

Your Essential Guide to **Workplace Wellbeing** 2019-2020

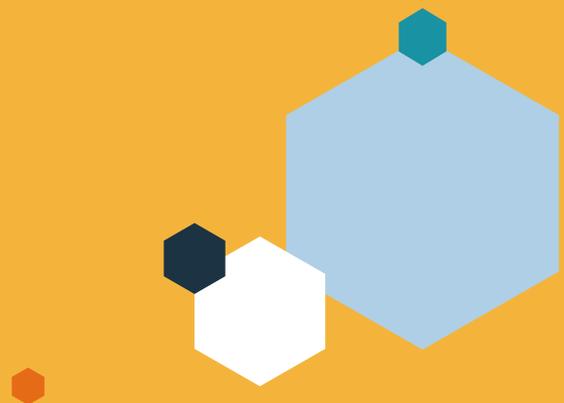


 **e-days**[®] Absence Management

In association with
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Foreword

by Chieu Cao,
Co-founder & CMO at Perkbox

It's an occupational hazard that HR professionals tend to spend a lot of time on the procedural tasks that keep employees ticking over and less time helping them to flourish – on both a professional and a personal level.



The upshot? Wellness programmes are often moved down the people agenda. But with every new research project undertaken by government think tanks and progressive organisations comes further evidence of the link between employee wellness and business performance.

Take the Government's recent Thriving at Work report, for instance. It found that mental ill-health costs 300,000 jobs a year and accounts for £42bn in lost revenue. This vicious cycle of stress, anxiety, disengagement and burnout amalgamate to become the single greatest cause of employee absence.

Wellness programmes don't just reduce absenteeism, they increase engagement, performance and retention too. However, to get these results, as this report so elegantly demonstrates, we need to think beyond physical fitness as the epitome of wellness. The best programmes must take a comprehensive approach, supporting financial and mental, emotional and intellectual wellness too.

E-day's findings are fascinating. The report doesn't just shed new light on the perennial problems of seasonal defectiveness and presenteeism, but also examines the macro effects of political uncertainty and technological change.

This is an inquisitive look at the state of workplace wellbeing in 2019. It shows promising signs that progressive wellness initiatives are the key to creating productive and fulfilling workplaces.

Chieu Cao
Co-founder and CMO at Perkbox



Your Essential Guide to **Workplace Wellbeing**

Eight hours a day, five days a week. We spend the majority of our waking lives at work. But for many people, work is a source of stress, anxiety, uncertainty and unhappiness. This can lead to a host of serious health problems – not to mention a lot of job dissatisfaction and unplanned absences.

It's unacceptable. If we're to spend most of our lives at work, then employers have an obligation to prioritise their employees' wellbeing.

What is Wellbeing in the Workplace?

The term "employee wellbeing" refers to the impact your job has on your overall health and happiness. When we talk about employee wellbeing, we're talking about a combination of good physical health and good mental health.

Wellbeing in the workplace is influenced by a number of factors – some physical, some social, some psychological, and some environmental.

Help your employees and you'll help your business. Businesses that make wellbeing a priority can expect huge boosts to job satisfaction and productivity, along with improved employee retention and reduced absences.



A 2010 study¹ by the London School of Economics found that the Royal Mail received a **£225m ROI** from their three-year investment into workplace wellbeing.

Why You Need Workplace Wellbeing in 2019-2020



Mental health issues cost UK companies up to
£15bn
in productivity each year

Political and economic uncertainty. Brexit. Extreme weather. Tight deadlines, heavy workloads, demanding clients, and even more demanding families. UK workers certainly have a lot to worry about. So it may come as no surprise that, according to Mind, one in six workers is currently facing mental health problems.²

We may be facing a stress pandemic. According to the Mental Health Foundation, in 2018 74% of people felt so stressed they were overwhelmed or unable to cope.³

This comes at a very real cost to businesses. Widespread mental health issues are estimated to result in 91 million lost days, which costs UK companies up to £15 billion in productivity each year.⁴

While many companies are taking steps to address their employees' wellbeing, far too many companies are doing it on an ad-hoc basis, with no real strategy in place. And that's if they're doing anything at all. Many organisations have no wellbeing program to speak of.

References 1: <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/case-linking-employee-wellbeing-productivity/> 2: <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/> 3: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-stress> 4: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/employment-the-economic-case>

The Current Wellbeing at Work Landscape

Employers have always known that healthy and happy employees are good for business. But it's only in the past few years that we've started to have meaningful conversations about employee wellbeing. So before you budget, plan and implement your wellness program for this next financial year, let's take a quick look at the state of the employee wellbeing landscape today.

Workplace Wellbeing in Numbers

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) recently produced their 2018 Health and Wellbeing at Work Survey.⁵

The survey was completed by 1,021 HR professionals in November 2017. Here are some key findings:



The Rise of Presenteeism and Leaveism

What do you get when you cross huge workloads and demanding deadlines with a workplace culture that champions efficiency above wellbeing? You get presenteeism and leaveism.

Presenteeism is when employees have so much to do that they feel they're too busy to take any time off. This can lead to many employees showing up to work even when they're unwell.



According to the annual CIPD report, **86% of businesses reported instances of presenteeism** in 2018, but only **25%** of organisations took active steps to discourage this behaviour.

Leaveism might be even worse for employee wellbeing. This is where employees have such huge workloads that they use their allocated time off to work. According to the CIPD report, nearly 60% of UK companies reported some form of leaveism in 2018, but just over a quarter of these companies have taken steps to discourage the behaviour.

References 5: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/health-well-being-work>

What Influences Workplace Wellbeing?

If you want to understand the factors that can influence workplace wellbeing, you could start by looking at the UK's average annual absence trends.

We took a look at the 2018 absence data of 500 UK businesses that use our absence management system. We discovered a few interesting patterns...

When Are People Most Likely to Call in Sick?

November is the worst month of the year for unplanned absences. Excluding weekends, on average, 87.5 absences each day were recorded on our system throughout November 2018. 107 absences were recorded on Monday November 26 alone, making this the worst day of the year for sick leave taken in the UK in 2018.

What made this day especially bad for employees? Let's consider the facts:

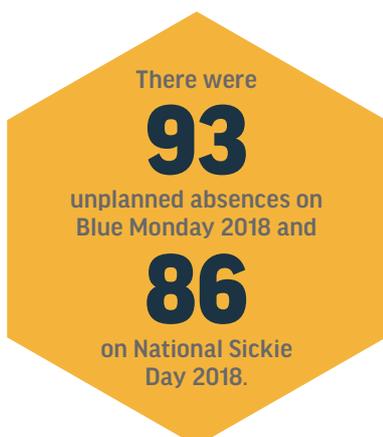
- **It's winter.**
The days are short, the temperatures are low, and there'll be a lot of bugs going around. Poor weather makes a lot of people feel bad, both mentally and physically.

- **It's nearly Christmas.**
That means there'll be a lot of deadlines fast approaching, along with a lot of impending financial pressures. Both inside and outside the workplace, the demands really start to pile up around this time of year.
- **It's a Monday.**
Many people simply don't like Mondays. Take all the other factors and add the general gloominess generally associated with Mondays, and is it any surprise that so many people across the UK chose to call in sick?



Another bad day for unplanned absence in 2018 was Tuesday 1st March.

On this day 103 absences were recorded on our system as UK was subjected to a double whammy of weather anomalies. The Beast from the East, a period of unseasonably low temperatures, joined forces with Storm Emma. **Extreme weather conditions can make it unsafe** for many employees to even consider travelling to work.



Blue Monday and National Sickness Day

Certain days of the year are commonly considered to be bad for unplanned absences. The third Monday of January is often referred to as Blue Monday⁶, "the most depressing day of the year." Then there's the first Monday of February, which some think of as "National Sickness Day".⁷

Our data records 93 unplanned absences on Blue Monday 2018, and 86 on National Sickness Day. Think of the factors that make these days so notorious for unplanned absences.

Just like that record Monday in November, you're looking at a cocktail of bad weather, financial pressures and circulating illnesses, all of which might serve to make work worries seem considerably worse.

References 6: <https://www.e-days.co.uk/news/blue-monday-how-to-prepare-your-business-for-the-most-depressing-day-of-the-year>
7: <https://www.e-days.co.uk/news/is-national-sickness-day-really-the-worst-day-for-employee-absence>



When Are People Least Likely to Call in Sick?

Our data shows that employees are least likely to call in sick in May. Excluding weekends, an average of 51 days were taken off throughout May 2018.

What makes May so special? Once again, let's consider the facts:

- **Two Bank Holidays**
May is a generous month indeed for bank holidays. You get two, one at the start of the month, another at the end. This time to unwind will relieve the pressures of work for many.
- **Better Weather**
If bad weather makes people feel physically and mentally unwell, good weather can have the opposite effect. Long days filled with warm temperatures and bright sunshine are good for your health and for your mood.
- **Impending Holidays**
Many people choose to take their holidays in the summer months. If you've something like this to look forward to, the pressures of work may seem more manageable.



Summer 2018 had low absence stats

In 2018, the UK had one of the **longest and hottest summers** in recent memory. There was a **World Cup** to get excited about. Spirits must have been high all summer, which might explain the comparatively low average absence stats for June (56.1 days excluding weekends), July (64.7 days excluding weekends) and August (58.8 days excluding weekends).

What Other Factors Influence Workplace Wellbeing?

Unplanned absences can vary throughout the year. But some things can have a negative impact on your employees' wellbeing throughout the year:

- **Family Problems**
Employees with children will have a lot on their plate. Along with the many demands that come with raising children, some employees may worry that their job is causing them to miss out on spending valuable time with their family. Also consider that Britain has an ageing population. How many of your employees have to worry about taking care of older relatives, as well as their children?
- **The Political Climate**
Bad news sells newspapers, and the press has a lot to sink its teeth into these days. Brexit, and all the uncertainties it brings, seems to be stressing everyone out. This stress will hit some of your employees worse than others.
- **Technology**
Smartphones and laptops aren't necessarily good for business. If your employees aren't able to switch off during out of work hours, it can add to their stress levels and ruin their work/life balance. 87% of UK businesses believe that technology has a negative impact on employee wellbeing.⁸



References 8: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/health-well-being-work>

How to Improve Workplace Wellbeing

Identify the Underlying Causes of Stress, Anxiety and Unhappiness

If you understand the reasons behind absences you can reduce the likelihood of them happening in future.



Keep on Top of Your Absence Stats

Our absence management system generates **clear reports** that will help you to understand the absence trends for your business. If you understand your own data, employee demographics and behaviours, you can take strategic actions to not only support employee wellbeing, but also reduce absence costs.



Conduct Routine Return to Work Interviews

If an employee took time off for stress-related reasons, **talk to them when they return to work**. Ask them for their thoughts on the source of the stress. You never know, you just might be able to help.



Make Flexible Working Possible

If your employees can do their jobs remotely, let them. Remote working means **less time and money spent on stressful commutes**, and more time spent in an environment where your employees can feel safe and comfortable. Remote working also means that your **employees won't miss any days when the weather's too extreme** for them to safely travel.



Don't Let Work Get in the Way of Life

Offer generous leave for new parents. Make it clear that you'll **be willing to accommodate** if your employees ever need to take time off, for whatever reason - from new born babies to dental appointments.



Discourage Overwork

Don't pressure your employees into working too hard. When the clock hits 5pm, or whatever time you officially finish work, then make it clear that all work must stop immediately. If a particularly tight deadline or demanding project demands extra time, offer TOIL, so that your employees can make up the time elsewhere. **Overwork should always be the exception** - it's not normal, and it should never be expected.



Remove the Common Sources of Workplace Stress

Mental health specialists Verywell Mind put together a list of some of the biggest causes of stress in the workplace.⁹ You might be surprised by some of the items listed, and by just how simple the solutions could be. For instance, **many employees feel stressed because it's unclear what exactly what's expected of them**. So make everyone's job responsibilities, and your expectations, as clear as you can. And if anyone's job requirements are going to change, make sure you signpost the change, in writing, as early as possible.

References 9: <https://www.e-days.co.uk/news/7-simple-ways-to-manage-stress-in-the-workplace>

Employee Wellbeing Perks

Trends From Perkbox

Perkbox specialise in creating happier and more productive company cultures. They do this by giving employees everything they need to stay motivated and inspired. They offer a lot of perks, from discounted cinema tickets to reduced airport parking.



But interestingly, many of their most popular perks are those that promote health and wellbeing. Given the choice between discount takeaways and discount gym memberships, a lot of employees are going for the option that'll make them feel fitter and happier in the long-term.

It's also interesting to note just when employees are favouring these perks throughout the year. For example, the figures suggest that many employees genuinely struggle with the winter blues. Do you notice a spike in absences in the winter months? This might explain why. But it also provides a good idea of the sort of things you can do to support your employees' wellbeing.

Health and fitness

Gym membership redemptions up by **98%**
December 2018 to January 2019.

Greatest spike in gym redemptions was Monday 21st January, aka

Blue Monday +83%
compared to the same time the previous month.

People are least likely to redeem gym memberships on **Saturdays**, most likely on **Mondays**.

Redemptions of our online guided workout programme, **Boxx**, were up

741%

WC 14 Jan compared to WC 10 Dec.

This suggests 2 things: people are being more money conscious (it's free), and less willing to head out to a gym.



Emotional support

Confidential employee support line redemptions rose on Monday 7th Jan by

33%

compared to previous month

Total weekly redemptions of emotional support helpline dropped **76%**

in WC 18th Feb compared to one month previous, WC 14th Jan. (This suggests the January Blues really are a thing)

Healthy eating

On 14th Jan, MyProtein redemptions peaked at

116%

compared to the same time in December

The Benefits of **Mindfulness in the Workplace** with Sam Culshaw-Robinson

Sam Culshaw-Robinson is an experienced workplace health consultant and mindfulness coach. She is all about helping you have a happier, healthier workforce.

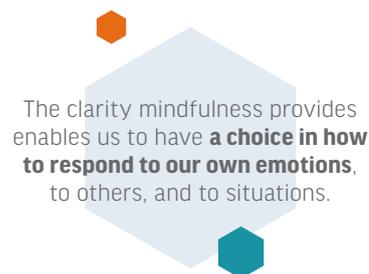


It is probably best to start with what mindfulness actually is. A simple way to put it is Mindfulness is a set of techniques that enable us to focus our attention fully on purpose and non-judgementally in the present moment.

Why would we want to do this?

Usually throughout the day we find ourselves on “auto pilot”, our minds full of chatter; constantly replaying the past, projecting what we think the future might bring or just drifting along, so we are never fully engaged in what is happening now.

The aims of mindfulness practices (and it doesn't all have to be meditation) is not to make our minds blank, or suppress our feelings in anyway, but rather to pay attention to our thoughts, feelings and experiences without labelling, judging or making our own stories about them in any way, so that we don't get swept along with them, we are able to “watch” them without getting engaged in them.



The Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy course has been shown to reduce the recurrence of depression by

30%

Why is this a good thing in the workplace?

Research shows that mindfulness improves our brain's ability to process information, reduces brain related problems in old age, strengthens our immune system, lifts our mood and reduces stress, help treat heart disease, lower blood pressure, reduce chronic pain, improve sleep and alleviate gastrointestinal difficulties.

The Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) formal 8-week course has also been shown to reduce depression by the same amount as anti-depressants and the recurrence of depression by 30%, help with substance abuse and eating disorders, anxiety disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

3 ways Mindfulness can benefit your workplace:



Better Emotional Intelligence

This can have numerous benefits, including:

- More effective management and better manager-employee relationships. Mindful managers make better leaders
- Stronger, healthier teams
- Fewer impulsive decisions
- Healthier ways of managing conflict when it does occur
- A more positive work environment



Improved Focus and Productivity

A calm mind is a focused mind. And a focused mind is a mind that gets things done.

People who practice mindfulness become adept at blocking out irritations and distractions. Mindful people can focus entirely on the task at hand. They can learn to recognise when their minds start to wander, and quickly correct course to stay focused and productive.



Enhanced Creativity

In the future with increased automation, creativity will be valued even more highly to invent new products, find innovative solutions to problems and redesign processes in an effective way.

There's a strong case for introducing mindfulness in the workplace – both economically and ethically and it also needs to be fully integrated rather than an add on.

Healthy Eating and Exercise

Food affects mood,¹⁰ and there are strong links between a good diet and good mental health.¹¹

Similarly, there is a lot of evidence that exercise can help maintain and improve wellbeing.¹² Physical activity releases endorphins, the body's natural stress-busting hormones, and can help protect people against anxiety and mild depression.¹³

We recently investigated the employee wellbeing programs of some of the biggest and most successful businesses in the world.¹⁴ We found that most of these companies work hard to promote a culture of healthy eating and exercise in the workplace. Some of them provide onsite gyms, full-size basketball courts, Olympic-standard swimming pools, and free canteens specialising in health food.

You might not have the budget (or the space) to provide such elaborate facilities. But there's still a lot you can do to promote healthy eating and exercise in your business:

- **Stock your vending machines with healthier snacks.**
Keep your fruit bowl well-stocked, and get a watercooler to help people stay hydrated.
- **Run monthly fuddles, where all staff members contribute to a communal buffet.**
Set a theme for each fuddle – such as veganism, or natural ingredients – to encourage your employees to think about health and nutrition.
- **Make sure everyone's got the right equipment for the job,** and nobody needs to make do with anything that might compromise their health and safety. For instance, you could invest in office furniture that promotes good posture as opposed to slouching.
- **Offer subsidised gym memberships and cycle to work schemes.**
Offer to sponsor or match-donate any employees who wish to train for marathons or other challenges.
- **Encourage participation in sport and physical activity.**
Start a company sports team or a hiking club. When selling the benefits of these schemes, make sure you emphasise health, fitness and happiness as opposed to weight-loss. Some employees might resent the idea that you're urging them to lose weight.¹⁵
- **Think of the link between nature and mental health.¹⁶**
Fill the workplace with plants and natural light and, if possible, encourage employees to take walks in nearby parks during their breaks.
- **Small things make a big difference.**
Encourage your employees to take the stairs instead of the lift. Promote a policy where everyone must stand and stretch at least once an hour.

References 10: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood#.XKH7IOtKjYV> 11: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/diet-and-mental-health> 12: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-benefits-of-exercise/> 13: <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/2976123/how-to-improve-your-wellbeing-through-physical-activity-and-sport.pdf> 14: <https://www.e-days.co.uk/news/7-of-the-best-employee-wellbeing-programs> 15: <https://www.e-days.co.uk/news/the-3-biggest-barriers-to-employee-wellbeing> 16: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/#.XI-2hP7RTY>

2019-2020 Wellbeing Calendar

There are multiple awareness days you can use to kickstart a conversation about wellbeing in the workplace. Many of these would also make for a good focus for a special workplace wellbeing event or initiative.

March 2019

11-17 Nutrition and Hydration Week

15 World Sleep Day

April 2019

1-30 Stress Awareness Month

5 Walk to Work Day

May 2019

1-31 National Walking Month

13-19 Mental Health Awareness Week

13-19 National Vegetarian Week

June 2019

10-14 British Nutrition Foundation Healthy Eating Week

July 2019

1-7 Health Information Week

August 2019

15 Cycle to Work Day

September 2019

10 World Suicide Prevention Day

October 2019

1-5 National Work Life Week

10 World Mental Health Day

November 2019

6 National Stress Awareness Day

December 2019

1-7 Anger Awareness Week

January 2020

1-31 Dry January

February 2020

1-28 National Heart Month

7 Time to Talk Day

Are You Ready to Make 2019 Your Year of Wellbeing?

If you want a mission statement for the 2019-2020 financial year, how about this:



Make wellbeing more than just a buzzword.

Don't just think about it.
Don't just talk about it.

Do it.

Look Beyond the Figures

The growth of issues like stress, presenteeism and leaveism suggests a need to take a holistic approach to employee wellbeing.

Yes, you need to make wellbeing a priority. And yes, your wellness program needs to be strategic and practical. But unless you take the time to understand the underlying patterns of absence in your company, you may struggle to make your program a success.

You need to measure and manage absence, and you need to learn to spot patterns and problems before things are allowed to spiral out of control.

Is anyone working when they shouldn't be working? Are any of your employees displaying signs of stress, or other latent mental ill health problems? Are you talking to your employees when they return to work, to try and ascertain the cause of their unplanned absence?

There are two sides to wellbeing in the workplace: You need to create an environment that champions wellbeing while at the same time working to address any factors that may be having a negative impact on your employees' health and happiness.

Any company, any size, **anywhere in the world**

e-days is an industry-leading staff holiday planner and sickness tracker which makes managing absence easy for organisations of all sizes, anywhere in the world.

Over 1500 clients are revolutionising the way the manage absence and track leave, leading to greater efficiency and cost savings organisation wide.



Key features



Online leave requests, with multi-level online manager approval.



Online sickness logging, Bradford factor tracking and return to work forms.



Flexible shared absence calendars giving organisation wide visibility.



Automated sickness alerts and triggers, for managers and HR.

Discover the world's favourite cloud based absence management software, equipping businesses with the tools to accurately and efficiently manage absence.

Start your free trial



Helping employees live better, in life and at work

Perkbox is a platform designed to enrich the employee experience. Our four products help create environments in which people and companies thrive.

PERKS

Our Perks are carefully chosen to support your team's financial, emotional and physical wellbeing.

RECOGNITION

Recognition brings your company values to life, helping you incentivise and reward top achievers.

INSIGHTS

Insights is an agile pulse survey tool, enabling you to gather and act on feedback in a meaningful way.

MEDICAL

Our latest product Perkbox Medical is a simple and affordable answer to business health cover.

We also host events, publish books, write articles and create videos that will assist you in your journey to delivering the ultimate employee experience.

See the platform in action





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