

PRAISE FOR *LEADING WELLBEING*

‘Every leader should have this book in their toolkit. If you manage people and find the topic of mental health overwhelming but increasingly important, then this book is full of sound advice, relatable stories and easy-to-digest, practical ways to help you and your team feel supported as you navigate these conversations. Fleur’s solid leadership background and lived experience of managing the mental wellbeing of herself and her teams, combined with her award-winning writing, means this is a book I will certainly turn to again and again.’

Sonja Furniss, Senior People Program Manager

‘*Leading Wellbeing* really speaks to me. Fleur is so honest and real in sharing her journey and exploring how to manage those difficult mental health conversations while having strategies in place to protect your own wellbeing. Her approach to leading and promoting wellbeing is inspiring.

This is a great book that really made me stop and think about how to manage my own wellbeing while supporting others.’

Narelle Wallace, Director, Australian Public Service

‘All people leaders need to be competent engaging their people in mental health conversations. Mental health conversations are peppered with many imagined and real pitfalls, and without a map to navigate those pitfalls it’s easier to avoid the conversations that need to be had. *Leading Wellbeing* is the map; so, thanks to Fleur, every worker can engage in authentic mental health conversations to help boost wellbeing and productivity at work.’

Eugene McGarrell, Health Executive (Mental Health Service Development and Performance) and Board Director.

‘*Leading Wellbeing* contains a wealth of practical guidance for supporting the mental health of individuals and teams in a post-pandemic world. Whether you are leading a team of high-flying lawyers or a kids’ sport team, the framework and guidance of *Leading Wellbeing* will make you more effective by improving your capacity to support and nurture others.’

Barry Hemsley, Assistant Director, Australian Public Service

‘This book is an amazing resource for those in need of a practical and actionable guide to identifying and supporting those they lead who may be struggling with mental health.’

Colleen O’Connor, Head of HR



LEADING

A leader's guide to mental health
conversations at work

WELLBEING

Fleur Heazlewood





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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fleur Heazlewood is a leadership expert, keynote speaker and founder of the Blueberry Institute.

Fleur partners with leaders to create healthy, high-performing teams and organisations. She is known for building positive performance cultures that deliver both employee wellbeing and commercial results. She has trained and mentored over 3000 people in positive leadership, future-fit resilience and mental health mastery.

With over 20 years' corporate leadership experience, she has led many successful organisational turnarounds and culture transformations. Fleur understands first-hand the challenges of change, uncertainty, staff stress and top talent burnout. Her clients value her accessibility, practicality and skilled use of lessons that work in real life.

Fleur works with many high-profile organisations, including the Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs, Woolworths, GenesisCare, ITW Construction, Axicom, Goodman Fielder, Indara, Mental Health Commission of New South Wales, the Australian Government Department of Finance and the Country Fire Authority.

Fleur's experience is backed by extensive qualifications, which include a Masters of Coaching Psychology, Bachelor of

Commerce and Company Directors Certificate. She is a qualified yoga therapy and mindfulness teacher and incorporates this in her personal wellbeing and healing practices.

Her debut book *Resilience Recipes* won best Health and Wellbeing Book of 2022 at the Australian Business Book Awards and was a runner up for Business Book of the Year.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Leadership is a constant balancing act, and it's natural to feel pulled in different directions. As leaders, it is important to remember that you are human, too, and to know it is okay to ask for help and take time for self-care.

Much gratitude to my team, who are also my friends and cheer squad. They support and celebrate me and each other through the good, wobbly, great and awful ups and downs in life. Chloe, Jodie, Stephen, Meaveen and Nick bring a richness of unique gifts, perspectives, strengths and vulnerabilities that makes our work and our team wonderful to be a part of. Thank you also to Yarden, who chose to intern with us as part of her studies and painstakingly researched and checked the facts, stats and international content for mental health.

True growth and reaching our full potential as leaders occurs when we take personal risks, share our vulnerabilities, admit when we don't have the answers and ask for help.

This book wouldn't have been possible without the hundreds of leaders who have been willing to ask the scary, uncertain, silly and ultimately brave questions in my mental health, resilience and wellbeing workshops in order to better support their people.

Special thanks to Sonja, Barry, Tammy, Narelle, Barsha, Mike, Jane, Colleen and Victoria for your belief, feedback and ongoing support.

Leading with psychological safety is also about having the courage to advocate for what you believe is right, be open to a range of ideas and perspectives, and support people's voices to be heard.

Much gratitude to Eugene McGarrell and Lou Bentley for your friendship, belief and backing. Eugene has been an important part of my ten-plus-year journey in bringing mental health and wellbeing literacy to the world of work. Big thanks for the mental health expertise feedback provided during the development of *Leading Wellbeing*. Lou has a big heart, enormous 'energi' and a great talent for message and marketing. Thank you for your generous support in sharing the message of better wellbeing for work and amplifying my leadership voice.

Positive leadership that leads to sustainable performance is possible for any team when we start supporting wellbeing and building resilience as a capability and enabler of performance, rather than as a reward for results.

I acknowledge the leaders who, during the formative part of my career, demonstrated care for me as a person as well as appreciation for the results I delivered: Mark Bilton, Kim Gosper and Brian Jewell. I also acknowledge the leaders I have had the privilege of working with who have both the vision and commitment to build wellbeing as a foundation of a healthy, high-performing culture: Gavan McKenna and Mike Riches.

And finally, a big thank you to my winning book team, who have chosen to work with me a second time. They were invaluable in helping me write my debut book *Resilience Recipes*.

Thank you to Kelly, for challenging me to do better and pressure-testing the book idea and structure; to Lesley, Will and Eleanor at Major Street Publishing for helping bring the book to life; and Tess McCabe for another gorgeous cover design.

INTRODUCTION

You are exhausted from the continuous juggle of day-to-day business priorities, delivering on urgent work deadlines and supporting an under-resourced team that is cracking under the unrelenting pressure.

You take on more of the team's workload in an attempt to shield your people from some of the more unrealistic work demands and relieve some of their stress burden. But no matter how hard you work at it, you don't feel as though you ever get on top of things. You feel caught in a no-win downward spiral that you don't know how to break.

This book is for leaders who want to do their best but worry about how to better manage the demands of the business with the health and wellbeing of their team. You are not alone – and this book is here to help.

This book is for leaders who are willing to be courageous and embrace the conversational skills needed to better support the mental health and wellbeing of their people at work.

LEADERSHIP MATTERS

As leaders, healthy change starts with us. And it is not just what we say but also what we do that matters.

In the healthy leadership programs I run, I have learned that leading with courage, with vulnerable personal sharing, creates

the psychological safety and trust necessary to have the caring conversations that count. When I lead workshops with my lived experience, there is greater openness within the group – the burning questions are asked, the quality of the conversation deepens, and people listen with curiosity and respond to each other with compassion.

So, to encourage you to lead with courage and model vulnerability, I will share some of my personal, raw stories and why I care so deeply about leaders developing mental health mastery for work.

I started my career as a bright, ambitious young woman during a time when equal opportunity, flexibility, fair work and discrimination laws, policies and protections didn't really exist. During my first year of work I was bullied, harassed, ridiculed, threatened, sexually assaulted and ostracised for being young, female, qualified, competent and different. I started my working career in a tough employment market, and if I could have found a job anywhere else, I would have taken it.

The leaders who I turned to for help with this psychological harm pleaded helplessness and then, behind my back, contributed to the rumour mill that I was trouble. My manager distanced themselves from me because they saw me as a threat to their career progression. I was ostracised by my team and left to figure out how to be safe on my own.

I shut down and focused on survival. I worked twice as hard as everyone else to continuously justify my existence.

My days were spent living in my stress response and on adrenaline, and dreading Mondays. Weekends were spent in a state of mental exhaustion, and expensive health-retreat holidays were dedicated to finding new and faster ways to recover and manage burnout.

When I eventually resigned, it was as one of the company's top performers. The leaders scrambled to create incentives for me to stay. I didn't.

**Ill health is not an acceptable price for
business success.**

MENTAL HEALTH MASTERY IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF YOUR LEADERSHIP TOOLKIT

Most of us move into leadership and management roles with clarity around the tasks, projects, targets and results we are expected to deliver. There is an investment in training and time dedicated to work-in-progress meetings, either one-on-one or in teams, and performance expectations come with a range of measures for assessing our levels of performance and success.

Less explicit and often more informal, unwritten and unmeasured is an assumption that we will also manage the wellbeing of our team within the cracks of our leftover time. But when we don't manage the interpersonal dynamics well, leave those who are unwell to struggle, allow interpersonal conflict to fester or accept poor performance, we undermine both our own health and performance and that of our overall team.

**High performance is not sustainable unless it is
healthy high performance.**

The leadership wisdom in this book comes from my lived experience struggling with burnout, fluctuating mental health and a relentless drive for high performance. I worked extremely hard and fast-tracked a successful corporate career that took me from graduate trainee in a blue-chip global company to CEO of a multi-million-dollar business in just 15 years.

I overachieved on every commercial performance measure given to me, but I existed in a perpetual state of burnout – and ended up damaging both my mental health and physical health along the way.

There is a better way, and this book will help you find it.

MENTAL HEALTH IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

Mental health is something that we all experience, but when we notice someone struggling at work, we hope that Human Resources (HR) or someone else will deal with it. But with one in five of us experiencing mental illness at work each year, we all have a role to play in supporting our colleagues. With work being where we spend so many of our waking hours, the relationships with our direct managers and team members are some of the most significant influences on our mental health and wellbeing.

We don't have to be experts in mental health to have a caring conversation that connects someone who needs help to support. While this book has 'mental health' in the subtitle, the heart of it is about helping you to have better conversations at work – conversations that connect rather than disconnect, and that enable you to feel more confident offering timely and appropriate support to team members who may be struggling. It is as simple as starting one small conversation at a time.

Applying the Mental Health Mastery Framework to improve the conversations you are already having will alleviate worry and stress without adding to your workload. And research shows that people who feel valued and supported at work perform better, are more engaged and stay longer.

People who are well do well.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book provides you with a conversation framework to help you more confidently and capably have better mental health and wellbeing conversations at work as a leader. With just a little bit of preparation, and utilising your existing meeting calendar, you can make a positive difference to people's mental health and performance without adding much to your workload.

This book should feel a lot like common sense – because it is. It is simple and deliberately curated to minimise your mental load and help you make small positive changes to your conversations at work. This is a practical book with examples, scripts and checklists to help you prepare for conversations that better connect and support.

Take this book at your own pace. Each chapter is designed to build on the last, but this book doesn't have to be worked through sequentially. If one area resonates with you more, go there, read it and commit to an action.

This book will help you to recognise when someone may be experiencing mental health challenges and could benefit from support. It provides ideas, strategies and tips for how you can have better and more supportive wellbeing conversations with people you are concerned about at work. It is designed to improve the mental health literacy of leaders and teams in the workplace, to reduce stigma and to increase help-seeking for those who are unwell.

What I am sharing with you comes from my lived experience with mental illness, personal burnout, healing journey, years of study and leadership experience. It also comes from the conversations I have had in training over 3000 leaders across a range of industries, states and countries in my programs on mental health mastery, future-fit resilience skills and positive leadership.

WHAT THIS BOOK COVERS

Part I of this book provides your leadership context and the opportunity for you to create a personal development plan based on a short self-assessment.

In chapters one to three, I define the key terms you need to know, cover your leadership responsibilities for psychological safety and provide warning signs of burnout and potential mental health problems. Chapter four provides a self-assessment for you to determine your personal development plan starting point when it comes to your confidence and competence in supporting the mental health of your team at work.

Part II of this book covers the practical strategies and steps that address the most common challenges leaders face when having a mental health conversation at work. It addresses how to approach someone you are concerned about at work, how to start a mental health conversation, what to say in response to personal disclosure and how to help.

In chapters five to nine, we work through the five steps of the Mental Health Mastery Framework – Prepare, Ask, Listen, Empower and Performance – to build your conversation competence and confidence.

Supporting your people to be well will also help them to do well and ultimately achieve both healthy and high performance.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT

I am not a psychologist, therapist or counsellor. I am not an expert in workplace HR and safety policy, processes and regulations. This book does not teach, constitute advice or qualify you to diagnose, prescribe, recommend treatment or take specific courses of action. That is the clear role of mental health and medical professionals. Nor does this book replace the valuable guidance that your HR, wellbeing and safety teams, professional helplines and employee assistance programs (EAPs) that are relevant to your organisation provide.

Different states, territories, cultures and countries have different guidelines, policies and regulations when it comes to psychological safety and mental health at work. It is important that you familiarise yourself with the policies applicable to your organisation, the relevant protocols for your culture and regulations that govern your geographical location.