**Is Staff Wellbeing Your Problem?**

***Blog post by Karen Warren – KW Inner Strength***

Posted 04 September 2018

<https://wcnwchamber.org.uk/is-staff-wellbeing-your-problem-blog-post-by-karen-warren-kw-inner-strength/>

I burned out at 32, working in a banking and IT environment, which was my fault. But the fact that no one asked if I should be working until 8pm most nights didn’t help. No one asked about my wellbeing, my work/life balance, my access to support. There was a phone number I could have called but I didn’t, I was too busy working. I used to tell my staff about it though – not good ☹ My passion for workforce wellbeing comes from a very personal place but only because I’ve seen people walk away from organisations, looking like shadows of their former selves when a conversation and a kind and compassionate challenge of what their self care looked like could have made all the difference. They probably would have left the organisation anyway but they could have left with their heads held high, smiling and moving on to exciting new challenges. Whose responsibility is that?

Depending on the size of your organisation you may or may not have on site Human Resources, Learning and Development or Organisational Development teams. For many organisations you access that expertise from provider organisations as and when you need support and that’s a cost effective solution, but who is the barometer for how things are going in your workplace? Who has a general sense of who’s OK, working happily and effectively and who’s not? If you have an Office Manager they’ll often be that barometer, they’ll often be the first person staff will turn to if they’re struggling or if someone’s annoying them in the office! The Office Manager will often have a greater holistic sense of what’s going on than the individual Team Leaders will and can highlight potential office conflicts or individuals who seem a bit out of sorts.

So what happens if you don’t have an Office Manager? Team Leaders and Line Managers are often too busy to prioritise staff wellbeing and to hold regular team and one to one meetings and they focus on their own team, quite rightly so who has the overall view of all the teams? More Senior Managers will be focusing on high level operational and strategic issues so is there a gap between that and workforce wellbeing? Senior Managers usually only get to hear about workforce related issues when things escalate so in the meantime everyone’s doing the best they can which is OK unless issues with your workforce’s wellbeing are starting to undermine productivity.

In their simplest terms, Human Resources departments work to define staff terms and conditions, and ensure performance review systems are in place and carried out. Learning and Development teams support people’s training and development requirements and ensure things like statutory and mandatory training provisions are in place and completed. Organisational Development teams focus on staff engagement and wellbeing, along with the wider development requirements of the organisation. The responsibilities of these teams are often combined into the HR Department for instance who have specific individuals who focus on aspects of learning and development and organisational development. If you access these types of services from a provider organisation they might not know your workforce well enough to be that barometer, to know whether things generally are OK or not. So who’s responsible for your workforce wellbeing?

Ultimately, your workforce are responsible for their wellbeing and should escalate issues that are affecting their work, either in terms of their working hours perhaps, or their ability to perform specific tasks due to illness. Wellbeing can be defined as many things, with physical and mental health issues at the forefront of that but can also include family or relationship problems, performance anxiety, workplace conflicts or carer responsibilities, all of which can add pressure to a person’s life, which can then affect their ability and/or focus in the workplace. The key to ensuring workplace wellbeing is to make sure conversations are being had with your workforce and if work pressures are making Team Leaders and Line Managers struggle to do that it’s worth thinking about your organisational approach to that. You can’t outsource workforce wellbeing, it comes from within, however much external support you throw at it. People need to think you care about them, about whether they’re OK and are able to fulfil the job you’ve employed them to do. That is your responsibility, I believe, to make sure they’re up to the job you employed them for. Do you know that about all of your staff?

A good wellbeing conversation might go something like this:

* How are things going?
* What’s working well for you?
* What’s frustrating you?
* What would you change if you could?
* Is there anything I can do to help with things?

I appreciate that conversation could go in a hundred different directions but the important thing is to bring it back to them, how things are and if they need any help. If you ask regularly small issues usually get discussed, aired and resolved. If you don’t ask very often conversations can go on for ages, you get to hear a list of the fifty thousand things that are wrong with the place and then you become less inclined to have those conversations. There’s nothing wrong with saying ‘I hear what you’re saying but I don’t have a magic wand unfortunately’ as long as you say that respectfully! We all want to be heard, it’s part of how well we feel so see if you can build that into your working practices. A lunch time drop in session with a Senior Manager can be a great way to help people vent their frustrations and offer suggestions for change. But only if you’re brave enough of course!

I’m always interested to receive comments and feedback on my articles so please email me at kw.innerstrength@outlook.com if you have experiences, positive or less than brilliant about your organisation’s workplace wellbeing. All feedback will be held confidentially.