

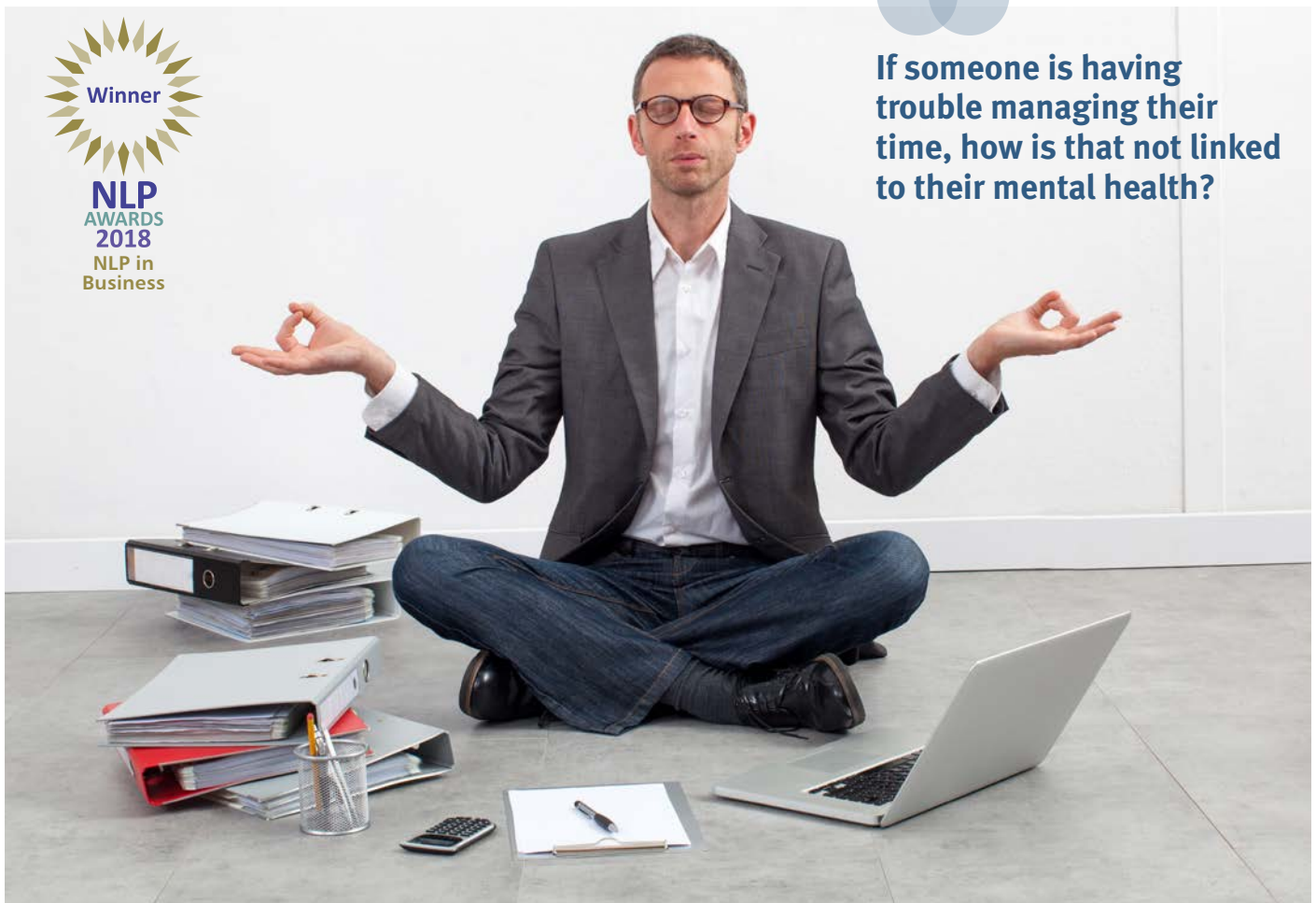
The essential elements of making organisations healthy places to be



By John McLachlan and Karen Meager



If someone is having trouble managing their time, how is that not linked to their mental health?



When we won the Best for Business Services UK award at the Mental Health Awards in 2017, the feedback we received was that the judging panel was particularly impressed with our creative approach to embedding emotional and mental health support into all the work we do in organisations.

Even though one in four people will experience a mental health issue in their lives, the subject is still a delicate one in organisations and people are not always falling over themselves to attend a workshop or talk on the subject. As one of our HR partners said recently, 'It's like signing up for a bad parenting course – everyone feels they need one but no one wants to own it.' As clinicians John and I run a small private psychotherapy practice but most of our work is done in organisations. After all,

most people who work full time spend more time at work than they do with their family; they are also generally more willing to try new things in the workplace than in their life outside work, so for us, the workplace is the perfect place to work with people on improving their emotional and mental health – whilst learning other great skills and techniques too.

If you work as a coach, trainer or consultant in a business environment, you have a massive opportunity to support the mental and emotional health of everyone you come into contact with – and the people who work with them.

Many companies think that supporting mental health is providing some awareness training for their managers and having a counselling or support service they can refer people to if they are struggling. As NLPers, though, we have a huge

opportunity to change the way people experience the world of work. In a recent meeting with a large IT company we regularly work for, we suggested that our role was to improve the mental and emotional health of every person with whom we come into contact. Their response was a bit perplexed: 'But you run our leadership development and time management programmes?'. Then the penny dropped, that we build it in covertly to every concept we teach, discussion we facilitate and exercise we coach.

If someone is having trouble managing their time, how is that not linked to their mental health? They are fine to admit they feel overwhelmed, stressed out and not coping in a training programme about time management, which gives us permission to work with them on it; and by doing that reduce their stress and overwhelmed feelings overall, helping them to make clearer and better decisions.

Sounds straightforward doesn't it? But anyone who has gone about achieving this knows that it's much easier said than done. When you are busy and tired, it's easy to just focus on getting through the material and not feel up to getting in there with your delegates. So here are some strategies you can easily introduce to your work as a coach, trainer or consultant.

OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP A GROUP'S OR INDIVIDUAL'S EMOTIONAL OR MENTAL HEALTH

Make sure you are as emotionally regulated as you can be; take your own personal development seriously

It is well known that our brain structures adapt depending on who we spend time with. If you are emotionally regulated, other people feel safe and are more likely to open up to you and other people. They won't understand why but you could be a catalyst without doing anything except showing up as a well-rounded human being.

Support people you work with to develop their conflict resolution and negotiation skills

These are key life skills that are essential to an individual's mental health. Anyone who has seen our website knows we don't offer courses on this; instead we integrate it into everything we do. Facilitate these skills in group discussions; highlight when someone has done this effectively; demonstrate them in your own behaviour.

Role model and demonstrate healthy boundaries

Setting and maintaining healthy boundaries is another important life skill which impacts people's emotional and mental health. You can support this by setting and maintaining clear boundaries throughout a programme or away day. Many facilitators set group agreements in a group session but they tend to be fairly superficial, written on a flip chart without any discussion and then not enforced; this is not setting boundaries. Group agreements can be very useful but to be helpful to someone's emotional and mental health they must be followed up on, otherwise people are unconsciously picking up that even you can't stick by the rules you set. Thinking about time boundaries is one of the best ways to role model boundaries; be clear about when you are and aren't available; respect other people's time; finish and start when you say you are going to.

Feedback, feedback, feedback

The word 'feedback' has an interesting reputation, even in the NLP world. Often people use it to dump their opinions on others. I once had someone come up to me at a conference to give me ►



Most people who work full time spend more time at work than they do with their family



- ‘feedback’ on my flip charts (she was trying to sell me her friend’s training course). My colleagues had to literally dive under the table to stop themselves laughing out loud, but sadly having unasked for, clumsy feedback forced on you is something people in organisations deal with all the time – so they are on high alert for the rubbish versions of it. You have to get very good at making it part of what you do. Using mental health and emotional support as your framework for feedback is helpful for this; what can you offer them that will build their confidence in their capabilities and help them to use the skills you are teaching them in the outside world?

Spotting potential mental health issues

Sometimes you will experience mental health issues from individuals in a group; many are undiagnosed and the person themselves may not be aware of it. If you spot any of the following behaviour it could be an indication that someone is experiencing issues that are deeper and might need more professional help.

- Inconsistent appearance; for example smart and groomed sometimes and unkempt and scruffy at other times
- Disproportionate emotion; nothing wrong with a few tears but watch out for emotion that is disproportionate to what’s going on, for example unable to keep state for a lot of the time
- Mood changes; are they extreme relative to normal behaviour? For example down on themselves sometimes and sometimes euphoric
- High levels of irritability, agitation or anxiety
- Loss of memory or abnormal patterns of speech
- More than is ‘normal’ of any of these: expressions of



The fewer touch points people have, the more likely they are to seek help

hopelessness, lack of interest in things, trouble concentrating, lack of energy.

It is important to note that these in themselves are not evidence that someone has a mental health problem; they are merely flags, something to watch out for. So if you suspect someone might need help what can you do?

Using one-to-ones

We have short one-to-ones at various points with people, particularly on programmes of more than four days. These provide an opportunity for people to express any problems they are having and for us to raise anything to them individually that you would not want to raise in front of the group.

Know where to point them for support

Equip your training team with a list of qualified therapists you can refer people to and have some form of supervisory support in place for yourself. When working in an organisation, get familiar with the employee support scheme so that you can give them the information they need straightaway without having to refer them to someone else. The fewer touch points people have, the more likely they are to seek help.

Do we all need to be psychotherapists to help people with their emotional and mental health? I don’t believe so; there are many things we can all do to support this. ●

