

Short List

5 December

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Anxiety and panic kill consultant productivity: wellbeing expert

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Recruitment managers shouldn't ignore consultants' mental health among the many factors they must address to maintain productivity, says workplace wellbeing expert **Sally Kirkright**.

Leaders need to prioritise consultants' wellbeing and workplace emotions alongside their hard skills and ability to achieve job outcomes, Kirkright told *Shortlist*.

"If you're a good leader, you have the ability to engage, empower and motivate your people, and they will be very successful – hopefully getting lots of sales – that's a direct bottom-line impact," she said.

A failed sales task, such as closing a job order, can lead to anxiety which, when not addressed, can cause absenteeism, lost productivity and staff turnover, said Kirkright, who is the CEO of employment wellbeing and training provider AccessEAP.

Leaders can manage anxiety through simple communication activities, such as a sales debrief, she said.

"It's really important to be talking and debriefing, and therefore it's important for the leader to be coaching and supporting people to give them that encouragement.

"If someone comes and says, 'have you got a moment', you always have a moment for your people. If you're a leader and you're running a business, you make time for your people. That's the number one priority."

One in five Australians experience mental health issues in their lifetime, and leaders need to develop skills and behaviours to counter these problems, Kirkright said.

"The more we're investing in our people, the more... [we're] creating a healthy workplace. Why do we want to do that? Because it's absolutely about productivity," she said.

"Today's managers are expected to nurture and train staff, and bring out the best in all employees, and they often need to acquire these extra skills to be able to do so."

Recruitment companies are putting more than productivity at risk if they ignore mental health, according to recent comments from Clayton Utz partner **Shae McCartney**, who said poor management of on-hire workers' stress can land agencies in legal trouble.

Panic kills productivity

The ability to manage panic in a crisis is crucial to reducing damage to company productivity, said Kirkright.

"People tend to go into that panic mode straight away [in a crisis], so you have to try and calm things down. It's about having conversations, taking a moment to assess the situation and then working through what you actually need to do," she said.

Staff look to leadership for guidance during high-pressure events, such as layoffs, said Kirkright.

"If you're panicking, then your people start to panic. The captain of the ship is always calm, so if you're calm, then the people will be calm."

Poise helps staff recover from high-stress incidents more quickly, allowing them to return to productivity sooner, said Kirkright.

Leaders will always be asked to do more

In 2015, recruitment leaders can expect to take on more responsibilities as companies continue to become more efficient, Kirkright added.

"The expectations on leaders are increasing. That's because of the cost pressure on organisations and the pressure to have higher performance and productivity," she said.

"We're also seeing more redundancies across the board, so leaders and their people are going to have to continue to do more with less."

Do you have an innovative strategy for managing, developing or rewarding recruiters? Email Hannah to share your experience.

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