

# A Work Health and Well-Being Toolkit

Surviving and Thriving at Work



By Dr Rachel Perkins OBE

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## **About the Author**

Dr Rachel Perkins OBE pioneered successful programmes enabling people experiencing mental health problems to achieve sustainable employment, before applying that knowledge to everyone in the world of work.

She led an Independent Review for Government into mental health and employment in 2009, was named Mind Champion of the Year in 2010, is a member of Equality 2025 (advising Government on disability issues) and has supported numerous health, voluntary and housing services to enable people facing multiple disadvantage to lead fulfilling lives.

She has written many books, articles and chapters and spoken nationally and internationally on health, employment, recovery and participation. Her work stems from her perspectives as a psychologist, an employer and someone living with a mental health condition.

# Introduction

Work can be satisfying and rewarding, and appropriate employment is good for you, but we also know that it can be stressful.

Promoting health and well-being at work is good for the individual and good for business.

It is a responsibility shared between employees and their managers, but there are no set formulas - Everyone is different, and this toolkit offers an easy framework to devise individual plans to survive and thrive at work.

## **Why it matters to employees**

Feeling in control of your working life, building strategies for fulfilment both at work and beyond work, make life better. By devising your own plan to survive working life and to thrive in your career, you can gain satisfaction from work and beat the negative side of stress. You can also prevent – or manage – the difficulties that occur in all our working lives, whether that is about workload, tricky work relationships, or difficult customers!

You can do this on your own, but you can also involve your line manager in the process so that they know the best ways of assisting you to make the most of your job.

## **Why it matters to employers**

This toolkit can help improve morale and well-being, increase high performance working and may reduce sickness absence.

Developed in the demanding context of health services, it enables individuals to increase control over their working lives. This can reduce stress – because a factor consistently predictive of stress at work is a lack of control.

This tool places employees in the driving seat. Active employee involvement also contributes to high performance working – closing the gap between people's skills and their actual motivation and use of those skills in practice. It also enables employees facing particular challenges – like caring responsibilities, health issues or physical impairments – to plan the best way to manage these in a work context. And uniquely it enables employees to discuss their strategies with their line manager – thus opening up conversations that may be difficult for either party to initiate.

The toolkit provides a structured, straightforward way of enabling both employees and managers to communicate and plan for well-being and success.

## Where the ideas come from

Over the decades, many initiatives have started out with a specific target of people with particular health or disability-related needs – and then gone mainstream, as we found they were useful for everyone.

In 1899 HG Wells imagined a strange future where doors would open automatically as you approached them. Seventy years later automatic doors were introduced as a disability access feature – yet now we experience them as a convenience to us all, as we move in and out of buildings and transport hubs with luggage, buggies and more. More recently Microsoft chief Bill Gates stated that voice recognition software, pioneered to help blind people access computers, was easier for most people than typing. Text messaging, so helpful to deaf people, has totally changed the way young – and many older – people communicate.

The ‘surviving and thriving at work’ toolkit was first developed to enable people with health conditions (including stress and mental health problems) to prosper in their working lives – to manage the challenges they face and discuss with their manager how adjustments and supports from them could help. It then became obvious that we all feel and work better if we can agree adjustments at work – leaving early one night to attend a course or receiving regular feedback and encouragement – so this toolkit has been adapted to be useful to everyone in the world of work!

## The context

Work flexibilities that make a difference are often very straightforward, routine measures – like line managers asking about any challenges and helping individuals to think through solutions.

In some situations people may want formally to ‘request’ flexible working – and the Government plans to give all employees this right (rather than only parents of young or disabled children as originally passed into law). This universal approach matches employer good practice: for instance, BT has found it most effective simply to ask all new recruits whether there is anything that would enable them to work to their best.

The Equality Act 2010 (like the Disability Discrimination Act before it) expects employers to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to enable ‘disabled people’ to work (that is, anyone with a long-term physical or mental impairment that has a substantial adverse impact on day to day activities). Employers only have to do what is ‘reasonable’: for instance, a small business would not be expected to put in costly equipment (and there may be government support available).

Other relevant legislation includes the Health and Safety at Work Act; and Dame Carol Black’s work on health, work and well-being has generated both policy and good practice materials.

# How to use this toolkit

The toolkit contains a number of sections, but every one of us is different so all our plans need to be individual to us. You may wish to use a different format and/or only use some of the sections we have suggested – that is fine!

- Some people may prefer to develop a plan to manage the stresses and strains of work on their own. However, line managers share responsibility for the health and well-being of their staff. If you want help and support from your manager then it is important to discuss with them the ways in which they can best support your well-being and performance at work.
- If you do create a plan with your manager then it should be confidential between the two of you and should not appear in your staff record.
- Prevention is better than cure - it is usually best to prepare plans in advance rather than wait until problems arise. However, these plans should be living documents that you review regularly and update in the light of experience. Supervision and appraisal meetings offer a good opportunity to develop and review plans.
- In general, the more specific you can be about what you will do and what your manager can do to help, the more likely your plan is to be successful.

## For further information on:

The Equality Act:  
[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

High Performance Working:  
[www.ukces.org.uk](http://www.ukces.org.uk)

Work, Health & Well-Being:  
[www.dwp.gov.uk/health-work-and-well-being](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/health-work-and-well-being)

Health and Safety at Work:  
[www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

# Part 1: A work health and well-being promotion plan

It is not easy to juggle the demands of your job and the demands of other things outside work that are important to you.

A health and well-being promotion plan helps you to strike a balance and remain on an even keel at work.

It might be useful to think about:

1

## **The things that are important to you in your life outside work**

This may be sports, hobbies and spending time with your partner or children. Think about when you are going to make time for them.

2

## **The things you need to do every day or week to keep yourself feeling on top of things**

For example:

- Get up in time to have a proper breakfast
- Have a lie in at least once a week
- Take a lunch break out of the workplace
- Get some exercise every day
- Allot a set time to answer emails and write up notes each day at work
- Have a 'treat' - something to look forward to - every day/week

3

## **The things your manager can do to help you stay on an even keel at work**

For example:

- Let me have Wednesday evenings off for my yoga class
- Help me prioritise when I have too much to do
- Say 'thank you' when I have done something he/she asked
- Encourage me to tell him/her when I am having difficulties
- Recognise my need to pray
- Make any adjustments I need because of a health condition, impairment or responsibilities outside of work

# My work health and well-being promotion plan

**The things that are important to me, in my life outside work (and when I will do them):**

**The things I need to do every day or week to keep myself on an even keel:**

**The things that my manager can do to help me stay on an even keel at work:**

## Part 2: A work health and well-being first aid kit

It is almost inevitable that we will sometimes feel upset, discouraged, hopeless, angry, worried or stressed out at work. We have first aid boxes for minor physical cuts and bruises - this is a first aid kit for the emotional cuts and bruises.

It might be useful to think about:

1

**The things you can do while you are actually at work and feel upset, discouraged, hopeless, angry, anxious or stressed out**

For example:

- Have a cup of tea or coffee
- Talk to a friend on the phone at lunchtime
- Get out of the situation for a while (maybe by going out for a break or even just going to the toilet for a bit of peace and quiet)
- Think about something you are looking forward to

2

**The things you can do after work so that you don't take the trouble of the day home with you**

For example:

- Talk through the events of the day with colleagues before you go home
- Take a walk - get some fresh air
- Go to the gym - get some exercise
- Listen to music
- Read a book or newspaper
- Play your favourite computer game
- Have a long hot bath



# My work health and well-being first aid kit

**Things I can do to get myself back on an even keel if I feel upset, discouraged, hopeless, angry, worries or stressed out at work:**

**Things I can do after work so that I don't take the troubles of the day home with me:**

# Part 3: Plan for managing things that get to you at work

There will always be things that happen at work that knock us off balance and wear us down at work: things that make us feel angry, hurt, upset, discouraged, anxious, stressed out. If we can identify these, we can work out how to stop them getting to us too much.

1

**There might be things relating to your job and things that colleagues and managers do, like:**

- A customer gets angry when we are busting a gut to help them
- Someone complains about our work
- A colleague promises to do something and fails to do it
- We do something we have been asked to do and no-one says 'thank you'
- Colleagues or managers act in a way that seems unfair

2

**There might be things that happen outside work which have a detrimental impact on you at work like:**

- Having a row with your partner
- Money problems
- A loved pet getting sick or dying

For each thing that knocks you off balance, it might be useful to think about:

1

**Things that you can do for yourself that help stop what has happened getting to you too much**

There might be things in your 'first aid kit' that would help. For example:

- Tell myself that the person was cross because of what had happened to them and that they did not really mean to upset me
- Talk to my colleagues or my manager about how I am feeling
- Do some breathing exercises
- Arrange a treat for myself after work

2

**Things you can ask your manager to do to help you get back on an even keel**

For example:

- Ask me how things are going when he/she notices I am not looking myself (remember to say how they will know)
- In one to one meetings, ask me about jobs I am finding challenging, empathise with the difficulties I am having and help me to think of ways forward
- Make a point of congratulating me for work I have done well

# Plan for managing things that get to you at work

**Things that make me feel  
angry, hurt, upset, discouraged,  
anxious, stressed out at work**

**What I will do to stop it getting  
to me too much when these  
things happen**

**What my manager can  
do to help me**

# Part 4: Plan for what to do when you are not feeling 100% - having an off day

Everyone has their off days - if we can spot that it is a bad day and nip things in the bud, then we stop everything from escalating and going from bad to worse.

First, it's helpful to think about how you will spot when you are having an off day - those tell-tale signs, thoughts, feelings and behaviours - that you are not feeling 100%.

For example:

- Ruminating on something that has happened- going over and over it
- Finding it unusually hard to get up and get going in the morning
- Feeling agitated and unable to relax
- Getting irritable and oversensitive
- Feeling restless and unable to relax

Then it might be useful to think about:

1

## **Things you can do to help you cope and get back on an even keel.**

There may be things in your 'first aid kit' that would help.

For example:

- Plan something nice for the evening - this might be something small like a long hot bath, or your favourite TV programme
- Talk to a close friend or colleague
- Do something you love - walk in nature, gardening, see a great film..

2

## **Things that your manager can do to help you get back on top of things**

For example:

- Try to notice when I am not my usual self and ask if there is anything they can do to help
- Encourage me to approach him/her when I am having problems (and respond to my requests for help!)
- Help me prioritise what really needs to be done today
- Encourage me to leave work on time

# My plan for what to do when I am having an off day - not feeling 100%

**How I will know that I am not 100% - the tell-tale signs that all is not well**

**Things I will do to help me get back on top of things**

**What my manager can do to help me**

# Part 5: Plan for what to do when everything is getting too much for you

No matter how much we try to keep on an even keel, all of us get to the point at some time when we have had enough and just want to jack it all in - when everything is getting too much for us and we cannot see a way through. Asking for help can be hard!

First, it is helpful to think about how you will spot when things are not going right for you - those signs - thoughts, feelings and behaviours - that things really are getting too much

For example:

- Disturbed sleep patterns
- Thinking that there is no point in what we are doing
- Getting all sorts of colds and minor infections
- Not hungry - or over-eating to comfort ourselves
- Drinking too much
- Bursting into tears or flying off the handle at the slightest provocation
- Letting responsibilities slip

Then it might be useful to think about:

## 1 Things you can do to start putting things right.

There may be things in your 'first aid kit' that would help.

For example:

- Confide in family and friends and ask for help
- Cut down on social activities
- Try to get some regular exercise - even just a bit
- Talk to my manager about how I am feeling and ask for relief of some responsibilities
- Ask for some leave so I can get away for a bit
- Go and see my GP

## 2 Things that your manager can do to help you get back on top of things

For example:

- Make time for me to talk about the difficulties I am having
- Arrange for me to take a few days off
- Help me to reduce my workload for a while/work at home some of the time
- Make sure that I only work my set hours
- Remind me of all the good work I have done/that I am a valued member of the team

# My plan for what to do when everything is getting too much for me

<b>How I can tell when things really are getting too much for me</b>	<b>Things I will do to help me cope and get back on top of things</b>	<b>What my manager can do to help me</b>

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