it's well known that stress can be a real danger to health and well-being. And being in a profession that serves society's most vulnerable in circumstances of poverty, abuse and disadvantage, social workers experience the pain of stress more than most. Their resilience is often challenged, as is their health, well-being and ability to do the job consistently well.

Against a backdrop of complex, ever increasing and demanding caseloads, diminishing resources, and anxiety about things going wrong, for social workers to fire regularly on all cylinders they need to manage stress well.

Employers have a legal and moral obligation to protect staff well-being. It is after all in the organisation's best interest – happier, better engaged employees, less staff turnover, less absenteeism, more high performing staff, better outcomes for service users, an effectively functioning organisation, better inspection results.

Why now...

There's nothing like the present for dealing with stress. Leave it any longer and issues that adversely affect individuals and blight organisations continue to make things worse.

So, what are the elements of the H.E.A.R.T. Approach to changing workplace culture?

Let's take a look ...

HUMOUR

Where employees enjoy their time at work, there's a greater chance of attracting and retaining the best.

Humour may seem alien to the serious, crisis-driven social work culture. According to research from establishments such as the London Business School, laughter is good for us.

Now, some bosses believe that employees who have fun, aren't working. But laughter brings a host of positivity, encourages motivation and collaboration and helps us connect, build and nurture relationships across ranks and cultures. It's a stress soother, a health heightener and a burnout blocker. In workplaces where humour is openly shared there's a more creative, engaged and productive workforce.

So how do you create a culture where laughter is integral?

- 1** Start at the top, where senior managers model and encourage it.
- 2** Give staff the go-ahead to have fun, whilst being clear on the boundaries. Remember, discriminatory comments should be a no-go area.
- 3** Set up a "fun at work group" tasked with initiating ideas for bringing humour into the workplace; for instant, teams could include a laughter slot in team meetings; and include a fun monthly goal.



**Get your people laughing
and you'll notice a more
positive environment
and more positive
employees.**

EXERCISE

If you're not caring for yourself,
you're unable to care well for others.

It's a well-known fact that if you're not caring for yourself, you're less able to care for others. And you'll struggle to get through tough times. Self-care involves regular exercise, the physical benefits of which are well known. These include fitness, a healthy weight, increased energy and productivity, and protection from chronic illnesses, such as heart disease.

There are emotional and psychological benefits too. Science and research studies have proven that regular exercise is good for one's mental health and helps reduce depression, anxiety and poor sleep quality. In short, it's a mood booster and protects against the harmful impact of stress. And those who exercise regularly, regardless of age, have been shown to function better on a cognitive level. Such benefits contribute to increased resilience.

How do you create a culture that promotes exercise?

1

Emphasise the value of regular physical exercise by including articles on the topic in any organisational newsletter.

2

Encourage the setting up of sports teams, (e.g. football teams) and the organisation of activities such as running or yoga clubs.

3

Provide designated secure bicycle parking areas as well as fitness areas in the workplace. And provide changing rooms with showers where possible.

**Promote the value of
regular exercise and you'll
enable your staff to
become fitter and
more resilient.**



ASSOCIATIONS

Whilst it's down to each individual to take responsibility for establishing their own support network, shouldn't the organisation take responsibility too?

The demanding nature of social work makes supportive associations crucial. Being supported during bad times and cheered on during good times by those we trust, enhance the quality of our lives. Research indicates that those who are supported tend to be less stressed and healthier – emotionally and physically. Not only does support reduce stress, and boost joy, it helps to increase our lifespan too. When an individual has numerous supportive relationships, dealing with stress is less difficult as different relationships provide different elements of support.

Given the nature of social work, staff supervision is crucial. This is the space for providing regular support, feedback and oversight on case management, performance, professional development, and health and well-being during stressful times.

So, what associations can the organisation provide?

1

Ensure each social work staff member gets regular one to one supervision that's formal and unplanned if needed, prioritised, safe, consistent, and without distractions or haste.

2

Invest in coaches, either internal or external when individuals experience major challenges that require additional time, support and deeper focus.

3

Enable the development of support networks where minority groups such as BAME, LGBTQ and disabled people can meet.



Give your staff places for off-loading and giving and receiving specialised support that might not be readily available elsewhere..

RELAXATION

Nearly everyone has experienced the “sad desk lunch” ...

Nearly everyone has experienced the “sad desk lunch” where people endlessly plug away on their computer with one hand while balancing a fork-full of food in the other. However, studies are increasingly identifying the importance of breaks, especially for lunch, and the benefits it has on productivity and mental health. Breaks and relaxation help to boost creativity and give people a mental breather so they return refreshed and more efficient.

A North American study[3], found that 20% of workers thought that taking a lunch break would make them look bad in the eyes of their bosses. And they were almost right because nearly 25% of supervisors surveyed, perceived employees taking lunch breaks as less hardworking.

Help change this workplace perception by encouraging staff to:

1

Have lunches away from their desks, their phones and the tensions of open-plan working.

2

Take a lunchtime walk and have time out to relax and refresh over their lunch breaks.

**Encourage everyone
to overcome the afternoon
slump, whilst improving their
physical and mental
health.**



TIME

Research conducted by Timewise found that 87% of employees would value flexible working...

Work has increasingly inched its way into more of our free-time, making it harder to manage workplace stress. The always-on-and-available nature of our digital lives means that it can be progressively harder to escape work outside work hours. Living to work rather than working to live seems to be an increasing feature of the 21st century workplace.

Research conducted by Timewise [4] found that 87% of employees would value flexible working. The Covid19 pandemic lockdown has shown that this can work well for social workers when line managers remain available and supportive. Workers value being trusted to manage their time and where and how they work.

So how do you enable your staff to balance their in-work and off-work times?

1

Let them know that it's okay to leave on time. Encourage them to avoid working late at the office. Model this sort of behavior and you're more likely to influence employees.

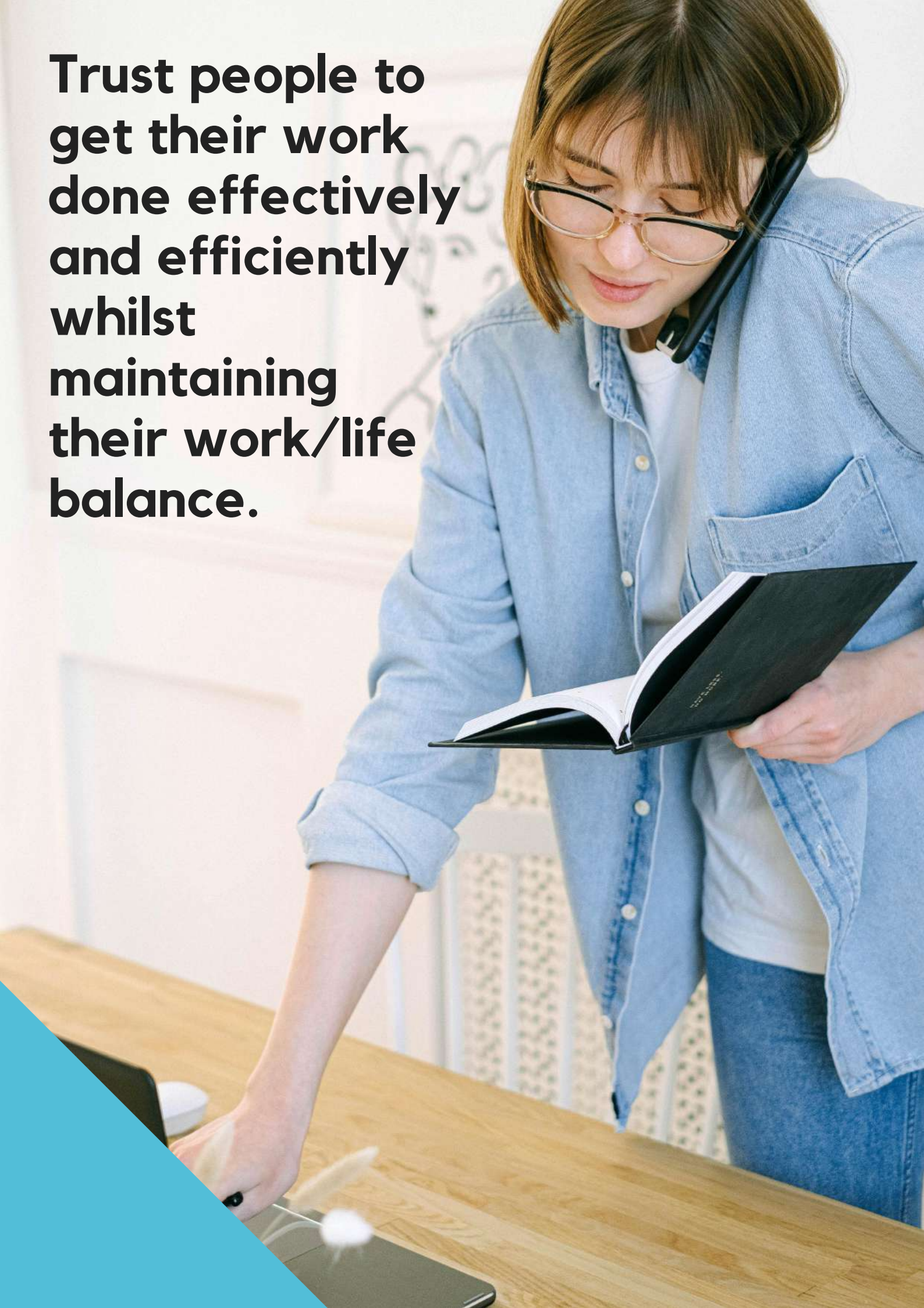
2

Avoid contacting your staff with work-related issues during their off hours and thereby encourage them to protect their social and rest times.

3

Enable flexible working. Offering flexible home-working opportunities and making it gender-neutral, would help with employee engagement and improve work/life balance.

**Trust people to
get their work
done effectively
and efficiently
whilst
maintaining
their work/life
balance.**



Now for the conclusion...

Social workers are often misunderstood by the public, overlooked and sometimes denigrated. But wouldn't you agree that social workers form a group of the UK's unsung heroes and heroines? Given the context, it takes a special kind of dedication to do their line of work. However, even heroes and heroines need support and help—and they deserve it.

Be a good people organisation that cares for its staff. Take the H.E.A.R.T Approach to developing an organisational culture that deals effectively with stress.

As a former social worker and manager, I have first-hand experience of the demands and effects of stress in social work. Now, with over 11 years' experience as a coach working primarily with women social work managers, I've enabled them to address the impact of on-going, stressful working, and how to sustainably strengthen their performance, well-being and confidence.

Take Yasmin, for example, a social work team manager...

Yasmin was referred for coaching following a work incident which diminished her alertness, energy and habits of excellence, triggering withdrawal and sick leave. Together, using Winning Pathways Coaching techniques, we explored her context - increased demands, reduced resources, intensified frustration which leaked into her social life, and disabled the restorative self-care that enabled her to deal effectively with stress.

She established new goals and priorities, built new habits as part of a foundation for inner calm, greater focus and energy, and strengthened her resilience to absorb future challenging work and sustain the high performance she expected of herself. "This is a better me", she said. "I will draw on her when I need to."

Want to find out more?

Contact me now for a chat.

Let's talk about how coaching can help build the resilience of your social work managers and other staff, reduce stress levels in your organisation and save you time and money.

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