Tips for staying mentally healthy when reopening your business

Leanne Faulkner, small business wellbeing advocate

Just like going into the COVID-19-enforced hibernation, coming out can also be a challenging and stressful adjustment. Embracing the 'new normal', recognising it can cause stress, and having a reopening plan that includes nurturing a mentally healthy workplace will help owners and their employees maintain good mental health and wellbeing.

With the easing of coronavirus restrictions, many owners across the country are facing multiple challenges associated with reopening their business. These include: reviving cash flow, wooing back customers, kickstarting supply chains, and creating a workplace that fully complies with the government's new safety principles for returning employees and clients.

According to small-business wellbeing advocate and founder of business coaching and mentoring company Fortitude at Work, Leanne Faulkner, this long to-do list and the challenges and stress that can come with actioning it may take a toll on the mental health and wellbeing of business owners.

Faulkner draws on her own business and personal experience of suffering work-related mental health issues when owner of Billie Goat Soap to help other owners cope with the challenges and pressures of running a business.

She has shared her tips for staying mentally healthy while navigating the transition of a business from a pre to post COVID-19 world on Beyond Blue's Back to work: how to manage reopening your business.

According Faulkner, the challenges associated with reopening and staying compliant "add an extra layer of complexity and stress".

"As COVID-19 has evolved, so have the concerns of small-business owners, so that the triggers are now quite different compared to those experienced at the start of the pandemic."

Faulkner's tips for small business owners to reduce stress triggers when reopening

Embrace the 'new normal' and accept that it can be a stress trigger.
Accepting the new normal and the changes it has brought and "recognising that it's okay if that is a source of stress is a good place to start," says Faulkner.

Understand your new obligations and plan for the months ahead.
By researching the new workplace safety measures specific to your industry then making a plan to implement them will help you feel more confident in your ability to reopen and help your employees with the transition back to work. Faulkner recommends thinking through your business reopening and planning for different situations to help you prepare for dealing with issues and to give you a "sense of power and feeling of calm about something which, to a large extent, is beyond your control".

Look after your mental health and wellbeing and create a mentally healthy workplace.
Looking after your own mental health is as essential as creating a mentally healthy workplace for your employees. "If a small-business owner isn't feeling resilient and mentally well as their business reopens or adapts, it's going to be a real struggle for them to manage the same for their employees," says Faulkner, who adds that addressing your own mental health concerns will not only result in greater empathy for your employees but enable you to better manage the reopening of your business.

Beyond Blue's Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service provides current information, advice and strategies to help manage your wellbeing and mental health here. It also offers 24/7 access to trained counsellors on 1800 512 348. Heads up's *Creating a mentally healthy workplace* can be accessed here and Safe Work Australia's new National COVID-19 safe workplace principles are here.