



HR Business Consultants

# NEWSLETTER

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## The Wellbeing Edition



## Welcome from Jane



Workplace wellbeing has never been more important. Supporting employee wellbeing goes beyond offering benefits - it's about creating a workplace where people feel connected, valued and able to do their best work. From tackling loneliness and preventing burnout to embracing flexible working and recognising employee contributions, employers have a vital role to play in building healthier, more resilient teams.

In this edition of our newsletter, we explore some of the key issues affecting workplace wellbeing and share practical advice to help you support your people while strengthening your business.

Inside this edition:

- Tackling loneliness at work
- Flexible working
- Rewarding your team
- Supporting men's mental health in the workplace
- Recognising and preventing employee burnout
- Your mid-year people health check

These articles are packed with practical tips and insights to help you create a positive workplace culture where employees can thrive and your business can continue to grow.



# Loneliness at work: the engagement risk hiding in your team

Loneliness at work rarely looks the way you'd expect. You might think an employee who feels lonely might not speak up in meetings as much. Or they start taking more days off.

But actually, loneliness can show up in all sorts of subtle ways. And, ultimately, it usually ends up affecting performance, which impacts your bottom line as a small business owner.

## How loneliness costs you

When people feel like they belong, they engage more and stay longer. The people around them benefit too. Replacing someone who leaves costs a lot more than most business owners realise once you add up recruitment, onboarding, lost knowledge and disruption to the rest of the team.

Getting belonging right is one of the most cost-effective things you can do.

## What loneliness can look like

- They stop pushing back on things they used to have opinions about
- Their work becomes formulaic; they do exactly what's asked and nothing more
- They stop flagging problems or risks they would have spotted before
- Quality starts slipping in small ways, not enough to raise formally but noticeable
- They default to other people's ideas
- They don't interact with the team as much
- They take lunch breaks alone
- They resist collaboration, preferring to work alone even when it doesn't make sense
- Short-term absence increases

## Shift from loneliness to belonging

My best advice is to stop thinking about loneliness as an individual problem and start thinking about belonging as a team one.

When people don't feel like they matter, they stop showing up fully.

When people feel like they belong, individuals start feeling like a team working toward a shared goal.

And when someone's motivation drops, it's worth asking whether they feel connected before jumping to a performance conversation.

## How to build belonging without a big budget

You don't need an away day or a wellbeing programme. Belonging comes from small, consistent actions.

Start with the basics:

- Ask employees for input on decisions that affect them
- Notice and acknowledge effort, even briefly
- Keep people in the loop when things change
- Check in when something seems off
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On top of that, there are practical steps any small business can take:

- Build social integration into your onboarding from day one
- Run regular one-to-ones that go beyond work tasks and include how someone is actually doing
- Create small team rituals that encourage connection, even 15 minutes a week matters
- Train your managers to spot early signs of disengagement
- Make sure that everyone knows what the business is working toward and how their role fits in

## HR consultants have experience with fostering belonging

An experienced HR consultant can help you to work out where engagement is strong, where it's slipping and what practical changes would make the biggest difference.

Loneliness Awareness Week runs from 15 to 21 June and it's a handy prompt to take stock. But the work shouldn't stop there.

If you're worried about engagement or retention in your team, get in touch. We're always happy to talk it through.



## Can I refuse a flexible working request during school holidays?

Every summer, the requests start coming in. "Can I work from home on Fridays while the kids are off?" "Would it be okay to shift my start time for six weeks?" "I was thinking about dropping Wednesdays during the holidays..."

It's tempting to say yes without thinking it through. Many business owners also say no without realising that they might not be on solid ground.

Either way, it's worth knowing where you actually stand.

### How the rules have changed

Since April 2024, flexible working has been a day one right. Your employees don't need to have worked for you for six months before they can ask. They can ask from the very first day.

They're allowed to make two requests per year. You have to respond within two months. And you can only refuse on one of eight statutory grounds.

### From October 2026, it gets tighter still.

The Employment Rights Act is adding a reasonableness test on top of those grounds. Citing a reason won't be enough on its own. You'll need to show it was actually reasonable to refuse in your specific situation.

### So, what are the eight grounds?

You can refuse a flexible working request if it would cause any one of these:

- Burden of additional costs
- Detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand
- Inability to reorganise work among existing staff
- Inability to recruit additional staff
- Detrimental impact on quality
- Detrimental impact on performance
- Insufficiency of work during the proposed hours
- Planned structural changes

If the request genuinely creates a problem under one of those headings, you can say no.

What you can't do is refuse because it feels inconvenient or because you'd rather not deal with it. You need a real reason and, from October, you'll need to show it was reasonable to act on that reason.

### How to handle the requests when they come in

Consider each request individually:

There's no such thing as a blanket summer policy that holds up legally. Each one needs its own thought and a written decision within two months.

### Be consistent:

If you've said yes to someone in a similar role before, saying no to someone else needs a clear justification behind it.

### Before you refuse, explore alternatives:

Could it work on a trial basis for a few weeks? Could the hours be adjusted slightly to make it more workable? Having that conversation shows good faith and reduces your exposure if the decision is ever questioned.

### If you do refuse...

Write down which statutory ground applies and why it applies in this specific case. That record is what you'll rely on if it ever comes back around.

### Get your policies and processes watertight now

Getting flexible working right requires a clear policy, a consistent process and documented decisions that hold up if they're challenged.

An HR consultant can help you to build that before the summer requests arrive, advise on specific requests you're unsure about and make sure that you're ready for the changes coming in October.

We'd be happy to talk you through it. Get in touch if you'd like help.



## How to reward your team (without increasing spend)

### It's getting more expensive to employ people.

With rising costs and changes under the Employment Rights Act 2025, many small businesses are having to think carefully about pay and benefits.

Let's explore a few practical, affordable ways to reward your team without locking yourself into higher salaries.

### Reward doesn't have to mean spending more

When people talk about reward, it can sound very corporate. In reality, it just means thinking about what employees value, not just what shows up in their payslip.

For many people right now, flexibility, time and support matter just as much as pay.

### Flexibility that actually works for your business

Flexibility doesn't have to mean remote working or home offices if that doesn't suit your business.

It might look like:

- flexible start and finish times
- compressed hours
- predictable shifts
- more say over rotas

When done sensibly, flexibility improves work-life balance and engagement without increasing wage costs. It can also make roles more attractive at a time when recruitment is still challenging.

### Extra time off can feel more valuable than cash

Offering an extra day of annual leave or the option to earn one is often far more meaningful than people expect. The cost to the business is usually lost productivity for a day, not extra pay.

Used as a thank you for a busy period, a job well done or to recognise loyalty, it feels personal and thoughtful without creating a permanent cost.

### Salary sacrifice (only where it genuinely fits)

Salary sacrifice can work for some small businesses, but it's not essential and it's not for everyone.

It allows employees to swap part of their salary for certain benefits, which can reduce tax for them and NI for the business.

In practice, it tends to work best when:

you have a stable team  
payroll is already outsourced or well set up  
the scheme is simple, like pension or cycle to work  
It's often not worth it if the admin feels heavy or your team is very small. If it adds complexity, it's usually better left alone.

### Buying or selling holiday (with clear limits)

Holiday trading is often more realistic for small businesses. It lets employees buy extra leave or sell a small amount back, usually in a cost-neutral way.

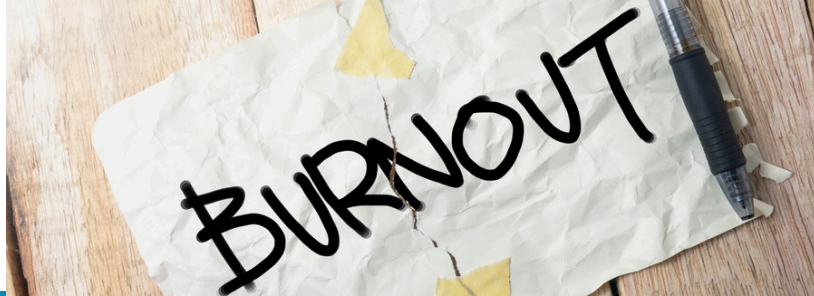
It works best when:

holiday records are accurate  
there's enough cover in the business  
clear limits are set on how much can be bought or sold  
In small teams, time off has a bigger impact, so this needs to be optional, controlled and reviewed regularly.

### Reward is about being intentional, not extravagant

In small teams, a genuine thank you, flexibility at the right moment or time back after a busy period often matters more than anything written into a policy. Non-cash rewards are often more realistic and sustainable for small businesses.

**If you want help with thinking through what's practical for your business, we can help.**



## Men's health at work: what employers are getting wrong

Men's Health Week is from 15-21 June, and it's worth asking yourself a question. When was the last time one of your male employees told you they were struggling?

If the answer is never, that doesn't mean everything is fine.

### The issues we commonly see surrounding men's health:

Men account for around 75% of UK suicides

In construction alone, around 700 workers take their own lives every year. And, statistically, male employees are less likely to talk about mental health and seek support.

HR has rightly focused on women's health in recent years

Menopause policies and maternal mental health have been getting the attention they needed. Men's health hasn't had the same focus and the gap is showing.

### Problems can go unnoticed

Especially in a small team with no EAP and no managers trained to spot the signs.

Ultimately, this costs you money

Unmanaged mental health drives absence and disengaged employees are less productive. Replacing someone who leaves unexpectedly can be very expensive.

### The solution?

Start with regular one-to-ones that go beyond task management. Train managers to notice changes in behaviour. Keep overtime in check. Signpost free resources like Mind, Samaritans or CALM where an EAP isn't affordable.

Use Men's Health Week to open the conversation, but don't let it be a one-off.

If you'd like help with thinking about what wellbeing support looks like in a small business, get in touch.

## BURNOUT IN NUMBERS...

As a business owner, why should you care about employee burnout? Because burnout doesn't just affect wellbeing. It quietly affects your time, your money and your business.

### When people are burnt out:

- Work slows down
- Good people leave
- Customers notice

Tired, stretched teams struggle to deliver the level of service that keeps clients coming back.

### Often, preventing burnout comes down to a few practical actions:

- Talking openly about workload
- Noticing who's consistently working longer hours
- Being realistic about deadlines
- Setting clearer boundaries around availability

Take a look at the burnout stats below and why this matters for employers.

And if you want support with spotting burnout early and handling it confidently, before it becomes a bigger issue, drop us a message.

**91% of adults**

experienced high or extreme stress

**1 in 5 workers**

worked through stress that hurt performance

**Nearly 1 in 10 workers**

took sick or unpaid leave due to stress

**More than 2 in 3 workers**

feel unfulfilled at work

# Your mid-year people health check

Rate yourself **Green**, **Amber** or **Red** for each area.

**Absence:** Do you know your absence patterns from H1?

Tracked and managed



Not sure of the data



Known problem

**Turnover:** Have you lost anyone you shouldn't have?

Stable, exits understood



Some surprise departures



Losing good people regularly

**Performance:** Are underperformers being addressed?

Regular conversations happening



Some gaps



Problems being ignored

**Compliance:** Are you ready for the 2026 law changes?

Reviewed and actioned



Aware but not actioned



Not sure what's changed

**Managers:** Are your managers equipped for H2?

Trained and confident



Some gaps



Winging it

**Scored Amber or Red on more than one?**

The second half of the year needs a plan. We can help you to build one in a single session.

**Get in touch to talk it through.**

# HR Top Tips

## How to handle heatwaves

There's no legal maximum workplace temperature in the UK. But there is a duty to provide reasonable working conditions. In a warehouse, a kitchen or outdoors in July, that becomes hard to ignore.

If someone raises a concern and you haven't documented that you've taken it seriously, you're exposed.

We can help you to understand what reasonable actually looks like for your workplace.

## Getting inclusion right

Owners of small businesses don't usually set out to get inclusion wrong.

But policies written three years ago often don't reflect how your team actually looks today and that gap creates problems when someone raises a concern. Gender identity, pronouns, dignity at work...

They might sound like tick-box topics, but they're part of creating an environment where people actually want to stay.

We can help you to check that your policies and your culture are keeping pace with your team. Get in touch for help.

## Don't take long service for granted

"They've been here years. They'll be fine."

Long service doesn't mean that someone is happy.

It often means they've just stopped raising things.

If you haven't had a proper conversation with your longest-serving people recently, now is a good time.

We can help you to set up meaningful check-ins that go beyond a quick catch-up.

## Need a confidential chat?

If you have a problem brewing in your business, you're worried about something or you simply need some expert HR support then please get in touch with us for a confidential chat.

A quick conversation could save you from a very costly mistake and we could give you the clarity you need to decide your next steps with confidence.

Whether you're a new or existing client, we offer a free 30 min chat (without any obligation to buy from us in the future).

**Get in touch to arrange.**

