

MENTAL HEALTH & THRIVING WORKPLACES

MARGO LYDON, CEO OF SUPERFRIEND

In conversation with
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Margo Lydon

CEO, SuperFriend



Margo has worked in mental health for 20 years and has been CEO of SuperFriend for 10 years. She has extensive experience in leadership, business growth, strategic partnerships, and systems change. Margo represents SuperFriend on a number of nationally recognised strategic alliances including: The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance, Victorian Workplace Mental Wellbeing Collaboration. Through Margo's involvement and influence in the Alliance, she also chairs the Stakeholder and Communications working group of the National Workplace Initiative – a four year investment from the Commonwealth's Department of Health to create a nationally consistent approach to workplace mental health.



Margo is a member of the AICD and was a finalist in the 2019 Telstra Business Women's Awards.

David May from the Lawson HR Group spoke with Margo about the importance of mental health training for thriving workplaces.

For a further conversation on this topic, please contact David on 03 9946 7312 or david@lawsondelaney.com.au.

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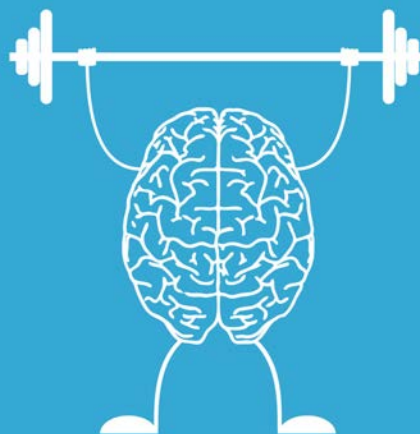
Margo Lydon in her own words



"Each year at SuperFriend we conduct Australia's largest national workplace mental health and wellbeing survey, called 'Indicators of a Thriving Workplace' ([click here to access](#)). We ask over 10,000 people questions about their experiences of leadership, capability, culture, connectedness, their sense of belonging, and the policies and practices that they see and experience in their organisations.

There are 11 practical or tangible actionable items that are within the control of any business to implement. One significant actionable item is mental health and wellbeing training. It's essential that this is fit-for-purpose skills-based training, not just awareness training. It is also really important that it happens on an annual basis for all people leaders if it's going to have the desired results.

It's also crucial not just to have policies about mental health and wellbeing but to make them visible in the workplace."

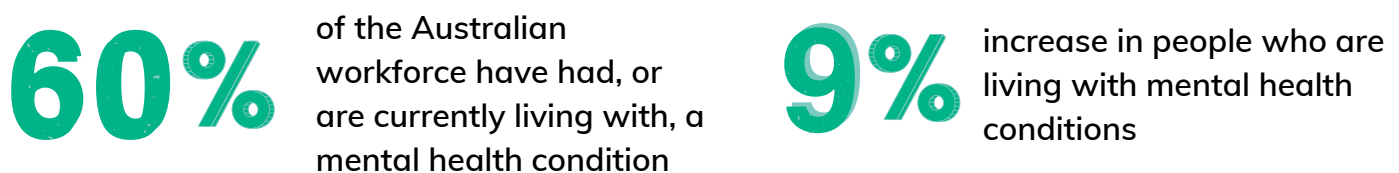




THE LAST 12 MONTHS IN AUSTRALIA

It's been a tough 12 months in Australia, more so in Victoria. What effect has the last 12 months had on people's wellness and mental health?

“Awareness of personal mental health went up significantly in 2020, as did the understanding of the relationship between mental health and the workplace. The results from ‘Indicators of a Thriving Workplace’ tell us that we've seen:



We talk to the leaders across the mental health sector in service provision areas and they are all recording significant uplift in demand on their services (20% - 40%). The positive is that help is available and people are sticking their hands up and saying, 'Hey, I'm not coping, I'm not feeling so great'. We know that the very first step of getting help and to feel better is acknowledging the need for help.

We know, when you do reach out early and to people who do care, understand you, and also people who have the skills and necessary support, then it usually leads to a much better recovery, a much better outcome, and certainly a much easier path to navigate than ever doing it on your own.”

Is the visibility of leaderships' buy-in to creating a mentally healthy workplace important here?

“Having support and policies is one thing, having the policies visible and actioned is when you actually get the business benefit. A lot of CEOs and C-suite are walking every day in new territory. In 2021, recognising the context and the circumstances in which people are is crucial. For a lot of CEOs and leaders, this is bringing a whole raft of new challenges.

From a mental health perspective this is tough for them but also for their workers. Their workforce probably won't tolerate bad leadership, toxic environments or unsustainable work conditions to the level that people have done previously. People have had an 'aha' moment in their lives and value happiness like never before, and are making decisions about what work they do and where they do it.



People are actively seeking employers who provide the best environments. This is supported by the data from the 'Thriving Workplaces' survey that shows year on year, those organisations that **visibly** put into practice **at least eight tangible, actionable mental health initiatives** score the highest in the 'thriving workplace category' and those organisations, like their people, are thriving in terms of business performance. Mentally healthy workplaces can create competitive advantages.

I think in the year that we've had, where there's been the absence of in-person connection, the more visible the CEO can be across the organisation the better. Walk the floor, chat to the staff, go to functions, sponsor different things, get involved, get engaged, really hear from people and hear what's worked and what hasn't worked.”

TIME TO GET PRACTICAL

What other practical steps can people leaders take?

"It is not up to the people leader to diagnose or find solutions for people but it's up to the people leader to understand how perhaps an individual is experiencing their mental health condition and how it impacts their work.

It's how you have that conversation and then how the organisation and the people leader can provide the support necessary for somebody to navigate their requirements of work but also navigate their health and wellbeing needs effectively.

What creates that positive health culture is when people are able to see, particularly from people leaders, their understanding and awareness in action every day.

We know that when leaders role model what it's like to have good mental health and wellbeing, and look after themselves, it has a ripple effect across the organisation."

"Lost productivity due to mental ill-health is estimated to cost the Australian economy between \$10-18 billion every year, but on the flip side, every dollar invested into workplace mental health is estimated to deliver a return on investment of 5:15."

2020 Indicators of a Thriving Workplace, SuperFriend

Is there benefit in everybody experiencing mental health training together or is it more effective to run a leadership group separately?

“Best practice is that leaders need to be trained first and the rest of the staff being trained second. If you train the whole of the workforce and you haven't trained the leaders, staff will be starting to have conversations with leaders who aren't yet equipped to have these conversations. The sequencing of the training is incredibly helpful.”

What effects can robust mental health training have?

“Mental health training can be so transformational, if it's the right type of training, and it's skill based training. It has to be more than awareness training; it must include building confidence and capability.”



When people are trained there is a ripple-on-the-pond effect into their families, into their communities, into other places beyond the workplace. They take this newfound knowledge, expertise and training and display it in real life - this can be talking to a neighbor, a friend or a family member who might be distressed.”



"It's a gift of a workplace to help somebody develop those skills and be able to apply it. It's certainly part of a value proposition for any employee."



WORKPLACE CONNECTIVITY

Many have mentioned missing social and workplace connectivity. Someone said to me, “I don't miss anyone at work, but I miss everyone at work. I just miss the thing of going to and being at work”. How has this changed us?

“From a mental wellbeing perspective, we are human beings and absolutely every single one of us needs to have connectedness to thrive to be alive. It's a core fundamental we need to live, as much as we need air; we need that sense of connectedness.

People miss the connections that are outside the formal meetings and the formal ‘getting the job done’. The generative meaningful conversations are really the fibres that bring people together and create a culture where people feel a sense of belonging and a sense of care from that organisation.

An important part of returning to work is rebuilding this sense of connectedness.”

"Positive, high quality interpersonal connections are essential to maintaining positive mental health and wellbeing. They are the foundations of effective teamwork and collaboration. Having a shared vision and knowing how a person's role fits into the organisational framework can unite workers, creating purpose and meaningful work.

Trust, psychological safety, fairness and social inclusiveness are outcomes where positive interpersonal connections occur."

2020 Indicators of a Thriving Workplace, SuperFriend

LESSONS LEARNED

What lessons can we learn and what can we do to have a thriving workplace in 2021?

“We've really got to recognise that flexibility in our work this year has brought a lot of silver linings; people are talking about comfortable clothing, no commute times, people's increased availability for work and home commitments because they're not traveling.

However, some managers still believe if they can't see somebody working, they are not working. This micro managing will have eroded trust and that sense of belonging and connectedness in their workplace, as their team is not getting the trust that they deserve nor need.

The answer will be a blend of home working and office working. We need to find a way to meet the needs of the business through productivity, and all of the good stuff that happens when businesses are working well together, but also from a human perspective. We can't just design a return to office or a new way of working just to meet the business needs without considering the psychological human needs that are essential for us to live and breathe, let alone be thriving, amazing humans doing great work.

So this whole next phase will need us to be innovative and think about things differently.”

LESSONS LEARNED

What lessons can leaders take for mental health and wellness?

“We know from our research - the evidence is compelling, no matter which way you cut the data - when people leaders at all levels of the organisation receive really good quality and effective mental health and wellbeing training, performance and productivity improves.

By having training that is skills-based on how to have conversations there is a massive ripple-on-the-pond effect. It opens up transparent conversations, it opens up trust, it can have an affect on culture across the organisation. It certainly builds capability for the people leader and their staff. Also, and really importantly, it helps people to stick up their hand and say, 'hey, look, I'm not coping that well, or I need some extra assistance here, and know that their people leader has the skills to help them.'

From an organisational perspective, I think it's incumbent on CEOs to recognise that; if they want business performance and success, they need to be front and centre of mental health and wellbeing. They must equip their people leaders to reach in and have a conversation, a meaningful conversation. It's about having a human to human, adult mature conversation about people's wellbeing.

Mental health and wellness has a huge bottom line impact - when you've got a leader who is looking after their wellbeing they have greater levels of empathy and compassion, they make better decisions, and they've balanced the head and the heart to get those better decisions. They're much better leaders in every way, shape and form, particularly in their relationships."

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

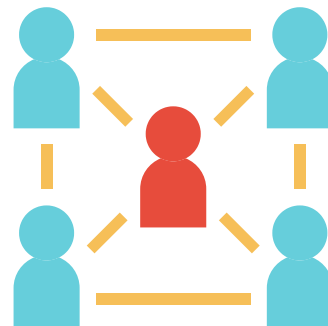


"Work these days is largely based on relationships. So if you've got somebody who is looking after their own renewal and taking care of themselves, you are actually setting yourself up for success as a leader. By taking time out, reflecting by doing all of the good things to look after yourself, eating well and so on, it sets your business up to actually perform better.

Dissonant leadership is when you've got leaders who are micromanaging, mistrusting, not sharing information, not being respectful in their interactions, not walking the talk, creating cultures where people are floundering and struggling, and toxic cultures. Nobody, no matter how resilient, functions as best as they possibly can in that sort of environment.

So there is a level of responsibility, for everyone in the workplace, not only the leaders, to look after their own mental health and wellbeing. This means that they show up for others and help others show up for them to be the best selves that they can be at work.

It is incumbent on leaders to really bring that authenticity to their organisations to enable people to be authentic as well."



In conclusion

The evolving state of mental health

Like physical health, mental health is not a fixed state and is something that changes, how well is this understood in the workplace?

"With mental health, you can be thriving and flourishing, enjoying really great relationships, loving your work and your contribution to this world, having a strong sense of purpose and meaning that's aligned with your values.

Likewise, you can be languishing with your mental health. Signs of languishing include feelings of not coping; it might be you're sleeping badly, you've got poor quality relationships, you might be using drugs or alcohol as ways of suppressing what's really going on, you might be taking loads of medications and feeling really awful within your own wellbeing. That is actually a low state of mental health. It may not be diagnosable as a mental illness, but it isn't healthy.

People can be flourishing though, and have a mental health condition. It's about the support, it's about how you manage your health and wellbeing, including your mental health condition. It's about what you have in place around you, which is where good work is so important to people's wellbeing.

There is so strong evidence about the health benefits of good work - when you've got people who are doing good work, they've got opportunity to actually improve their health outcomes, and the business benefits."

If in doubt, speak to a mental health organisation about how their professional expertise can support your team and organisation.

Thank you to Margo Lydon for sharing her expertise with David May and the Lawson HR Group.

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ABOUT US

The Lawson HR Group is a leading, privately owned group of specialist Executive Search, Professional Recruitment and HR Consulting companies.

We apply innovation, intellect and rigorous methodologies to achieve the desired outcomes for our clients whilst significantly mitigating risk.

The Lawson HR Group strives to reflect values which are represented in our published research papers on diversity, flexibility, risk mitigation and strengths-based leadership.

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