



# LEADER TOOL

STRESS DOWN DAY – JULY 24th



Leading through what we are experiencing with more lockdowns is hard. Leaders have the unenviable position of keeping calm when things are stressful, of giving certainty when there is none and turning up to the workplace (remotely or physically) when it feels like the whole world is locking down and we still have to soldier on for our people. We need to recognise our own stress and make sure we carve out time to focus on managing our own stress.

The first place to start is acknowledging that there are higher demands than usual and adapting how we work to that. For the people that you lead, it can be pretty easy to pick up stress levels in people you know very well, their tone of voice, a look, the way they answer what seems to be a simple question. Sometimes that stress can even be contagious, and you find yourself picking it up. What happens when you don't know a person and their stress signs so well, like in a work situation? Team dynamics can become frayed, and trust may be lost when patterns of behaviour change unexpectedly. As a leader managing your stress levels and being consistent in your response and approach can ensure harmony and effectiveness in your team. In most cases, you know exactly when you are getting stressed and when it is getting the better of you. Here are a few tips and behaviours to watch for so you can course-correct in time:

- **Pause, reflect, act** – especially in what seems to be the most urgent situation, doing nothing in haste is a good start. Give yourself time to collect your thoughts, understand the situation and formulate a response.
- **Recognise your stress signatures and their impact** - In addition to the obvious signs such as becoming short or irritable, high-stress situations can cause us to become more closed-minded and controlling instead of open and curious.
- **Circle of support** – just as stress can be contagious, so too can calmness. Within your team, nurture people you can trust to follow your lead and keep a level head in a stressful situation. You can then draw upon a wider breadth of experience, diversity of viewpoints and levels of emotional intelligence to ensure you have the advice you need to make a plan or decision.
- **Keep it real** – particularly over the past 18 months. We have seen that circumstances can change at a speed we haven't been used to and that governments have stepped in and made changes that affect the way businesses can operate in a way not seen at any time previously. Being realistic and honest about what we can and can't control is a good way to start and will help you and those around you stay calm and move forward with what can be achieved.
- **Value psychological safety for your team.** What this means is giving your people a safe space to express their lack of certainty to you and for you to hear it without getting defensive, dismissive or rude about it. Psychological safety doesn't mean that we are all nice all of the time; it means that our people feel that they can be honest without being excluded and that they know you have their back – and they have yours.

Recognise that what you are doing as a leader is important and that you are doing your best. We have a Manager/Leader Support Hotline available to support you through these stressful times. As always, as your EAP, we are here to support your people whatever the nature of their concerns; please contact AccessEAP on 1800 818 728.

