

Kinder way to work

Post-trauma expert leads the campaign to focus on workers' wellbeing

LONG hours, squeezed budgets, increased workloads... it's little wonder that more and more professionals are falling prey to stress, anxiety and, in some cases, mental breakdown.

For almost 25 years, Derbyshire-based psychotherapist Anna Pinkerton has supported professionals and people in public life who have experienced specific events or a build-up of stresses which have overwhelmed them, leading to what she calls 'traumatic breakdown'.

A leading UK expert in post-trauma work, she has pioneered strategies to help people recover from conditions such as chronic stress, depression and anxiety.

Now she has developed a therapy practice to help combat the stresses of corporate life and believes the answer could lie in greater kindness not just to others, but to ourselves.

Kindness Incorporated examines and challenges the modern corporate culture that leads to physical and mental health issues, as a result of stress and lack of self-care. Anna believes that a 'top down' approach is the key to a significant and lasting change for the better.

She explains: "I developed Kindness Incorporated to invite visionary leaders, managers, business owners and professionals to work towards prevention of burnout and breakdown. It takes courage in our carry-on-regardless culture, but it's time to take care of our best minds.

"Businesses today are in a dilemma. The competitive landscape

is intense. Budgets are getting smaller and the daily motto is achieving more with less. Time lines become more and more truncated. Emails flood in all day.

"Kindness Incorporated was born out of almost 25 years of working with people on the verge of breakdown. I have discovered a simple formula to apply in complex conditions.

"I've seen how pressure builds and requires us to become an automaton, often causing complete collapse..."

"Companionship, consideration and care of self creates robust, resilient leaders who go on to create robust, resilient teams and businesses."

She adds: "The leaders who break down are the ones who are strong, committed and often visionary. Sometimes, however, these very driven people forget or simply don't fully value what is required to sustain them.

"Modern professional life can be overwhelming. Stress has been assimilated as a normal part of every day and high-pressure roles expect progressively greater levels of

performance. Add to this trying to meet the demands of busy family life and social obligations and it can be lethal.

"I've seen how this pressure builds and requires us to become automatons, often causing complete collapse which then requires months of recuperation."

In 2015, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported a 71% increase in reported employee mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, since 2009. The increase was associated with long working hours and the extent to which operational demands took precedence over employee wellbeing.

Anna says: "Early signs are when we stop having lunch, we don't eat at all or even put off going to the bathroom. We can begin to feel we are not doing anything well. While occasional stress is a normal part of professional life, consistent strain limits our ability to live full and productive lives and eventually breaks us down.

"It doesn't have to be this way. By cultivating a kind and companionable relationship with themselves, leaders can feel more open to internal creativity and external opportunities. Incorporating kindness into our lives can also be profoundly healing and help recovery from trauma, burnout, anxiety, stress and despair" ■

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