

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

End-of-year opportunity: Building mental health and the resilience of your people and business

The end of a calendar year is a chance to unwind and recharge. For many though, the pressure of pre-Christmas deadlines, increased traffic congestion and expectations of us over the holiday period can increase stress and worry.

Managing challenges

Many of those challenges can't be avoided. However, according to Safety Risk expert Keith Govias, they can be prepared for and managed. Meaning your people – and your organisation – are better placed to return stronger and more resilient for the New Year, and into the future.

“So firstly it's about what are businesses doing to plan for recovery of their people in the second half of December and into January, because you come back and it's almost like you get hit with a sledgehammer again after that end of year break,” Keith says.

“And then it's about challenging how we reflect on what we have learned in the past few years and plan for how we can do it better the year after.

“Often, businesses don't take time to reflect on ‘what have we learnt from our mistakes?’ ‘Can we make this better?’ Do we engage with our drivers, our schedulers, with our loaders to ask them what did and didn't work well and make some tweaks.

“That's the business risk. From an individual perspective, drivers might feel anxiety leading up to having time off over the Christmas period, having to see family or dealing with absence or loneliness.

“This time of year can be very challenging if you don't have family and friends around you or if you are embedded in a lifestyle of loneliness as a long-haul truck driver, that might be quite challenging for you. This is one of the reasons we see many people get on their boat or travel somewhere where you can get away from people.

“So it's about acknowledging what the anxiety is and what triggers it – is it a business driven anxiety, is it personal anxiety? – and being able to embrace how people are dealing with it. Because mental health is personal but can be influenced by organisational factors, or it's personal and can play out in terms of poor organisational behaviour in the workplace.”



Practical coping measures

The positive news for business owners is that building mental health and resilience is not as difficult as many believe, and every organisation already has many of the tools and information needed to help.

The starting points, Keith points out, are simply having conversations with your people, and reviewing existing data to highlight where to focus your efforts.

Keith will elaborate on practical measures to create higher achieving and more resilient organisations as part of NRSP's December webinar, [Coping as a business and supporting mental health during the holiday season](#).

The webinar will also explore issues that impact worker mental health and business resilience across the Christmas and New Year periods and how shifting perspectives on mental health and providing psychologically safe workplaces can improve general business practices.

"Start by thinking about some of the key accounts where you know you've had the most complaints and what fed into that. Look at the data points you do get. Speak to your own drivers, to your customers, and try and get a sense of is it a particular process, is it a particular task or site that's driving this? If it's particular personalities, is that driven by a lack of understanding of cultures, is it English literacy, is it the types of forms or processes you are communicating (see breakout boxes)?"

"Start with the data points and work processes that you do have and then look at other aspects of your business that might be impacted, because they've got their own pressures."

Connecting the left hand with the right

"I was with a Logistics client recently," Keith Govias explains, "and they have a gatehouse. At the gatehouse, you need to present certain paperwork and if you don't have all that paperwork, your load is rejected. If you don't have your driver's licence in hard copy so they can put it through a scanning machine, you're rejected."

"So you have drivers turning up who have no responsibility for the paperwork that's submitted because that's done by head office, and if one form is missing and they know they have a particular run that's been planned and this throws the entire run out, it's frustrating."

"It might just mean there is a checklist provided to check 'have I sent all this information?' or maybe if drivers wear a high-vis vest, have a pocket sleeve so that your driver's licence sits in there so it is with you at all times."

"Understanding those process failure blockages and coming up with ways to unravel them can be very useful."



Communication uncovers practical solutions

“Part of the solution is starting with talking to the person at the coalface. If you know you have a particular personality that’s open to just having a chat with you, go for it. If they’re more likely to break into a chat in the lunchroom or if you have a sausage sizzle, and they’re more relaxed because they’ve got a ‘sanga’ in their hands, use that as an opportunity.

“Talk to them generally, make it part of the conversation. Give them free choice to vent, then give them the opportunity: ‘what can you suggest for us to fix this?’ The most practical solutions are driven by your workers because they know how to fix the issue.

“Sometimes when we talk about mental health, it can seem like it’s aerospace or high-tech maths, when in reality it’s really about do you have conversations with your people and do you know enough about them, which isn’t work-related, to understand what’s going on in their lives and for them to feel comfortable that they can talk to you?

“It’s not ‘I’m talking to you about this because we’re in a performance review’ or because you got injured and you’re on a workers compensation claim and suddenly I know your name and you’re of interest to me.

“It’s that I know your name, I know you have two kids, I know you love restoring cars and going on fishing trips and ‘hey it’s a long weekend coming up, where are you going to this weekend?’ It’s just regularly taking the time out to have those conversations.”

“Think about your schedulers who take bookings from third parties, customer service teams who are getting abuse. What are the most common causes of complaint and when do they come in – is it mainly on a Monday or on a Thursday or Friday? All of that gives you a little piece of a puzzle that can help you unlock whether the first day back after a weekend is where these problems usually happen, or it tends to be when we’re at our most tired later in the week, so what can we do as a business to address that?

“Quite often, especially with some of the workplace support and job design or job control aspects, as employers we do what we need to do with the issues that are here in the short term.”

“Rarely do businesses actually give themselves an opportunity to plan for the fact this is cyclical and they’ll see the same issues in another 12 months.

“But if they can find the time to consult and to review their processes and get the groundwork right, incrementally they will see improvements and it will likely result in improved culture, improved productivity and maybe free up some more time for other tasks.

“This is about resilience and building resilient organisations. It doesn’t have to be a pure focus on mental health but if you get it right, good mental health, good safety, really is good business practice.”

Register [here](#) for the NRSPP webinar, ‘Coping as a business and supporting mental health during the holiday season’, on December 8.

