



Mental Wellbeing – For You & Me!

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Abstract :

In India & across the globe, the importance of mental health is being discussed at all levels with corporates having Employee Assistance Programs for staff & their families. Most of the time, not addressing the root cause and not seeking timely help aggravates the problem for the individual. This article highlights some of the key pointers in identifying and providing assistance. It also shows.

Introduction

“R U OK?” - A campaign started by Australian Gavin Larkin in 2009 has put the limelight on mental wellbeing in general and Suicide in particular across the globe. A 2022 Statista survey identified ‘Depression’ as the top contributor for common mental health symptoms experienced by employees in India at 59%, followed by emotional exhaustion/burnout at 55%, Irritability or anger at 51%, Sleep Issue at 50% and Anxiety at 49%. This is based on the share of respondents who took part in the survey.

As per the 2022 data published by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the number

of suicides per year in India is alarming at a staggering 12 suicides per one Lakh people on average with Maharashtra followed by Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Karnataka. These 5 states accounting for 50.4% of total suicides reported. The question to be asked is, Do we understand what ‘Mental wellbeing’ really means? What indicators are there to identify someone needing help? This article is an attempt to shed some light on the basics of mental wellbeing and provide some tips to take care of ourselves and our loved ones. As the emergency protocol in an aircraft says, ‘wear your mask first before helping someone else’! I guess this analogy suits this context perfectly.

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The Downward Spiral

A recent survey in The Economic Times revealed that 76% of Indian workers say that stress is negatively impacting their work!

Being aware of The Downward Spiral is a very powerful tool all of us can and should use each day to introspect and quickly snap out of the negative mood we might be getting into. This not addressed early culminates into much worse situation and ends up with an individual making wrong decisions. Imagine a Downward Spiral. We all start our day at the top of the Spiral. As time goes by, due to environmental factors (be it traffic, workload etc) we go into this downward spiral that compounds and puts us in a much more of a negative state mentally. As a life coach, my advice to clients has been quite simple. As soon as you recognize that you are going down the spiral, get yourself out of the situation you are in. Do something that cheers you up - be it going for a walk, speaking to someone, or reading your favorite book. Objective is for you to bounce back up as soon as possible so that you don't become a victim of the downward spiral.

Internal Vs External Locus of Control

Another indicator of poor mental health is an assessment of our locus of control. There are two types - Internal or External. **Internal** - Believe they are in control and take responsibility for their own actions. **External** - Blame external forces for their own circumstances. This is equivalent to the sports metaphor - 'Playing above the line'. If someone you know is exhibiting an external locus of control, it may be worth having a discussion with them.

The misconception is that I'm not qualified to deal with such issues and so I couldn't identify the problem early enough. Even though I agree to some extent, I strongly believe that common sense should prevail in identifying any change in one's behavior easily. I don't expect all to have the expertise to resolve the issue however taking the time to be a 'sounding board' for your loved one is a great starting point. We all have the tendency to start providing advise way too soon when all the other person wants is someone who can just listen. If someone isn't comfortable in sharing what they are dealing with, something I advise as an exercise is to take a third-party view - 'fly on the wall' approach. The way it works is to remove yourself from the issue and look at it as an 'observer'. This is why we can provide advice to anyone for their problems compared to getting a solution for ourselves!

Self-Assessment

The other suggestion that's equally powerful is to do a self-assessment which is more like putting a mirror in front of you! Follow the steps given below to do your own self-assessment now.

- Sit in a quiet place
- Switch off your mobile and avoid any possible distractions for next 15 minutes
- Have a pen & paper handy.
- Start scoring your current life across the following aspects on a scale of 1 – 10 (Be truthful!)
 - Family and Home
 - Financial & Career
 - Mental Health
 - Physical Health

- Social & Cultural
- Spiritual & Ethical

Once done, review the scores and adjust each based on where you want to be – the preferred state – to be. This will give a clear view of the areas of life that needs attention and helps focusing on improvement. For most, this becomes their guiding light in achieving the mental wellness they aspire for.

Gratitude Journal

In this fast moving world, something we all lack is appreciation for what we have. Even kids nowadays worry so much about things they don't have, instead of enjoying what they do. To address this, the concept of 'Gratitude Journal' is increasing in popularity. Maintaining a journal capturing the day's events & people that gave you happiness and made you feel positive is the underlying objective.

Each night, jot down all the people you met & events that happened that gave you happiness and made you feel positive and finish with a 'thank you'. This habit will cultivate gratefulness in you towards life in general.

Here are some important tips to start a journal-

- Be as specific as possible
- Go for details (depth) vs breath – Don't be generic. More details of the event, the better
- Get personal – More than an event of the day, feeling grateful for a person has much more impact

- Write regularly – Writing every day in a regular time helps you honor your commitment of establishing this as a habit

Personal Space

How many of us are familiar with our 'personal space'? What does personal space mean? Personal space is the distance between two people. Imagine 3 concentric circles with you in the middle. Each circle having a gap between each other. The closest circle to you is the 'intimate' zone where people will be the most attached to you – your partner, parents, kids, siblings etc. Next circle is the 'personal' zone where you have people who you converse with every day and share your life events to some extent. The third layer/zone is the 'Social' circle – This is your acquaintances! The last zone is 'public' and as the name suggests, this is pretty much anyone who is a 'hi/bye' type of relation.

Easier way to assess someone to various spaces is to imagine you being in a train. People travelling with you (if family) could be in your intimate space, friends/colleagues could be either in personal or social space whereas the next seat passenger who you just met and will get off when their stop arrives will be in the public zone. From experience, I can tell you that there will be movement of people between the personal and public space based on your life's events and how both feel about the relationship. This activity will help you understand your circle of influence – both positive and negative. Main objective of this exercise is to be bold in removing someone from a zone where they don't fit. Anyone who doesn't contribute to your growth should be very far.

Not moving people out of our circle when it's absolutely necessary is the common mistake we all do. This, in a longer term drags us into activities that are non-productive and doesn't yield any growth in our personal or professional life. I've seen many a times people struggling to get out of a relationship which they know is poisonous but due to social convention or to be the 'nice person' we are, we sacrifice our growth over maintaining the relationship.

Being the nice guy – Always!

Ask yourself a simple question – What's the hardest thing in a relationship? One of the top answers will be 'saying no'. Mantra of successful individuals is to choose the right mix of people they want to be with and saying no boldly to the ones they want to avoid. We live in an age where networking is the lifeblood for any successful endeavor. Who you know is much more important than what you know. Unless you get the right audience to share your expertise, it's just a waste of time.

Be very clear that you can't please everyone – I would take it a step forward and say that you DO NOT have to please everyone. As Lord Krishna says in Bhagavad Gita, one should do their duty without expecting anything in return. This may make you look like not a 'Nice Guy' however your end result will speak for itself and everyone will want to be acquainted with you.

Tiny Changes, Big Impact

All that we have discussed so far and the various activities we have detailed requires a shift in mindset. Human mind is smart but lazy in many ways. As long as you don't show

commitment in a change you want to make, it'll push you down what you have already got it used to. Notice the line ants form in taking food from the source to their destination. Now, disrupt their pathway! Within seconds, you will notice that they form a new path and line is back again.

James Clear in his book titled 'Atomic Habits' provides a framework for building good habits and breaking bad ones. In simple terms, he offers practical strategies for making small, consistent changes that can lead to significant personal growth. He stresses the point that Habits are the compound interest of self-improvement. James gives an analogy of a plane destined to New York City – The pilot enters all the correct information into the plane's computer, and the plane takes off heading in the right direction. But now imagine that, not long after takeoff, the pilot accidentally changes the flight path slightly. He only changes it by 3.5 degrees – which is nearly nothing, just a few feet. The plane's nose shifts slightly to one side, and no one – not the pilot, not the passengers – notices anything. But over the journey across the United States, the impact of this slight change would be considerable. At the end of their journey, the confused passengers - and even more confused pilot - would find themselves landing in Washington DC, not New York City.

Just like the confused pilot – we don't notice tiny changes in our lives. Small changes leave a negligible immediate impact. If you are out of shape today, and go for a 20-minute jog, you'll still be out of shape tomorrow. If you eat a family size pizza for dinner, it won't make you overweight overnight.

You've probably worked out the main insight here: it's that small habits can have a surprisingly powerful impact on your life - and you won't necessarily see this impact happening in real-time. You'll only see the results of your habits after a while. Doesn't matter how tiny the change is, make it today. Let the compounding effect help you achieve the big impact you aspire to.

Conclusion

Having discussed the various items in this article, there will still be a time when none of this seem to work and that's when you consult a professional. It is very important to take this step in a timely manner as every day lost could have a serious ramification for the individual. Depending on the circumstance, even doing these in parallel could be a wise decision to make. National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) recently found that out of nearly 150 million Indians in need of mental health care services, less than 30 million are actively seeking it. Let's encourage anyone needing assistance to seek professional help they deserve. Considering various issues in mental wellbeing, ethics plays a crucial part

in protecting the rights of the individual and as a professional, there are ethical guidelines that need to be followed and maintained. This will & should give the confidence for more to seek assistance. Let's keep it simple and start by asking 'R U OK?' with genuine love and interest to your near & dear ones. You will be surprised what this small act can do to others.

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O Hidden Life, vibrant in every atom;
 O Hidden Light, shining in every creature;
 O Hidden Love, embracing all in Oneness;
 May each who feels himself as one with Thee,
 Know they are therefore one with every other.

- Dr. Annie Besant