



ROBERT WALTERS

# THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIES IN ATTRACTING TOP TALENT

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# INTRODUCTION

In recent years, public awareness of mental health has risen dramatically, with a new focus on employers to take the initiative to support their staff in this area.

This shift in culture also presents a valuable opportunity. Businesses which can set themselves apart from competitors by demonstrating a commitment to developing and maintaining an effective mental health policy can attract high calibre professionals and ensure the highest levels of productivity.

For this whitepaper we explored the strategies employers have adopted to support the mental health of their staff and how they communicate these effectively to existing employees and during the recruitment process.

We also investigated the attitudes of professionals to determine how they feel their mental health can be best supported by their employer and where they feel support should come from at work.

This research is based on a survey of over 1200 professionals and hiring managers from a range of disciplines across the UK.

# ABOUT ROBERT WALTERS

Robert Walters is a specialist professional recruitment consultancy, working with businesses of all sizes as a trusted recruitment partner. With an international network of offices spanning 28 countries, we are perfectly positioned to help you find the very best skilled professionals. In the UK, we recruit specialists on a permanent, contract and interim basis, in the following areas:

- Accountancy & Finance
  - Banking & Financial Services
  - Executive Search
  - Human Resources
- Information Technology
  - Legal
  - Procurement & Supply Chain
  - Projects
- Secretarial & Business Support
  - Tax
  - Treasury

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# KEY STATISTICS

97%

Of professionals believe employers have a responsibility to support the mental health and wellbeing of their staff

72%

Of professionals believe attitudes towards mental health at work have changed in recent years

88%

Of professionals consider the mental health policies of a potential employer important when looking for a new role

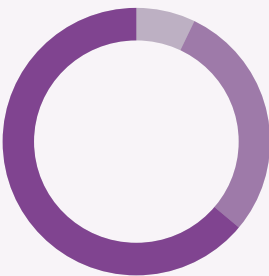


Of professionals believe mental health 'first aiders' are important



Of employers have such a policy in place

## HOW EASY IS IT FOR PROFESSIONALS TO FIND INFORMATION ABOUT MENTAL WELLBEING STRATEGIES FROM POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS?



- Easy 9%
- Neither easy nor difficult 27%
- Difficult 64%

51%

Of employers have a mental health policy in place

37%

Of professionals believe senior management at their company considers mental wellbeing a priority

## WHO DO EMPLOYERS PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING TO?



46%  
HR



35%  
MANAGERS



18%  
ALL STAFF

# CHANGING ATTITUDES TO MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Mental health and wellbeing is often regarded as a less widely discussed topic than physical health.

However, our research suggests that employers consider that awareness and attitudes towards mental health and wellbeing have improved in recent years, with 92% of employers feeling they have improved.

Among professionals, most agree that attitudes have changed, but the number is lower at 72%. Additionally, while 48% of employers strongly agree that attitudes have changed, just 23% of professionals strongly agree.

The research also revealed that employers (99%) and professionals (97%) are widely in agreement that businesses have a responsibility to support the mental health of their staff. However, despite employers being very aware of the importance of mental health and wellbeing, just 51% currently have a policy in place to support their staff.



“Employers are demonstrating a growing awareness of the importance of mental health and wellbeing among professionals. However, identifying which strategies are considered most effective by their staff will be essential in creating effective mental health strategies.”

**Janine Blacksley, Associate Director at Robert Walters**

In addition, among those employers who do have mental health strategies, it may be important to communicate them more effectively to staff. Our research showed that just 38% of professionals were aware that their employer has a mental health policy in place, and 29% were unsure.

## 76%

Of professionals believe people at their place of work would be uncomfortable discussing mental health

## 51%

Of employers have a mental health policy in place

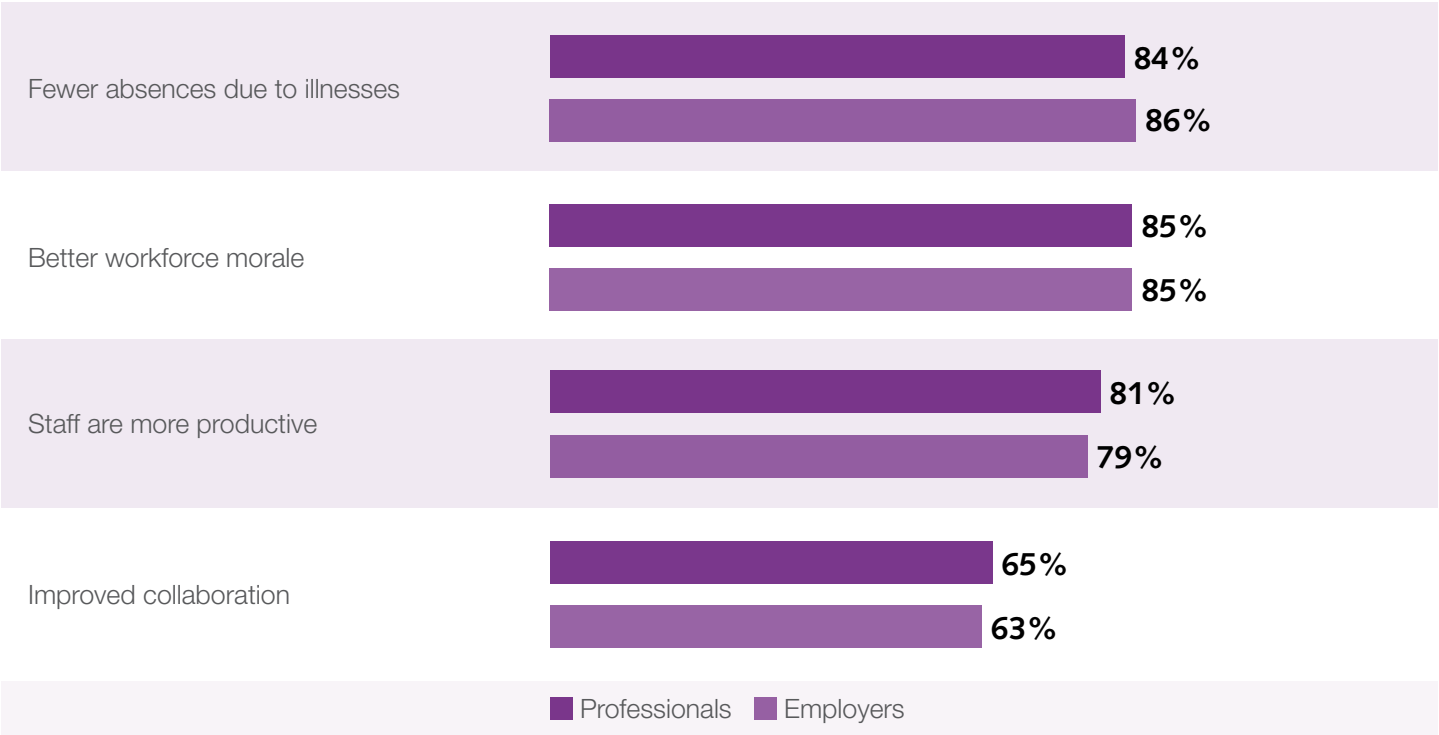
## 74%

Of professionals say increased media focus on mental health has helped encourage discussion at work

# THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING AMONG STAFF

Employers and professionals both recognise the value that supporting the mental health of staff can offer. 93% of employers and 85% of professionals agree that supporting the mental wellbeing of staff can help make employees more effective in their roles.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING POLICIES



Effective mental health strategies can also play an important role in improving staff retention. 84% of employers believe that staff who feel that their mental wellbeing is supported at work are less likely to leave and seek another employer and 83% of professionals agree.

Hiring managers should also note that almost two thirds (63%) of professionals would be more likely to recommend their employer to their contacts if that employer had positive mental health and wellbeing policies.



“The benefits of supporting the mental health and wellbeing of staff are well documented, with both professionals and employers recognising the positive impacts of doing so.

Employers should consider that policies which support mental health and wellbeing, while requiring investment, can yield significant benefits for the organisation.”

**Lucy Bisset, Director at Robert Walters**





Of professionals believe mental health 'first aiders' are important



Of employers have such a policy in place

# EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Identifying which policies will be most effective in promoting mental health and wellbeing can be a challenge for employers. However, while specialist training and knowledge in the field can offer highly valuable insights, employers can also consider which strategies are considered most valuable by staff when implementing policies.

## WHAT POLICIES DO EMPLOYERS OFFER AND PROFESSIONALS VALUE?



Our research revealed that many of the strategies professionals consider important are not offered by employers, while some, such as remote working, widely offered by employers (71%) but are considered less important in terms of contributing to mental wellbeing by professionals (60%).



“Perhaps most notably, professionals believe that training for managers and a clear message from senior leaders that mental health is a priority are highly important, but relatively rare among managers and employers.

While formal policies are an important part of an effective mental health strategy, professionals place a great deal of value on having managers who are aware of this as a general priority and have the capacity to address it effectively.”

**Neil Morgan, Associate Director at Robert Walters**

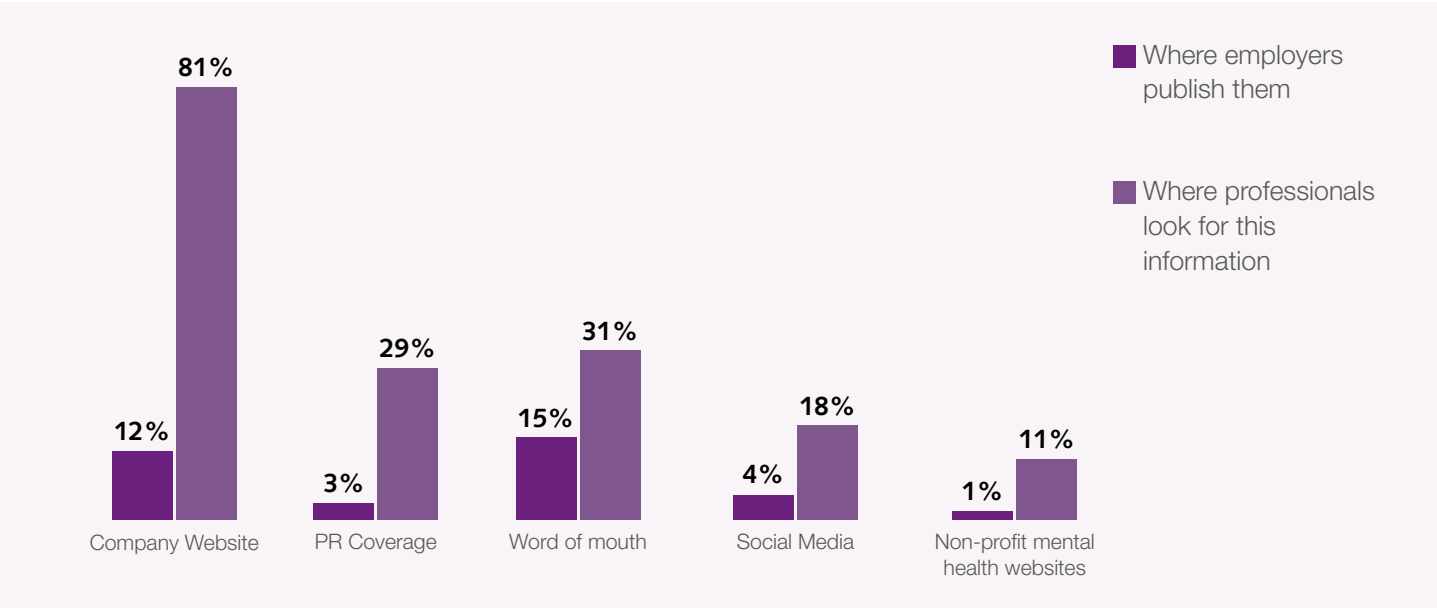
# PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH POLICIES WHEN RECRUITING

With mental health being an increasingly high priority for professionals, employers may want to consider how they can emphasise their strategies for supporting mental wellbeing to help them secure top talent.

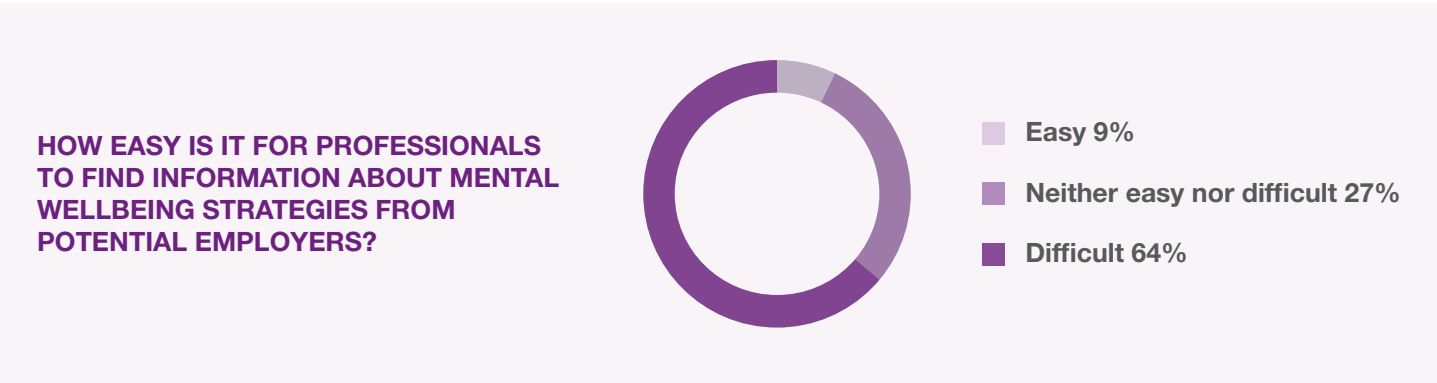
Our research showed that hiring managers underestimate how important mental health strategies are to professionals when choosing a role. Just 42% of employers believed that mental health strategies were important to professionals when choosing a role, compared to 88% of professionals.

Furthermore, 20% of professionals said that they considered this extremely important, 28% said it was very important, and 40% said it was somewhat important. In contrast, no employers believed professionals would consider mental wellbeing support strategies extremely important, 9% thought these strategies would be considered very important and 33% believed that they would be considered somewhat important.

## COMMUNICATING MENTAL WELLBEING SUPPORT STRATEGIES



The research also revealed that among employers who have a mental health policy, just 3% mention their mental wellbeing strategies in job adverts, and only 66% communicate these policies internally







# 42%

Of professionals would look for information about mental wellbeing strategies on employer review sites



# SECURING STAFF WITH MENTAL HEALTH EXPERTISE

One of the barriers employers can encounter when looking to develop strategies to support mental health and wellbeing among staff is a lack of access to professionals with the required expertise to help shape these strategies.

Just 6% of hiring managers specifically recruit staff with expertise in mental health, and of those who are hired, just 9% felt that their skills in this area were being used as effectively as possible.

## WHO DO EMPLOYERS PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING TO?



46%

HR



35%

MANAGERS



18%

ALL STAFF

The research also showed that relatively few employers take advantage of official mental health awareness events to promote mental wellbeing within their organisation.

Just 25% of professionals said that their employer held events to coincide with mental health awareness days, and only 9% believed that their employer was planning to organise such events in future.



"Recruiting staff with expertise in mental health and wellbeing into HR teams and other departments can be an extremely worthwhile investment for employers.

In addition to gaining valuable experience and expertise from such professionals, employers can also pass this experience on to other staff through internal training and upskilling, helping to raise awareness of the importance of mental wellbeing strategies which are put in place."

**Marcus Blackburn, Director at Robert Walters**

# 38%

Of professionals don't know whether their employer actively recruits staff with mental health training



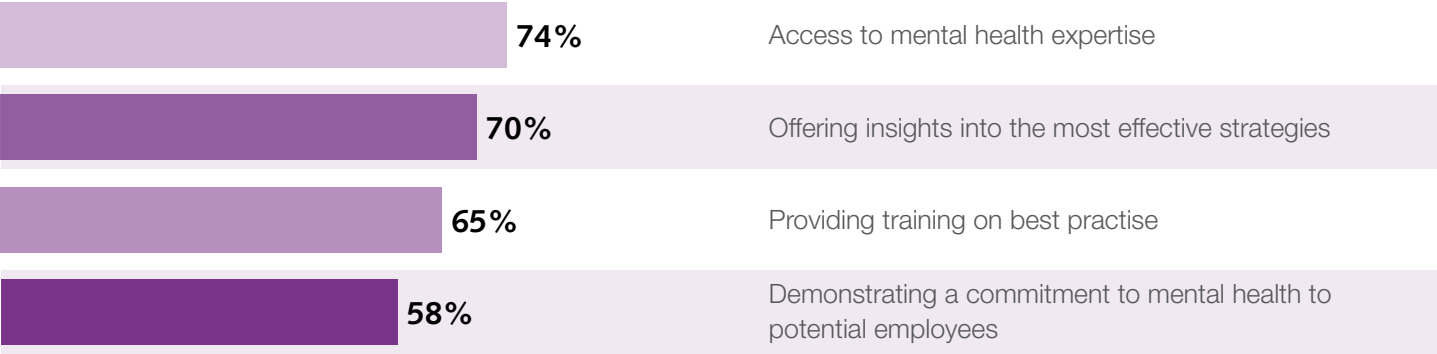




# PARTNERING WITH MENTAL HEALTH ORGANISATIONS

Finding an organisation or charity specialising in promoting mental wellbeing and raising awareness of mental health can be extremely valuable to employers, particularly for those who do not have access to mental health expertise among in-house staff.

## WHAT BENEFITS DO EMPLOYERS BELIEVE PARTNERING WITH A MENTAL HEALTH CHARITY CAN OFFER?



Despite many employers recognising that partnering with an external organisation can yield important benefits, just 17% currently have such a partnership in place.

19% stated that they plan to develop a partnership with a mental health organisation in the future, though 64% are not currently partnered and have no plans to develop such a partnership.



“Charities and other organisations specialising in mental wellbeing can provide an invaluable source of information to employers.

In addition to helping guide strategy and policies, many such organisations can also offer their staff training to develop their skills in directly addressing mental health and wellbeing among the workforce.”

**Richard Boyd, Director at Robert Walters**

89%

Of employers believe that partnering with a mental health charity would benefit them

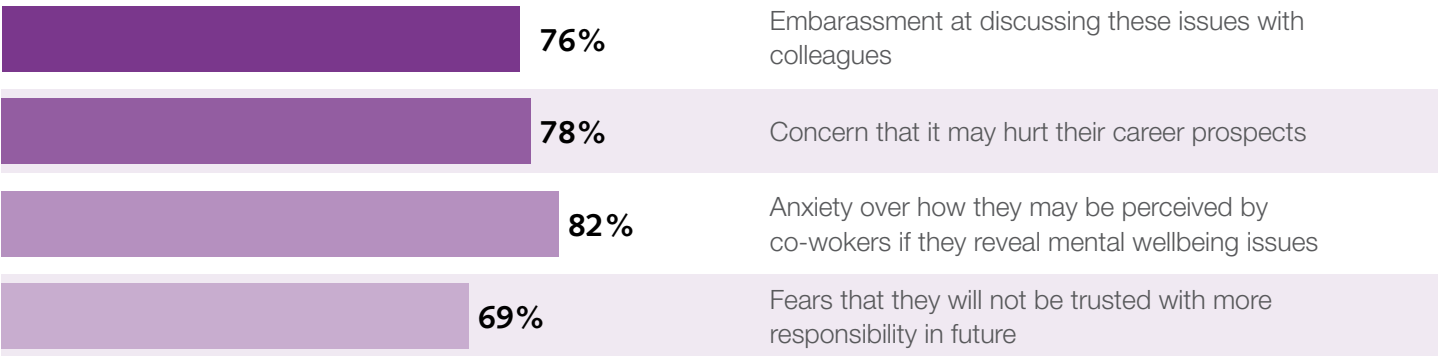


# THE CHALLENGES OF ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

While many employers evidently recognise the importance of supporting the mental health and wellbeing of staff, our research shows that relatively few are actively engaged in pursuing policies to do so.

In many cases, this may be attributable to employer's concern that professionals will be reluctant to discuss issues surrounding mental wellbeing at work due to how they may be perceived by managers and colleagues.

## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO DISCUSSING MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK?



Our research found that employers and professionals generally agree on the reasons why staff may be reluctant to discuss issues with mental health. However, it is notable that while only 33% of employers believe that a lack of encouragement from senior management would represent a barrier, 55% of professionals state that it is.



“Employers should consider how prominent a role they can play in encouraging their staff to be more open regarding mental wellbeing.

By taking a proactive approach and leading by example, senior managers can play a key role in helping to develop the culture of their company to encourage discussion of mental wellbeing.”

**James Murray - Director at Robert Walters**

37%

Of professionals believe senior management at their company considers mental wellbeing a priority

## KEY FINDINGS



Employers and professionals broadly agree that attitudes towards mental health have improved in recent years, but professionals are less optimistic than hiring managers. Employers may want to consider which strategies they can use to encourage staff to be more confident when discussing these issues.



While developing and implementing mental health policies requires investment, employers should not underestimate the benefits such policies can bring. Professionals and hiring managers agree that staff are less likely to leave the organisation and are more productive in their role when they feel that their mental wellbeing is supported.



Many employers have strategies in place to help support mental health, but relatively few are providing training to managers and supervisors on how to approach mental wellbeing effectively. Providing this type of training may be a highly effective strategy to initiate cultural change within an organisation to support mental wellbeing.



Very few employers emphasise their mental wellbeing policies when recruiting, and two thirds only release information about these policies internally. Given that employers significantly underestimate the importance professionals place on the mental wellbeing policies of a potential employer, simply promoting existing policies may be the first step towards standing out from competitors.



Despite acknowledging the benefits of an effective mental wellbeing strategy, few employers actively source professionals with expertise in this area. In addition to seeking professionals with these skills, employers should review their current workforce to identify staff who already possess expertise in the field, given that just 9% of professionals with these skills feel that their employer makes effective use of them.



External organisations can provide vital insights and training to help develop a company's mental wellbeing policy. Building relationships with these organisations can help ensure that they are following best practice and give them access to the latest insights and research.



Professionals and employers both recognise that there are inherent barriers to encouraging staff to engage with mental wellbeing policies. However, employers may be underestimating how much of an impact encouragement from senior management can have, demonstrating that by setting an example in this area, employers can help to change the organisation's culture.

# CONTACT US

To discuss this whitepaper, request other research papers we have produced, or talk about your recruitment needs in more detail, please contact your Robert Walters recruitment consultant, email us at [contact@robertwalters.com](mailto:contact@robertwalters.com) or get in touch with one of our offices below:

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