

12 - 18 OCTOBER 2018

THE WEEKLY FOR HOSPITALITY LEADERS

THE CATERER

HOTELS • RESTAURANTS • FOODSERVICE • PUBS & BARS



THE MENTAL HEALTH SPECIAL

Fighting back

Chef Andrew Clarke on battling depression, plus The Caterer's survey on mental health in hospitality and how you can better support your staff



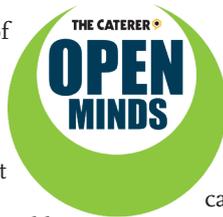
Working with you in mind

Since I joined *The Caterer* at the start of the year, some important themes have come up time and again, because they affect so many people, in all parts of the industry, from top to bottom. Mental health is possibly the most prominent of these issues.

This is an industry particularly susceptible to mental ill health, writes Hospitality Action chief executive Mark Lewis in this week's issue, with pressure worn as a badge of honour, as well as long hours, split shifts and adrenaline peaks and crashes.

Last month, *The Caterer* carried out an industry-wide survey to examine the true picture of mental health in hospitality and to see what's changed since our last survey on this issue in 2012. More than 700 of you shared your views and you can read the results on page 20. What's clear to me is while the industry is improving, there are plenty of areas it must do better.

This week's cover star, chef Andrew Clarke, talks openly about his own experiences and why the industry needs to do more to support its people.



"I don't blame hospitality for anything that's happened to me," he says. "But by trying to cushion a few parts of it, hopefully our industry will be viewed as a great place to work."

It's for this reason that we've dedicated this week's issue of *The Caterer* to mental health in hospitality. Our special report features advice from those who have experienced problems along with coping strategies, details of the help available and advice for businesses on how to better support their staff.

The Caterer's mission is to help you build better businesses and better careers. We fight your corner, have your back and champion the issues most important to you.



As you will see, there's plenty of support available for those in need and willingness from the industry to make changes for the better.

Chris Gamm, editor, *The Caterer*
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"Employers need to create an environment in which hospitality mental health concerns are as valid as a bad back or broken leg"

Mark Lewis, chief executive, Hospitality Action



"Don't hold back – say everything you're feeling, with at least one person. Tell them exactly how you feel and be 100% honest with them."

Ben Crittenden, chef-proprietor, Stark, Broadstairs



"We can't necessarily do anything about pay, we can't necessarily do anything about the hours, but we can do a lot about bullying"

Andrew Clarke, chef-patron, St Leonards, London

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Reassess your attitude to mental health

Create an environment in which hospitality mental health concerns are as valid as a broken leg, and you might just save someone's life, says *Mark Lewis*

“I told my head chef I was suffering with depression. He told me to take another Prozac and shut up.”

This conversation, reported first-hand to me, sums up the response of too many hospitality managers to mental health problems across their teams. There's an enduring lack of societal empathy towards mental wellness. Symptoms of physical health problems are plain to see: burns to the hands, a broken leg. But when mental ill-health strikes, the symptoms are often invisible.

Hospitality workers regularly weather a perfect storm of stress-inducing influences: pressure; long hours; split shifts; adrenaline peaks and crashes; the need to wear your 'game face'; having to guard against negative reviews... Pressure is worn as a badge of honour. Little wonder, then, when pressure graduates to stress and mental wellness is stretched to snapping point.

When problems strike, embarrassment or shame prevent too many people from admitting to them. There's also the worry that doing so might delay that next step up the ladder. Who wants to promote a flakey employee, right?

At Hospitality Action, I hear many stories of lives made better. But not all stories have happy endings. Too often, people with mental health issues soldier on until breaking point, with managers none the wiser. Too often, suicide is the first – and last – discernible symptom.

Against such a landscape I applaud *The Caterer's* focus on the mental wellness imperative. Managing your team's stress levels is important for two reasons. First, keeping its workforce healthy and happy is the right thing for a caring and enlightened employer to do. Second, a healthy and happy workforce is also a work-ready and productive one. Stress can result in high sickness absence, high staff turnover, low morale and under-performance.

Research findings reported elsewhere in this magazine make uncomfortable reading. We recently conducted research of our own. Asked if their job was stressful, a worrying 80% said yes, sometimes or most of the time; and 51% – more than half! – described their job as stressful most or all of the time.

Consolidating our research and *The Caterer's*, take any 10 of your employees, and seven of them either have or have had a mental health challenge – while eight of them are regularly experiencing stress. It's a toxic mix and something needs to change.

Employers need to do two things. First, create an environment in which hospitality mental health concerns are as valid as a bad



“Too often, people with mental health issues soldier on until breaking point, with managers none the wiser”

back or broken leg. Our research suggests progress is being made: 56% of respondents said employees are more likely to discuss mental health issues with employers than previously. However, the other 44% used vocabulary like “stigma”, “taboo”, “weak”, “embarrassed”, “macho”, “brutal”, “scared” and “militaristic”. Maintaining a culture where these words apply is unacceptable.

Second, take proactive steps. Hospitality Action's Employee Assistance Programme offers one route. It offers a comprehensive suite of employee welfare benefits, providing specialist, independent and confidential advice and support, 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. The annual per-person

cost of £5 equates to 45 minutes' labour on current minimum wage.

But that's only one answer. Look to your systems, policies and benefits. Create better lines of communication between managers and employees. Train managers to spot and deal with mental health issues. Hold mental health awareness days.

When you close this week's issue, I urge you to make a pledge that you'll reassess your attitude to mental health. Do this, and you might just save someone's life.

Mark Lewis is chief executive of Hospitality Action, the industry's charity

Mental health in hospitality

The Caterer investigates

Following World Mental Health Day this week, *Katherine Price* looks at the results of a survey conducted by The Caterer to examine the problems hospitality workers have with their mental health and how they feel they could be better supported

The hospitality industry was shaken on 8 June when it was announced that American chef, author and television personality Anthony Bourdain had taken his own life. Bourdain had always spoken candidly about his mental health and problems with addiction, and his death led to others sharing their own stories of mental illness.

According to mental health charity Mind, approximately one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year. Mind also says that while the overall number of people with mental health problems has not changed significantly in recent years, it appears that how people cope with them is getting worse, as the number of people who self-harm or have suicidal thoughts is increasing.

A survey of London chefs by the Unite union last year reported that 51% said they suffer from depression due to being overworked, and nearly a third (27%) said they drink alcohol to see them through their shift.

In 2012, *The Caterer* ran an award-winning, month-long campaign to raise awareness of mental health issues in the hospitality sector and discovered a widespread problem and a lack of support in the workplace to confront it. People with mental health problems were struggling to speak openly to their employers about their illnesses.

Six years on, where we are now as a sector? Have things improved? Are people feeling able to talk about their mental health with their employers, and are employers themselves getting enough support?

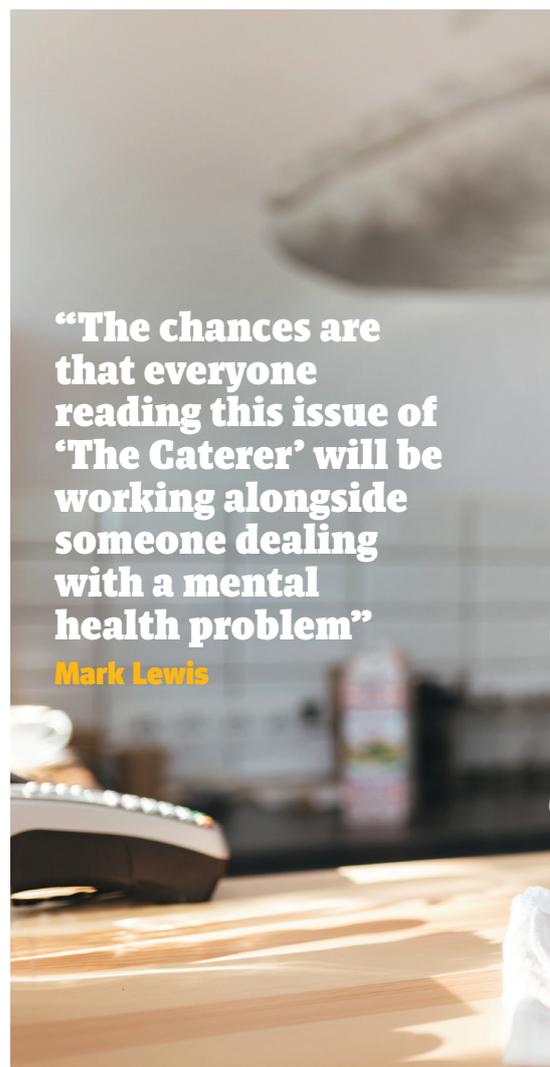
Last month *The Caterer* distributed a short, 10-question survey asking people about their experiences of mental health in hospitality. It received an overwhelming response, with more than 100 submissions in the first 24 hours and 713 in total over two weeks, demonstrating what a hot topic it is for the industry.

Of the respondents, 59% consider themselves to have a mental health problem at the moment and 71% had experienced a mental health problem at some point. Of these, 51% had sought help or advice for it, but 56% said their employer was not aware of their mental health problem – very little change from the reported 54% six years ago.

Mark Lewis, chief executive of Hospitality Action, said the survey “presents a clear and stark indication of the prevalence of those experiencing mental health problems in our industry. The chances are that everyone read-

“The chances are that everyone reading this issue of ‘The Caterer’ will be working alongside someone dealing with a mental health problem”

Mark Lewis



ing this issue of *The Caterer* will be working alongside someone dealing with a mental health problem, yet many people still find that stigma and silence can be as bad as the mental health problem itself.”

When asked if they felt there was a stigma surrounding mental health, a clear majority says yes (70%) – a disappointing statistic, but down from 90% in 2012, suggesting that while the industry is improving, there’s still a long way to go.

Emma Mamo, head of workplace wellbeing at Mind, said: “It’s worrying to see such high levels of stress and poor mental health within the hospitality industry. It’s even more concerning that so few people are seeking help, or opening up to their employers about it, probably because of the perceived stigma surrounding mental health. Staff struggling in silence are unlikely to be getting the support they need, and this can make things worse.”

“Employees living with mental health problems such as depression and anxiety can and do make a valuable contribution to the workplace, but may need additional support. If your mental health problem meets the definition of a disability under the Equality Act 2010 – in that it has a substantial, adverse, and long-term effect on normal day-to-day activities – you need to tell your employer about it.

Further help

Mental Health at Work
www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk

Mind
www.mind.org.uk

Time to Change
www.time-to-change.org.uk

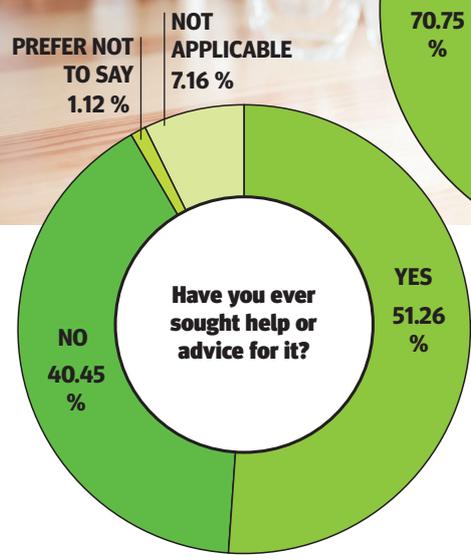
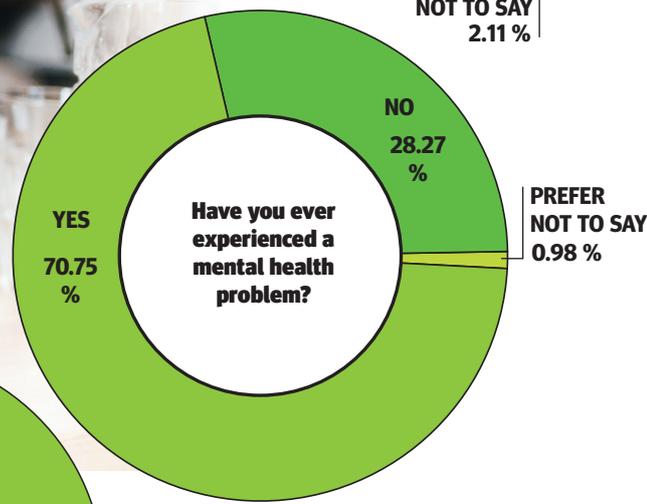
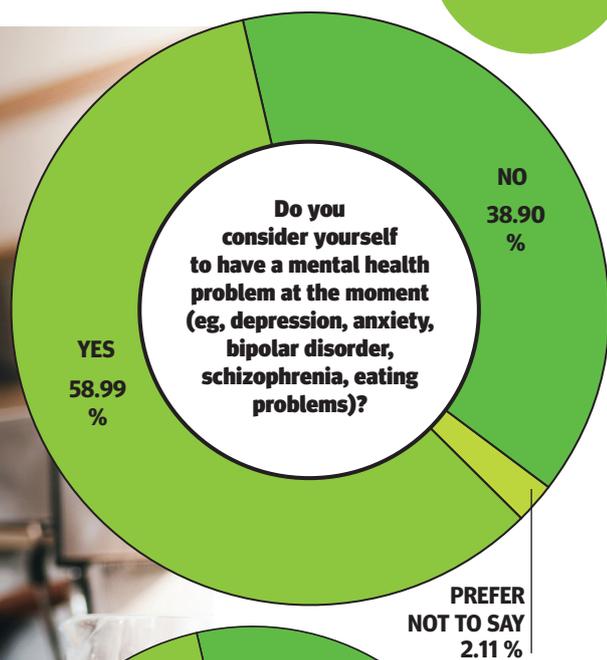
Hospitality Action
www.hospitalityaction.org.uk

Samaritans
www.samaritans.org



time to change

let's end mental health discrimination



They then have a duty to make reasonable adjustments, which could include anything from changes to working hours, roles and responsibilities, to providing quiet rooms and regular breaks, for example.”

A helping hand at work

When asked what support employees and operators would like to receive from their employers and the wider industry, the answers flooded in with a few recurring themes: more investment in staffing; incentives and rewards; access to counselling; and better training. Hospitality Action research earlier this year found that only 17% of managers and 9% of employees had been offered mental health awareness training in their workplace.

“Offering things like flexible working hours, employee assistance programmes and regular catch-ups with managers sends a message to employees that their contribution is valued,” said Mamo.

Many just asked for empathy and understanding, open dialogue and for employers to follow through on resolving issues when employees confide in them. Positively, some said that all of these things were in place and they did feel they were able to speak openly with their employer.

Although 26% of respondents said their

employer would be understanding if they needed time off for stress or mental health, when asked if their employer invests in their mental health, just 18% answered ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’.

Several business owners pointed out that they themselves are under so much pressure and asked for more support from government and local authorities – particularly for small, independent businesses – to help them support their employees.

“Some employers don’t know where to start when it comes to promoting good mental health at work,” said Mamo. “That’s why Mind, with support from the Royal Foundation, Heads Together and 11 other organisations has recently created a free Mental Health at Work ‘gateway’. This UK-wide portal allows employers and employees to access a range of

information, advice, resources and training.”

Added Mamo: “You need to create an open and positive culture when talking about mental health. To date, nearly 850 employers have shown their commitment to tackling the causes of poor mental health at work by signing the Time to Change pledge.” Time to Change is a movement which is campaigning for greater acceptance of mental health issues at work.

While the hospitality industry does not necessarily cause mental health issues, more than half of our survey respondents cited long working hours (56%), unreasonable work demands (54%) and a high-pressure working environment (53%) as having an adverse impact, all of which are characteristic of hospitality and can exacerbate existing issues.

This issue offers examples and suggestions of what businesses can do to support their employees’ mental health, as well as professionals sharing their stories of dealing with mental health problems.

While the survey shows that there has been some improvement over the past six years, it also shows more can be done to ensure momentum keeps moving in the right direction to make hospitality a more welcoming, inclusive environment for those with mental health issues.

Keep an open mind



What does it mean to have mental health problems and how can hospitality be a more supportive place for it? Here, seven professionals share their different stories and their coping strategies within a hospitality environment

Barry Hancox, hospitality consultant and former general manager of the Lygon Arms in Broadway, Worcestershire



It's a very present subject for any industry, but having worked in hospitality all of my life, you begin to see just how important it is.

You work long, unsociable hours, and we still see low pay levels so much in our industry. It's such a physical challenge as well

and therefore it's going to reflect on you mentally in the end.

Mental health issues are not unique to our industry, but there are exacerbating factors: alcohol, dealing with the public, which can be very stressful, and the social aspects. I've seriously reduced my alcohol intake and I'm really pleased to say it's becoming the norm – if you go out for a drink somewhere now you can get a non-alcoholic beer.

We've come a long way, but I think we've got a long way to go. It's still very much a dismissive situation – someone gets stressed and that's it, they're a "stress person", but there's more to stress than that.

I've suffered with mental health problems quite badly for several years and had therapy at various times. I took an overdose a few months ago and had to spend 10 days in hospital. I suppose I'm still recovering from that.

Having gone through it myself, I'd like to try and help other people if I can. I'm really keen to do an instructor training programme with Mental Health First Aid England, for which I'm seeking sponsorship. I want to help other people in the industry by going into organisations and teaching them how to recognise mental health and anxiety within a workplace situation.

To me, mental health first aid should be treated the same as physical health first aid. It's a legal responsibility to have first aiders – why shouldn't it be the same for mental health first aid?

I really enjoy cooking, and I think it helps me enormously with my issues. Cooking in itself can be a very important part of recovering from mental health problems.

I've had a very, very difficult few months and I've had to take a break, but I'm very, very passionate about food and the food industry, and if there's anything that keeps me motivated, it's that.

Ben Crittenden, chef-proprietor at Stark restaurant in Broadstairs, Kent

What started me off on a downward turn was when my wife had a miscarriage. Because it was just me and the chef-patron working in the kitchen – I was at work the next day – if I didn't go to work, they couldn't open. I knew I should have been with her, but I couldn't let work down. That's where my issues stemmed from. It was no one's fault other than mine; I've just never phoned in sick because I can't let people down.

Later we took on two less experienced people. One was a friend of mine, but the head chef left, so I took on the running of the kitchen. My second kid was born two days later, so I didn't have any time for paternity leave. She was born on the Sunday and I was back at work on the Tuesday. I didn't bond with my second kid for the first six months.

I confided in the guy I was working with, who was meant to be my mate. I told him I was struggling. He started telling me the chef-patron was slagging me off behind my back, saying I wasn't good enough. That went on for ages. It got to the point where I didn't want to go into work anymore. I just kept thinking, "what the fuck am I doing this for?"

I would be driving to work thinking "maybe I'll just crash my car". Not badly, but just so I can't go to work. I started to try and plan how I was going to get out, but I was in such a rut that on my days off I'd just stay in bed all day. I was really bad with my kids, with my wife; she tells me now that she contemplated leaving me because I wasn't there. I was just vacant.

It all came out later that my "friend" had been playing me and the chef-patron off against each other. He was basically angling



for my job; that's the only reason I can imagine. That's how I got as bad as I did, because I was being manipulated. That happens a lot – people playing each other off in the industry.

It was a combination of personal issues and people not really understanding what you're going through and using it against you for their own personal gain. That's why I work on my own now. I've got massive trust issues, understandably.

Most people try and hide it, but you can tell if someone's struggling because they won't be as

productive. They might be quiet and miserable. Those things you can keep an eye on, and approach them if you think they might be struggling. Ask them and they might open up.

When I struggle I always phone my wife and talk, maybe not even about what I'm feeling, just about stuff, talking shit. That's how I get through when I'm struggling. Don't hold back – say everything you're feeling, with at least one person. Tell them exactly how you feel and be 100% honest with them.

Charlie Hodson, owner of Charlie's Norfolk Food Heroes

I didn't notice my mental health until 2012, which was when I guess I had my first serious incident. I moved back to Norfolk and was working in a restaurant where I was given two rosettes. At the same time, I'd fulfilled a life dream of mine, to be a lifeboatman at Cromer for the RNLI. But as I started to make a name for myself, I put more and more on my own shoulders. It's the nature of the business we're in, it's what we put on ourselves – as they say, you're only as good as your plate of food.

I didn't say no to people and just took more and more on – you don't want to let people down, so you keep doing it. You work harder, because the harder you work, the less you have to think. I felt like a performing seal. You end up being a bit like a pressure-cooker and the whistle starts to blow, but it never stops. That's when I first snapped.

A lot of people think if you take your own life it's a weakness, but it's not. When you're sitting in a car park in the middle of the forest with a piece of rope thinking about who is going to



"The most amazing thing I've found is the positive response you get by being honest with people – don't hide it"

find you in the morning, it is the most fearful place. I had run out of cigarettes, so I had to drive quite a distance to the nearest garage, and by that time it had occurred to me that my boy was three years old. How was his mum going to tell him that his daddy had decided not to be around?

I've got nothing in life I can complain about – I'm successful, I've got a great family, but I would come off stages and television sets and

find a quiet place to have a cigarette and cry for an hour because I'd think I was an utter failure.

Learning to say no has helped. I always explain why and I was amazed by the response from pals that I thought really wouldn't give two hoots. The most amazing thing I've found is the positive response you get by being honest with people – don't hide it. If you're struggling, go and see your doctor or, if you really are at your lowest ebb, the Samaritans are amazing.

A lot of people say employers should be doing more, but employees and employers should be doing more together. We need to listen to each other and, as employers, we have to ask our employees how they are more. If we're going to inspire the next generation of chefs, we need to let our industry breathe, and that's not going to happen if we keep up this copious amount of pressure.

Charlie Hodson supports Hospitality Action and encourages people to talk about mental health on social media using the hashtags #TimeToTalk and #TimeToChange

Doug Sanham, head chef at the Parade Room in Canterbury



We had such a prolonged period in hospitality where there was a lot of bullying. It doesn't happen so much anymore, but I did work for a head chef who was a physical and mental bully.

This particular chef used to keep a perforated spoon tucked away in the middle of the range so it was constantly hot, and if you did something really shit during service, he would walk up behind you and put it on your arm to burn you.

This kind of behaviour spread among the staff too – you could do a 19-hour shift, get yourself ready, and the following day someone's sabotaged a load of your prep.

It was my first move away from home as well, with no friends or family around. I don't know whether I was suffering from depression as such, but I found myself one morning reluctant to go to work. I started drinking at 9am and I took quite a heavy overdose and tried to kill myself. I was quite lucky because one of the chefs came banging on the door and found me.

I had another situation four years later in another place I worked, and a similar thing happened, but I wasn't aware of it. I suffer from something called disassociation. The easiest way to explain it is when you've had a long day and you're tired and you drive home. You do the same drive every single day, but there will be certain days when you can't remember the drive home – it's basically your brain putting

you on autopilot mode. Everyone has it, but for me it can come at any time and I won't remember it. I put up a wall in my head and put everything negative behind it, and eventually I'll have a bit of an episode because I haven't dealt with any negativity or hurt. Suddenly, everything I've blocked out will attack me all at once.

I'm having a form of cognitive behavioural therapy which teaches me all sorts of grounding techniques and trains you to focus, so if something bad happens I will be able to give myself a minute to take in my surroundings, re-focus and then approach the situation in the most effective way.

Hospitality is quite a difficult environment to take a minute in, even if you wanted to, and nine times out of 10 people are just tired. Daniel Clifford and Sat Bains have got it right, taking their restaurants down to four-day weeks, so you might still be working a 15- or 16-hour shift, but you're getting those three days off and the time to have a life. I do appreciate they've worked very hard to get where they are and they can now afford to do that. It's the smaller businesses that are struggling with that approach.

My ideal hospitality business would offer a good, solid salary and a good, solid working environment, maybe 48-50 hours a week. The hardest thing is that, as a chef, you put 150% in and generally only get about 20% back.

Jamie Lumsden, head chef at the Colchester Officers' Club and life coach



When I worked in London I was suffering really badly with mental health. Working in hospitality made it worse, but it wasn't the root cause. Lots of young people go into kitchens with problems, or they

develop problems in the kitchen, and they don't know how to deal with it. They grow up learning not to talk about it.

In kitchens, it's OK to have a burn or a broken arm, but you can't talk about how you feel mentally. If you've got a difficulty that can't be seen, it's not accepted as real.

I buried myself in work. I thought burying my head in the long hours, in drinking, would help me, but it burned me out quicker. People don't know help is available, which is the worst part. They don't know there's someone who wants to talk, to listen, to help. There's Mind, there are mental health charities, your doctor – there are other alternatives. But we just end up going round in a vicious circle.

In the end I helped myself. I found support and I saw a good therapist. I looked after myself and I talked about my problems and ignored anybody who said I shouldn't. I broke away from that culture and it changed my life.

Learning how to coach and be a mentor for people has always kept my skills fresh. I realised I was quite good at it, so I thought I'd develop my skills further. I took a counselling course and worked with a master life coach. I've done quite a lot of personal development courses now, so I can actually help people solve issues with their mental health these days, rather than just talking about it.

I only work five days a week and my mental health has improved greatly for it. It's about looking after yourself. We have health and safety in the kitchen, we have non-slip shoes, we have chef whites and fire blankets – but we have nothing to support our minds. There are no posters on the wall saying if you're considering suicide there's support, here's a number, here's somewhere to go.

It's going to take time, but if we start installing this attitude in our younger chefs now, then the future generation will feel that it's OK to talk about mental health.

www.jamielumsdenlifecoach.com

“In kitchens, it's OK to have a burn or a broken arm, but you can't talk about how you feel mentally”

Mitchell Collier, guest relations manager at Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons

There is a real problem with mental health in hospitality – it's so competitive, you're expected to crack on no matter what and smile through it. I always remember one of my old bosses telling me to leave my problems at the door. That's easier said than done.

I was diagnosed with a form of skin cancer in June 2017 and had surgery in late June. My partner left me while I was going through the treatment and that was devastating. I had just got out of hospital on my 21st birthday and it was not what I had planned at all. Then in May I applied for a promotion but wasn't successful.

You get to a point when you suppress it so much but it niggles away more and more every day. I almost didn't want to burden my colleagues with it – I saw them having a hard shift and I didn't want to make things more difficult by saying, "I'm really struggling at the moment and I don't feel myself". We see admitting that you're not doing well as a sign of weakness – that you're not able to do your job. I stopped asking "how are you?", because I didn't want them to ask me how I was; I knew that I'd have to lie and pretend I was fine.

Eventually, I told a colleague that I couldn't do it any more, and she pointed me in the direction of Hospitality Action. They gave me a total of 12 sessions of counselling, which helped me cope – having someone to talk to, to open up about my experience without any fear of judgment.

You have all these training sessions on a variety of different things, but I don't ever remember having a training session about



mental health, spotting the tell-tale signs. It was only through my own experiences that I can spot that in someone else.

We're with each other all the time in our industry; you should be able to pick up on your colleagues' level of performance and interaction, changes in behaviour, someone who rarely makes mistakes messing up. Rather than picking up on the mistake, pull that person aside and ask what's going on, and if someone

says they're struggling, don't turn around to them and say get over it – encourage them to get support.

In November 2017 I was promoted to guest relations manager and I fully redid my 21st birthday this year. I previously viewed my mental health as a sack of bricks I was trying to pull behind me, but I don't see that any more. Now, it's more of a rucksack that I'm wearing – I'm carrying it, but it's not a burden.

Stephen Johnson, consultant chef for Best Western



My problems personally stem from my military service. I came home from Afghanistan from a very intense tour with quite severe post-traumatic stress and I'd been injured quite badly. Within a couple of weeks of coming back home I'd already made

two attempts at taking my own life because nobody understood what I was going through. To me, my world was falling apart and it was very difficult to adjust coming from a very intense scenario to the relatively normal day-to-day life as a chef.

I became very aggressive. I was very distant from my loved ones and I had no tolerance with people. It was just the everyday things that

most people just shrug off, like road rage. And in the kitchen I was finding it very difficult to overcome my anxieties and issues.

It destroyed my marriage, it estranged me from my eldest daughter and there are some scars that are quite apparent – you can see that I used to self-abuse. It was a way of dealing with the anguish. The problem is employers don't know how to deal with a member of staff that is showing these signs – when chefs are being abusive, people just think that's what being a chef is. It's not. These people really suffer with problems.

The reason that I started to get support was because the police got involved. I got arrested and I was taken to an adult mental secure unit. A counsellor got involved and after talking to me they knew exactly what I needed. I was introduced to a resource called Combat Stress, a mental health society that looks after

veterans. I still talk to a psychologist, but it has taken since 2011 to get to where I am now and by then I'd already done quite a lot of damage, family-wise, friends-wise and job-wise.

I work for a big corporation now that's pretty understanding of my issues. I was quite upfront when I came in and they were still happy to take me on. I'm not shy to say I've been broken and I needed someone to help me get fixed, but people need to know the resources are there. There aren't enough ambassadors out there from our industry to encourage people to say they need help. How many times do you hear a famous chef say "I'm an ambassador for a charity for mental health problems?". It's going to take somebody in the public eye to stand up and be open and honest and say they suffer with these issues. Meanwhile, companies need to look after their staff and give them the resources to spot the signs.

If you feel like you may want to talk about your mental health, organisations such as Mind (www.mind.org.uk), Time To Change (www.time-to-change.org.uk) and Samaritans (www.samaritans.org) can offer help. Industry charity Hospitality Action offers a range of counselling and other support for hospitality professionals suffering stress-related symptoms via its Employee Assistance Programme. Details are available at www.hospitalityaction.org.uk.

Andrew Clarke

Andrew Clarke is chef-director at the St Leonards and Brunswick House restaurants in London as well as the founder of the Pilot Light campaign, which is devoted to combating the stigma surrounding mental health in hospitality. He tells *Katherine Price* why the industry needs to do more to support its people

Do you think people talk about mental health in hospitality?

People are talking about it more than they used to, and this is a very good thing. It's definitely a recognised problem. And yet in my short journey of bringing Pilot Light to life, I still get people telling me how their bosses are not doing anything about it and treating people badly because of their illnesses. It's worrying that even though there's a very strong narrative so many people are turning a blind eye to it.

Is it a particular problem for hospitality?

It's definitely not just hospitality – I want to make it very clear that I don't blame hospitality for anything that's happened to me. But by trying to cushion a few parts of it, hopefully our industry will be viewed as a great place to work.

What can employers do to make hospitality a more welcoming environment for people with mental health problems?

It's difficult, particularly for small businesses. We run with small teams and small budgets. However, I think what we can do is offer workplaces where it's a little easier to work. The hours may not be easy, and sadly the pay isn't always great, but we can give that little bit more back and encourage a better work-life balance. The answer is a lot of little things, and every person needs something different. We can't necessarily do anything about pay, we can't necessarily do anything about the hours, but we can do a lot about bullying.

There is a perception that the industry has a bullying culture – is it getting better?

I'm still hearing horror stories. Since I've started talking about Pilot Light and what I want to do, the amount of people that get in touch with me and tell me their stories... One guy very recently was telling me about how his bosses refuse to give him time off. It's exploitation, because they know the person needs that job because of family or other responsibilities, so people are caught in a hole, and that's frustrating.

One of the most inspiring people I ever worked with was Phil Howard – there wasn't a raised voice in the kitchen. It was hard graft and long hours, and the prep seemed to go on forever, but what an inspiring person; to have a Michelin star for so long without really needing to raise his voice. It can be done.

You've mentioned before about seeing employers 'shaming' their employees on social media, is that also a form of bullying?

Calling your staff members out on social media – what example are you setting? You're a leader. You're a leader of a team. You have a responsibility to your team. Don't get me wrong, I will call someone out in the kitchen, but I don't drag it all the way through service.

Businesses in this industry are also exposed to nasty social media comments and reviews, could that be having an impact?

Much like encouraging people into the industry and gearing people up for a life of hard ▶

“We can't necessarily do anything about pay, we can't necessarily do anything about the hours, but we can do a lot about bullying”

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADRIAN FRANKLIN / HOSPITALITY MEDIA





CV

- 2018-present** Chef-patron, St Leonards, Shoreditch
- 2017-present** Co-owner, Jim's Cafe, Clapton
- 2015-present** Chef-director, Brunswick House, Vauxhall
- 2013-2015** Head chef, Rita's, Hackney
- 2010-2013** Head chef, Salt Yard, Fitzrovia
- 2007-2008** Part-time at the Anchor & Hope in London's Waterloo and private/event catering
- 2005-2007** Head chef, the Swan, West Malling, Kent

“Hopefully we can share our stories and give each other the strength and encouragement to move forward, and make it clear no one's going to go through this alone”

The Caterer interview

work, we need to give people the armour to deal with this sort of thing. There are people who don't know how to deal with trolls. I don't really look at my social media – I post on it and that's it. Fortunately, I don't get too many hurtful things. It could be hurtful, if I took everything too seriously – we need to gear people up for that.

That's something we're really trying to do with the Pilot Light campaign. We want people to share their stories online to give each other the strength and encouragement to move forwards. I want chefs, I want front of house, managers, everyone in hospitality to share their stories online. A young trainee might see a few of their heroes share their stories and it might just give them that encouragement and reassurance they're not alone; we're all going through it. But going through it is sometimes what's going to make you stronger.

Tell me more about where Pilot Light is now?

It's still in the early stages. Sarah [Restall, of Time to Change, a long-running campaign under mental health charity Mind that addresses the stigma around mental health] has taken a lot of it off our hands.

Opening a new site, having two restaurants, launching a campaign, writing a book and all these other things I'm trying to do... I had a lot of energy for wanting to start this campaign, but at the same time I was naïve to not realise how deep it goes. I realised that this is a full-time job for quite a few people. It didn't deter me – it just means that it's a slower process and I need to find the right people to do it.

There's a lot of stuff lined up for next year. But for now, we need people to share their stories and continue to talk about this.

How important is talking about mental health to de-stigmatise it?

The more people talk about it, the less it's a thing. It's only a taboo because we've made it a taboo.

I know what it's like – when you are going through depression, you can't talk about it. It's not even about the shame or appearing to be weak, it's just you don't want to talk. You can't be bothered to get out of bed. You lie there in this stunned, awake coma. It's a very weird feeling and it takes a lot to switch that mindset.

When I was going through it, I didn't know what I wanted to do, I didn't know where I wanted to be. The only thing I did know was that I didn't want to be there and that was part of my drive to get through it.

When did you become aware you might be having mental health problems?

The start of it was that I was in a very shitty job, which was high-paying and I thought I could stick it out for a year and bank the cash, but it was so demoralising. It wasn't cooking – I was walking round with a clipboard. It was exhausting and I didn't necessarily have the

tools around me to do it. At the same time I was coming home and my girlfriend would be away for long periods of time, so I had no one to talk it through with. I would come back to an empty flat.

I got out of that job eventually. I thought, "This is just exhausting, I'm a grown man almost crying on the way to work." I hated it that much, so I left with immediate effect. A few things were on the cards: my girlfriend was coming home and we were going to spend Christmas together, and then she came home and left me immediately. I just sat in silence for about two days and didn't move.

What helped you break through that?

I felt a bit that I'd had enough of the industry; I just didn't want to cook anymore, but I made the decision to come in as Jackson [Boxer]'s partner at Brunswick House and redo the menu, and that was the thing that saved me.

I was there 100-plus hours a week, and it was good for me to do that, to focus my energy and not sit in the flat in silence, with my brain ticking over the why, when, how, what, the negative questions you ask yourself. It was just me and my sous chef, the two of us cooking every day, and I liked it, and I liked the food that I was putting out.

It's really hard to write menus and create dishes when you have no appetite – I wasn't eating for days on end, but then the reviews started coming in and they gave me that little lift each time. Eventually, after about six months, I pulled out of it. I gave up drinking and general partying for a good six months, so I didn't have a crutch to fall back on.





St Leonards, Shoreditch

“We would be in a much better place if we addressed it and continued to support people... There have been too many talented people whose careers have been cut short, and some peoples’ lives have been cut short because the help wasn’t around for them”

Are there any coping strategies you would recommend, or anyone to speak to?

I would always recommend speaking to Mind. I am not an authority on any of this – all I can do is tell my story, because mental health is so vast and peoples’ coping mechanisms are all very different. I wouldn’t dare offer advice. I would merely suggest a few things. There are a lot of people that make certain lifestyle and dietary changes – stop the booze, do yoga – and they have more positive outlooks.

When the positivity is there, the shit doesn’t stop being thrown at you, you just learn how to deal with it and process it better. That was a big thing for me. I would post positive things around my flat. Even to the point

Helping hands

Photographs of chefs’ hands, including Andrew Clarke’s, will be exhibited and auctioned off next month to fundraise for the Pilot Light campaign.

Food photographer Joakim Blockstrom will be auctioning off his photographs of chefs including Pierre Koffman, Phil Howard, Ollie Dabbous and Ravinder Bhogal.

The event will take place at Carousel Next Door in London’s Marylebone on 12 November at 7pm.

A number of restaurants have contributed tables and experiences (including a day in the kitchen with Ollie Dabbous, followed by tea for two at Hide restaurant) which will also be auctioned off.

Go to www.tickettailor.com/events/shuttlecockinc/203823 for tickets

where I would put a positive word on the wall near my bed, so it was the first thing I’d see when I woke up. Get your mindset as positive as you can. There are so many different ways of doing this: exercise, rest, meditation, dropping drink and drugs for a little while. I won’t tell people what to do, but there are some commonsense rules there.

Getting back into martial arts was a good thing for me. It gets a lot of negative energy out when you’re hitting on a bag. I also found myself following a vegan diet. I’m not going to say it was all that, but it was a contributing factor because there were so many things that I changed: my diet, my outlook, what I was reading, how I was living – everything just made an impact.

Where would you like hospitality to be with regards to supporting peoples’ mental health? What would be your ideal scenario?

We would be in a better place if we addressed it and continued to support people, because there have been too many talented people whose careers have been cut short, and peoples’ lives have been cut short because the help wasn’t around for them. An understanding figure wasn’t there to give them guidance.

We’ve got an amazing industry. I wouldn’t want to be in another industry, but I want our industry to clean itself up and show other industries that we are better than them. It can be done.

If you feel like you may want to talk about your mental health, organisations such as Mind (www.mind.org.uk), Time To Change (www.time-to-change.org.uk) and the Samaritans (www.samaritans.org) can offer help. Industry charity Hospitality Action offers a range of counselling and other support for hospitality professionals suffering stress-related symptoms via its Employee Assistance Programme. Details are available at www.hospitalityaction.org.uk. To find out more about Andrew Clarke’s work at Pilot Light, visit www.pilotlightcampaign.co.uk



...support team wellbeing

Camilla Woods, EAP manager at Hospitality Action, explains the benefits of joining an Employee Assistance Programme

You may already know of employees struggling with pressures at home or work, so it's important to consider how best to support them. This pressure can impact mental health and, in turn, the way people do their jobs, which can result in reduced performance, lack of focus and absence. This can lead to lost productivity and potentially significant recruitment costs.

One option to help employees overcome such pressures is to look at introducing an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) across your organisation, like the one run by industry charity Hospitality Action.

What exactly is the EAP?

Hospitality Action's EAP is an assistance line supported by a care package of services and benefits that takes a holistic approach to employee welfare. Like the industry it serves, the assistance line is open all day, every day, and includes a translation service for more than 170 languages.

The benefits available include access to personal counselling, legal guidance, addiction support, debt advice, a parenting helpline and elder care helpline and a whistleblowing service. Should a hardship grant be required by any recipients of EAP support, Hospitality Action can point them towards its grant-giving team for consideration.

What makes a successful EAP?

One of the main factors influencing the success of an EAP is regularly communicating to the team the benefits of accessing the programme. An effective launch generates interest, awareness and usage of the services, so review all the options already available to 'talk' to employees, via printed material, online or face to face. HA offers a variety of printed and online material, in a variety of languages, to help promote the programme to the team and regularly attends launch events.

Securing senior management support is also essential, demonstrating to employees that your business is serious about caring for their health and wellbeing.

Can the EAP help with issues like addiction, domestic violence and sexual harassment?

Since launching the EAP five years ago, HA has researched all challenges facing those who work in hospitality. Whether drugs, alcohol, gambling, depression, bullying, harassment, anxiety, stress, illness, lack of work-life balance or financial pressure are the problem,



“Sometimes just having a ‘listening ear’ can make all the difference when stress, anxiety or depression strike”

it has advice that can help. EAP subscribers can access an online portal, Well Online, which has more than 200 factsheets covering all these topics and more. It's a great place to start to find out about the services offered and signpost employees to resources.

Will my young team really want to talk to someone rather than go online to find help?

Hospitality Action has found that under-30s are just as likely as over-50s to want to talk to someone about the issues they are facing, and really value the coaching and advice that the assistance line counsellors can provide, 24/7.

Sometimes just having a 'listening ear' can make all the difference when stress, anxiety or

depression strike. Of course, if an employee prefers to email, live chat or download a factsheet, those paths are also available.

What support can an EAP offer if my business is affected by a traumatic incident?

The EAP can provide on-site support for traumatic events, such as a terrorist incident, the unexpected death of a guest or colleague or armed robbery. As an employer, you have a duty of care to protect employees from psychological harm as well as having consideration for their physical safety. On-site support provides psychological first aid, helping teams and their managers to cope.

Does the EAP support Hospitality Action?

Any surplus Hospitality Action makes from the EAP is re-invested into its other programmes, for example, the Golden Friends Befriending Programme for industry retirees, or its Family Days Out scheme, which gives those on low incomes much-needed leisure time together. Joining the EAP is a virtuous circle: client companies not only support the welfare of their teams, they also help us support the welfare of some of the most vulnerable people in the hospitality industry.

This much I know

Simon Boyle

Simon Boyle is a chef, author and founder of Brigade Bistro in London, which helps Southwark residents at risk of homelessness develop the skills to find employment in hospitality. He talks to *Vincent Wood*

Mental health is huge in our work, not just with our beneficiaries but all of our staff. We offer a service to all of our staff to have a channel to talk about any issues that they might have; anything that might bubble up.

Drugs and alcohol are the symptom, not the issue. The people we work with have very complex issues and the majority of those stem from childhood. Roughly 88% of people that have been homeless have suffered childhood trauma. Now they are 30, 40, 50 years old, so those traumas run deep.

Anyone, particularly in hospitality, can have those issues and those addictions. People tell us what their issues are and we support them; for us, it is not the case that if you're misusing then you're out.

We don't add to anyone's issues by shouting at them and treating them badly or overworking them and underpaying them. It just doesn't happen at Brigade. We monitor and evaluate people on a daily basis so that if we see anything untoward or lateness, or if there's a change in their attitude, a change in their appearance, a change in their eating habits, we can see and we can help them and we can pick them up before they fall over.

We use cooking and hospitality as a tool to get people back on their own two feet. You put your complexities to one side while you're on shift. That doesn't mean you ignore them, or that we don't help them or deal with them, but the eight-hour shift is a way of focusing on something else. What is very, very important is that we are aware of all the other things going on. So if it wasn't appropriate that we put them on shifts then we wouldn't, but generally speaking, the shift is a time where they can focus on the job.



Recently, our apprentices have done sessions with the Prince's Trust, Refettorio Felix in Earls Court, and Bethlem Royal Hospital in West Wickham. Once they're able to do

that and recognise how they've moved themselves on, it's huge. They can say, hand on heart, "I was there six months ago where you are. Here I am working, being paid, holding down a job. It is possible."

It is not only good for the people hearing it, but it's also really good for the person giving that message.

We don't have all the answers. A lot of our apprentices stumble on the journey. That's part of the process and we get it, and not all of them make it. Some of them come back and start again and that's just part of their journey. But we're always there to support them, whichever way it goes.

CV

2010-present Chef-director, Simon Boyle's Stirring Creativity, London

2009-present Founder, Beyond Food at Brigade, London

2001-2010 Chef-director, Beyond Boyle/Food

2000-2002 Manager, Mosimann's London

1997-1999 Executive chef, Swan Hellenic North America

1995-1997 Senior sous chef, P&O Cruises

“We don't have all the answers. A lot of our apprentices stumble on the journey. That's part of the process and we get it”

Beyond Food

Beyond Food has a range of opportunities to help support the work at Brigade and beyond, including Simon's latest book, *How to Cook and Keep on Cooking*, which can be donated on your behalf to help teach basic cookery skills to someone in need. Brigade is also running Social Diner supper club events, with guest chefs including James Golding and Chris King. **For more information, go to www.beyondfood.org.uk**

Inspirational solutions to the challenges facing hospitality operators

Minding your business

A new generation of hospitality operators and managers has recognised the importance of supporting the mental health of their workforce – for both business and philanthropic reasons.

Rosalind Mullen looks at some examples of industry best practice

Managers and employees are starting to break down taboos about discussing anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts, with many companies now offering support to those who need it. But it seems there is still a long way to go – and it is in the interest of employers to address the issue.

A report earlier this year by jobseeker site CV-Library found that more than a third of staff working in bars, restaurants and hotels suffer from mental health issues, with nearly half saying their job was a key contributor. It revealed that just more than half of workers (52.2%) have considered resigning from a job due to the lack of support in place.

The report also suggested how companies could retain more staff. More than a quarter of respondents (27.8%) believe that regular one-to-one catch ups could help employers to support staff who are suffering. Some 33.3% said they'd appreciate the offer of professional help and 22.2% believe paid mental health days (time off) could help.

Many hospitality businesses already have these initiatives and others in place. Our case studies, below, offer a cross-section of companies that are using best practice to address the mental health of their workforce.

Giving workers space and support: M Restaurants

M Restaurants, which has four restaurants in London and 137 employees, has launched two initiatives this summer to reduce staff stress levels. In July, the company introduced M- mindful Days, which are four extra days a year that staff can take when they choose – be it a day when they just can't face the world, need a rest or want to help a loved one. Ultimately, the aim is to create a small package for the employee, with a fully paid day including wellness-related activities, such as a spa treatment.

In addition, in August, it became the first business to sign up to the Spill chat app, an anonymous platform that allows employees to text accredited counsellors about anxiety related to work. M Restaurants and Spill also hosted a "wellness in the workplace" event that included discussions on mental health and wellbeing in the industry.



André Mannini, M Restaurants

The man driving these initiatives is operations director André Mannini, who says there are two reasons for addressing mental health in the industry. One is a philanthropic desire to improve the working environment and align standards with more cutting-edge industries such as IT; the other is to address the industry's chronic staff shortages.

"A forward-thinking approach to employee wellness is necessary," he says. "A new generation of restaurateurs and chefs is showing a desire to part from the old practices of our industry – from the unpaid and over-worked, from the belittling and bullying in kitchens, and from the yelling chef, who on TV sadly con-

done and glamorises a behaviour that is horrific and is finally becoming a thing of the past."

By the end of 2019, Mannini wants to have adapted the company's training school, M School of Hospitality, to help non-employed people. M Restaurants partners with organisations such as Not for Sale, the Clink and the Hive, which promote social change by giving people who need it a chance to get back on track.

"My goal is to offer the M School – at our cost – as a continuation of the training such organisations provide, which could greatly help them to get full-time employment in M or other companies," says Mannini.



The impact

It's too early to measure the effect on staff retention, but Mannini says: "The feedback among the staff and management has been great and M-indful days have been an instant success. They have been used in many occasions precisely for the reasons they were designed, which feels very rewarding."

The company also carries out anonymous surveys to measure employee happiness and will use the results to make improvements.

Offering practical help: CH&Co

Foodservice company CH&Co is aware of stressful trigger points among its teams. "The hospitality sector is challenging in its very nature – the rush of service, skill or staffing shortages, low margins, and so on. These can all play a part in generating extra stress," says chief operating officer Terry Waldron.

"It's also a rapidly changing world out there, with a whole load of pressures beyond any one individual's control and that can be hard for some people to find their way through – Brexit, immigration status, technology, social media, consumerism, and so on. Therefore, if we can raise people's consciousness to the fact that some people may not be dealing with all of these issues as easily as others, that helps."

"A new generation of restaurateurs and chefs is showing a desire to part from the old practices of our industry"

André Mannini, M Restaurants

In the first instance, the company offers all staff access to Hospitality Action's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), an assistance line offering counselling, addiction support, legal guidance, debt advice and so on, to help them cope in times of difficulty.

"All employees are made aware of it as part of their induction with the company and we regularly remind the team of its availability by advertising it in our quarterly staff magazine," says Waldron. "Our HR team also recommends that people contact the EAP when they become aware of an issue with which it could help provide support."

The company also gives team members practical help to offset stress. "If it is an immigration status worry, we are helping EU ►

Help behind the bar

Healthy Hospo was founded a year ago by Tim Etherington-Judge, who had a mental breakdown in 2016 while working as a global drinks brand ambassador. "We talk about the fun side of the drinks industry, but nobody talks about the cost to our health," he says.

The pubs and bars sector is particularly vulnerable to mental health issues through a combination of unsociable hours, lack of sleep, poor nutrition from late-night takeaways, not enough exercise and greater opportunity for alcohol abuse.

Working with the benevolent charity, the mission of the not-for-profit social enterprise is to introduce preventative measures so that pub and bar staff stay happy and healthy. Training programmes, for instance, and encouraging staff to get involved in activities that don't involve drink.

"It's a young person's problem, as bar staff are usually under 35," he says. "Healthy Hospo aims to prevent you getting to the edge."

For more information, visit
www.healthyhospo.com



Terry Waldron, CH&Co

workers gain settled status,” says Waldron. “One managing director has recently launched an initiative called email-free Wednesdays to give people a break from the constant email avalanche we all get, and that is doing well. For other people, the ability to do flexible working helps them reduce the stress of their lives. It all depends on what the situation is, but as a company, we want to be as open to helping as we can be from a practical perspective.”

“If we can raise people’s consciousness to the fact that some people may not be dealing with all of these issues as easily as others, that helps”

Terry Waldron, CH&Co

In addition, the company is running a pilot programme whereby all apprentices are enrolled on a cash-wise course. This “gives essential training to help them manage their finances, as poor financial management and its consequences can lead to stress and anxiety,” according to Waldron, who envisages that it will be rolled out across the business.

The impact

“It’s too early to say on our particular journey, but from past experience, there is a greater team bond, sickness reduces, and a more open culture develops,” says Waldron.

Care in the community:

Hilton Bankside, London

As a St Julian Scholar, general manager James Clarke, who opened the 292-bedroom hotel in 2015, is a firm believer in giving back to the community and as part of his strategy to engage locals in Southwark, he hosts Love Thy Neighbour events every three months.

But his idea of community also extends to nurturing the “healthy mind, healthy spirit and healthy body” of hotel staff. “My philosophy is that as a team we take care of ourselves

first and then from there we can take care of our customers and have fun,” he says.

To help achieve this, he has given staff the chance to volunteer at local mental health charity Dragon Café, which not only allows them to give back to the community, but also helps them to understand the issue of mental health, enabling an open conversation.

It all started when Clarke invited the hotel team to choose a local charity to support as a group. The Dragon Café, which offers social interaction, affordable, healthy menus and creative, free activities to support people with mental illness or who feel isolated, was the one that resonated with them.

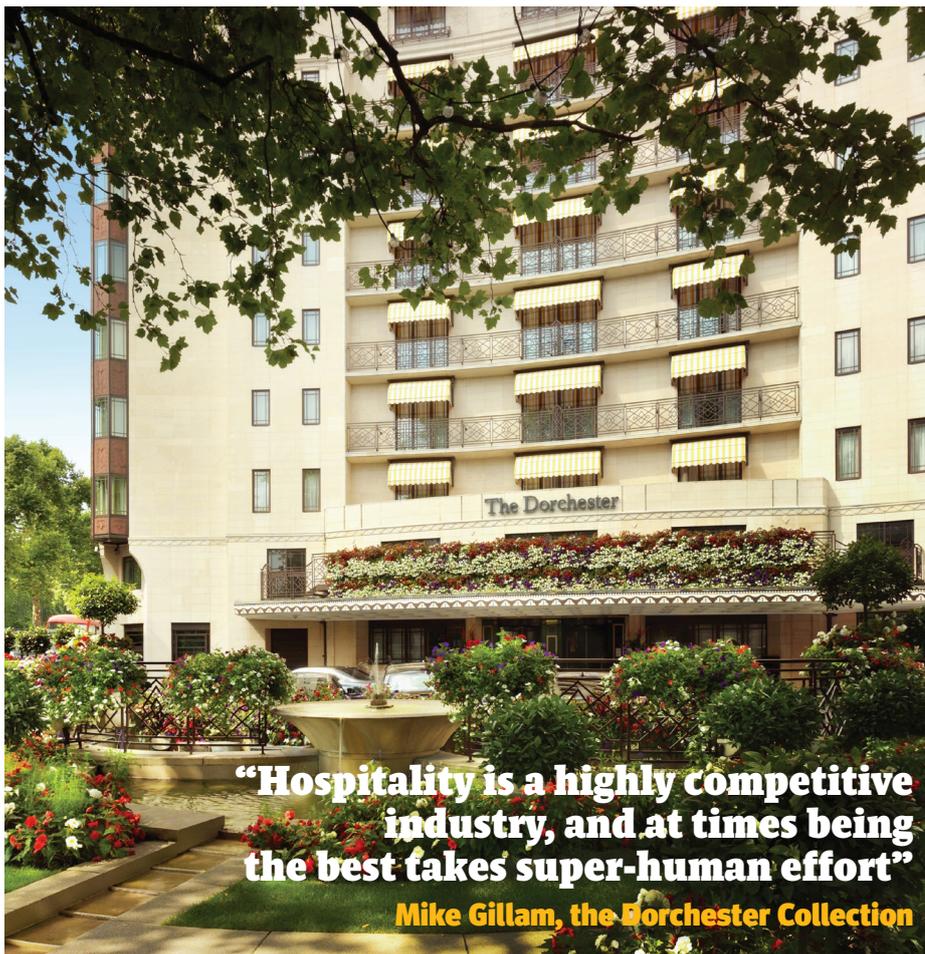
“One in four of us will have a mental health episode in our life,” says Clarke. “The Dragon Café made a presentation to us and it moved a lot of people.”

The café is open every Monday from 11am to 8.30pm and a rota of between two and four volunteers from the hotel across all ranks give two hours of paid work time, supporting workshops, serving drinks and food, doing the washing up and so on. The hotel also looks at other small ways to help, such as washing the tea towels or raising money through yard sales.

Tools to help

Organisations that provide tools to help companies improve their policies include:

- Hospitality Action’s Employee Assistance Programme – www.hospitalityaction.org.uk
- The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development offers a competency framework to help line managers gain the skills required to reduce and prevent stress at work – www.cipd.co.uk
- Healthy Hospo – www.healthyhospo.com
- The Benevolent – www.thebenevolent.org.uk
- Mental health campaign Time to Change www.time-to-change.org.uk



“Hospitality is a highly competitive industry, and at times being the best takes super-human effort”

Mike Gillam, the Dorchester Collection

“For us, it is mostly about giving time and engaging with the community. Every three months, the charity gives a presentation, updating the team. We get full attendance at the briefings. It is about making a difference and for us to see it in reality.”

And it is easy to run. Executive assistant to the general manager Hannah Mitford, who heads the hotel’s culture committee, which meets monthly to discuss how the team can “travel with purpose”, says: “It’s voluntary and staffing is not an issue. We schedule in advance to suit demand.”

The impact

The initiative is creating a more open attitude to mental health issues within the hotel. “It is a bottom-up approach and ensures the team is getting involved with the community and charity,” adds Clarke.

Last year the hotel’s commitment was recognised with the Community Engagement Award at Springboard’s Awards for Excellence.

“As a team we take care of ourselves first and then from there we can take care of our customers and have fun”

James Clarke, Hilton Bankside

Employing a designated expert: The Dorchester Collection

The Dorchester Collection, which includes the Dorchester and 45 Park Lane hotels in London and Coworth Park in Ascot, Berkshire, first appointed an occupational health professional in 2007, having recognised how important it is to support positive mental health in the workplace.

Occupational health manager Mike Gillam offers an approachable open-door policy available to all staff on a regular basis. “I provide regular one-to-one coaching with team members, access to support materials, Employee Assistance Programme resources and specific stress-risk assessments in the workplace. The role has strong backing from the highest group management and my overall purpose is to shape a continuing culture of wellbeing,” he says.

To maintain mental and physical health, the group also organises regular sporting activities outside of work, such as football, yoga, softball, nutrition awareness and a running club.

The impact

“Hospitality is a highly competitive industry, and at times being the best can take super-human effort,” Gillam explains. “If a team knows they are fully supported by both their leaders and their peers in all aspects of their wellbeing, they are more likely to enjoy a career that is personally fulfilling as well as successful.”

Hospitality Action



Mark Lewis, chief executive of Hospitality Action, explains the benefits of ensuring staff feel supported

Why should hospitality employers be more aware of mental health issues?

The hospitality industry is unique in terms of the pressures that workers face. Staff have to juggle long hours, work split shifts and always be at their very best, as we are all aware that you are just a step away from a damaging review or complaint if you slip up.

A further challenge for those who could be at risk of developing addictive behaviours is that hospitality jobs often involve working in close proximity to alcohol; or, it could be that the only places that are open for them to socialise and relax are local casinos or bars, depending on the hours they work. So it is extremely necessary to provide these initiatives to those in this industry. Companies not only have a legal duty of care towards their team members, but a moral one too; staff work hard for their employers and deserve to be supported and valued. This, in turn, creates drivers to keep businesses sustainable: happy, engaged staff remain loyal, retention rates increase and staff recruitment costs are reduced. And, of course, happy staff means happy customers.

What initiatives can employers adopt?

There are many businesses that are working hard to support their staff by offering mental health and addiction awareness training alongside flexible working policies as well as scheduling regular catch-ups with their team members, ensuring there is an open-door policy and better lines of communication.

Many companies are also offering access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to provide resources to support staff. That said, there are still too many businesses that unfortunately aren’t always aware of how best to deal with these issues and consequently are not supporting their employees adequately.

What benefits have been seen?

The benefits are huge. Employees who feel supported, through both good and bad times at home and/or at work, are able to better deal with the pressures they face in the industry. Employees also feel more motivated and engaged, which leads to increased productivity and staff retention, thus increasing ROI and creating savings in recruitment costs. An added bonus, as I stated previously, is that happy staff are more likely to mean happy customers, and ultimately, this all contributes to creating a more stable and sustainable business.

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