

Time to ask your clients “Are you okay?” - Mental health pressures equal to financial during unprecedented crisis

Now more than ever is the time for business and financial advisers to connect with their clients and ask a simple question: “Are you okay”, urges one of Australia’s leading voluntary insolvency firms, Jirsch Sutherland.

“The rapidly escalating economic impact of COVID-19 is having a major impact on many business owners’ mental health and wellbeing,” says Andrew Spring, Jirsch Sutherland Partner. “But the shock of the rapidly evolving circumstances may cause a number of people to forget to ask for help. Which is where we, as advisers, can step up.

“While we are being urged to have physical distancing, it’s more important than ever to stay socially ‘connected’. To our clients, our colleagues, our family and friends.

“We are increasingly hearing from small-medium business owners and accountants that their or their clients’ mental health is being affected. My colleagues and I have spoken with numerous people who say they cannot sleep at night and are sick to the stomach worrying about their staff, their business’s cash-flow and future. I spoke with a real estate agency owner who said he’s faced with a myriad of issues including staff who are breaking down in the office or just not turning up to work, tenants not able to pay rent, landlords concerned about their rental income being impacted, and just managing the day-to-day office needs. The pressures – and not just financial ones – are overwhelming.

“That’s why it’s so crucial for trusted advisers to offer support. This is a macro event of nobody’s making and it’s important that as an industry we all band together to help de-stigmatise asking for help.”

Asking someone if they are okay can make a huge difference, says Spring. “As advisers, our role is more than just dealing with business structures, financial information or stratagems, it’s also about understanding the human element within each business that can affect business owners and their decision making.”

Most of Jirsch Sutherland’s Partners, Managers and Principals have undertaken the mental health first aid certificate and the firm proudly supports Beyond Blue in its activities. “We understand that the current situation is unprecedented and moving rapidly but even having some tools to recognise if someone needs support is crucial,” says Spring. “The insolvency industry is one where we come into contact with many people experiencing high levels of stress – and the current situation is certainly testing us all.

“Being at the frontline of business owners who are dealing with trauma, particularly during these challenging times, means we’re in a position where we can offer support. It’s a simple question – “Are you okay?” – that can make a world of difference.”

Helpful tips for advisers:

- For workplaces, take a strategic integrated approach*:
 - Protect from psychological risks and hazards
 - Support people's mental health
 - Promote healthy and thriving workplaces
- Don't be afraid to ask for help
- Take advantage of the COVID-19 Telehealth services (a new COVID-19 rebate has been introduced through Medicare for psychologists and clinical psychologists, allowing them to bulk bill patients who are forced to self-isolate or self-quarantine)
- Remember that while we are required to have physical distance, it's important to stay connected
- Arrange digital "hang-outs" for colleagues, family, friends, neighbours – If you're struggling, reach out to [Beyond Blue](#) or another mental health organisation. See here for a comprehensive [list](#).

*Developing a workplace mental health strategy – Heads Up (Beyond Blue)

About Jirsch Sutherland – www.jirschsutherland.com.au

Established in 1984, Jirsch Sutherland is one of Australia's leading national independent insolvency specialists. The Jirsch Sutherland team works closely with small and mid-size accounting, finance and legal firms – and their clients – to provide a wide range of expert corporate and personal insolvency services including liquidations, voluntary administrations, receiverships and bankruptcy.

With head offices in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Newcastle and Perth, supported by a network of regional offices, Jirsch Sutherland's national reach combined with a local presence underpins the company's ongoing success. For over three decades, Jirsch Sutherland has earned a well-deserved reputation for protecting and guiding clients through the insolvency process in a fair and ethical way.

In Western Australia, Jirsch Sutherland trades as WA Insolvency Solutions.

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