

Wellbeing, by Olivia Martin, BPIF HR Adviser

With constantly streaming Coronavirus updates, statistics and still even fake news, it's never been a more stressful time for business owners and there's lots to think about. Particularly if you're a leader that everyone looks to for reassurance and answers in this ever changing environment.

The uncertainty and pressures of these unprecedented times can have an impact on your wellbeing, both physical and mental. Whether you're self-employed, in charge of a team or the owner of a company, you will probably focus more on your employees' wellbeing rather than your own. You're not expected to be an expert in mental health, but it's important during this uncertainty to look after your own wellbeing.

Employees are undoubtedly stressed and wondering about the future of their company and jobs. In some cases you might even feel guilty or to blame for the state of affairs within your company or team. You might feel really uncomfortable having 'awkward' and difficult conversations with employees. Many of our members operate a 'family' working environment where employees have been with the company for so long that they're part of the furniture and the thought of uprooting such employees is virtually unthinkable. It can be really difficult to take a step back and look objectively at your business to ensure its survival. You might not know where to start, and the potential upcoming changes to your business and workforce might even be keeping you awake at night.

The emotional and moral worries are one thing, but the financial stress and uncertainty adds another layer to your 'worry cake'. Then the icing on the cake is the loneliness and personal struggles of being apart from family/friends, limited social activities etc. and the cherry on top might be potential healthcare concerns.

Michael A. Freeman; a psychiatrist and former entrepreneur that researches mental health and entrepreneurs says "there are traumatic events all the way along the line" of running a business. He also states that sometimes it's a business founder/entrepreneurs very character that makes them more susceptible to neglecting their own wellbeing. Freeman suggests that "people who are on the energetic, motivated, and creative side are both more likely to be entrepreneurial and more likely to have strong emotional states". Those states may include depression, despair, hopelessness, worthlessness, loss of motivation, and suicidal thinking. (Source: Bruder, 2013).

In a study conducted by private bank Aldermore, more than 75% of small business owners had noticed mental ill-health and three fifths of those felt that their business had contributed to their mental ill-health. Research has also shown that start-up founders are twice as likely to have depression and suicidal thoughts. (Source: Mente, 2019).

Of course, you might be in the 0.0001% (not a factual statistic) of the population that is totally worry-free and goes around blissfully relaxed 24/7. However, these people can also be known as Sociopaths. So, if you're like the rest of us, the worst thing you can do is turn a blind eye to your stress and worries. We are here for you whenever you need an informal chat or non-judgemental support.

You can contact your Regional Director Marcus Clifford on 0774 381 8806, for reassurance on industry trends, confidential discussions on business support and funding options available to you, and much more!

Speak to your regional HR Advisor, if you don't know where to start with structuring your business for the 'new-normal' or maybe you're about to enter 'survival mode' and need to know what legal obligations you have. Don't forget your H&S Advisors that can help ensure your workplace is safe and ready to get up and running again when employees return.

Or maybe you don't want to talk to any of us! In which case, just make sure that you are looking after your own well-being. Below are some starter tips that might help!

- Go out for your daily exercise. Whether you want to cycle a marathon on the spin bike in your garage or just go for a 20-minute walk, getting out of your (home) office with no work distractions can do wonders for distracting and organising the mind. Not to mention the other physical health benefits!
- Take a break from the news. At the best of times all the doom and gloom can be draining. Don't be afraid to switch off from the news for a while. Or, continue to follow the news but ensure it is from trusted sources, such as the World Health Organisation, Public Health England and local authorities.
- Talk to people. We will be a bit offended if it's not us that you choose to talk to, but we will get over it, so do ensure you are in touch with friends, family, whoever. Freeman says "Don't let your business squeeze out your connections with human beings". When it comes to fighting off depression, relationships with friends and family can be powerful weapons. And don't be afraid to ask for help, see a mental health professional if you are experiencing anxiety, PTSD or depression.
- Practice reflection & reframing 'failure'. "Instead of telling yourself, 'I failed, the business failed, I'm a loser'" says Freeman, "look at the data from a different perspective: Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Life is a constant process of trial and error. Don't exaggerate the experience."

Further Guidance/Research:

'How is all the stress and pressure of the coronavirus crisis affecting you? Do you find yourself getting a bit less patient with those you manage? Or, perhaps you are withdrawing into the data and avoiding communicating with people? Or maybe you feel paralysed and you just don't know what to do for the best?' An interesting read from Dr Mike Drayton on 'Leading Under Pressure' can be found here:

<https://www.epcresilience.com/insight/documents-and-videos/blog/leading-under-pressure>

The BPIF Health & Safety team have also created a guidance document on 'Coronavirus - Managing Stress and Anxiety' which can be accessed here:

<https://www.bossfederation.com/coronavirus#section=148882>

We have published an array of documents on our website to support you, do let us know if you need a reminder of your login details.

If you are experiencing feelings of distress and isolation, or are struggling to cope, The Samaritans offers support; you can speak to someone for free over the phone, in confidence, on 116 123 (UK and ROI), email jo@samaritans.org, or visit the Samaritans website to find details of your nearest branch

<https://www.samaritans.org/>

For services local to you, the national mental health database Hub of Hope allows you to enter your postcode to search for organisations and charities who offer mental health advice and support in your area <https://hubofhope.co.uk/>

References:

Bruder, J. (2013). *The Psychological Price of Entrepreneurship*. Available:

<https://www.inc.com/magazine/201309/jessica-bruder/psychological-price-of-entrepreneurship.html>

Mente. (2019). *Entrepreneurs, business owners and poor mental health*. Available:

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