

Pleading guilt-free

Amanda Place meets a woman who makes your wellbeing her business.

LISA BURNETT is one of a growing number of Victorians trying to broaden the focus of leaders and managers so they address the physical and psychological wellbeing of their staff — a key to long-term productivity and health.

As a professional communicator and motivator, Ms Burnett is passionate about the need for a guilt-free workplace and an environment where people feel they have been heard — still a rare experience, she says.

“Basically, guilt and a sense of not being heard are the two key reasons I have a business. People don’t feel they are being heard at work, in business or at home. They feel guilty about doing things for themselves — and anxiety about the consequences on other people,” Ms Burnett, who runs Priority One, says.

Productivity and profit are directly affected by wellbeing, she says. The theory is growing as various services around Melbourne offer executive health assessments and management. Ms Burnett works with a general practitioner, personal trainers, pilates specialists, masseurs and dietitians to tackle the fitness and health of senior executives as well as individuals including international swimmers, cyclists and rugby players.

As part of a 12-week health check program, heart and organ function are assessed, a nutritionist looks at the person’s diet and other allied health professionals can be called in to consult.

A key feature is a service designed to eliminate guilt. If a hard-working executive longs for a day at a spa, Ms Burnett organises it. If a couple are losing contact,

Ms Burnett makes sure the kids are looked after and a restaurant is booked.

Health economists have long recognised the value of preventive health programs to help tackle preventive, chronic diseases, which chew through 80 per cent of the health system’s budget.

With so many diseases known to be preventable, people such as Ms Burnett are determined to help workers live healthier lives, rather than waiting for them to present with symptoms.

The Epworth Hospital in Richmond, also offers a health check program to Melbourne’s corporate executives. For more than 16 years it has monitored more than 10,000 people, aiming to identify potential health risks and to pick up early signs of chronic illnesses.

Ms Burnett’s service offers deeper intervention, however, tackling the tricky notions of responsibility, depression and general life dissatisfaction — to name just a few of the triggers that can reduce a capable person to an unhappy mess.

“All our experts are in one place and the clients come to us — from the mail sorter to the CEO.”

Marriage breakdowns, parenting problems and work issues can collide when a person is not coping. Ms Burnett offers an opportunity to talk confidentially and to put the person on a path to improved performance and wellbeing.

“Typically, someone presenting to me will have visited a dietitian for a few weeks, then tried a gym, they’ll have tried a weight loss program and then seen a personal trainer.”

She says that while some clients arrive and only tell her what they want her to

know, over time, she reads between the lines and then delivers a power-packed message slowly and gently, with respect and warmth. Being able to communicate clearly is vital for her to offer effective support.

“Sometimes a person’s whole family will be involved. We need to inform a partner, their children, friends and colleagues of the changes happening in the person’s life.

“It actually brings peace of mind to the family as they don’t have to second-guess or predict the motives for the changed behaviour. Is an overweight exec going to ‘fess-up about the fact they’re likely to have a heart attack if they don’t eat a different diet? It’s better if the message is delivered, accurately, by me.”

She aims to help organisations improve communication so they have healthy staff with clear minds, who have skills and a sense of direction to allow them to offer improved service.

The challenge for all people and workplaces introducing change is to sustain the passion and interest.

“We know that only 30 per cent of people make it work. We need to clarify a person’s aspirations and to identify how they are going to get there.”

Ms Burnett offers a coaching service to business leaders, unravelling the workplace before helping to build it up into a stronger organisation. “They come when they think they could do things better or they have something to launch.

“We come up with an approach to move them towards their goals.”

She and her colleagues help managers communicate clearly with staff to ensure

they embrace change. The corporate coaching is intense for three months or so before tapering off.

“We can be there for life, drip feeding and offering pulse checks.”

In a current project, the company is working across Victoria’s health system to improve communication between health workers, patients and families.

“We’re helping them stop, think and act in a clearer way so all parties get the best outcomes.

“And I can’t help myself. I’m also adding in my little bit about eating properly and taking care of the self.”



Lisa Burnett is passionate about preventing ill health in the workplace.

Picture: Rodger Cummins

LINK

▶ www.priorityone.net.au