



## **Foster employee well-being: be ahead of stress and burn out**

A unique toolkit based on input from over **40 HR professionals** and key learning points from Inuka's coaching practice.



inuka

[www.inukacoaching.com](http://www.inukacoaching.com)



No need to bother you with the dazzling numbers of stress and burn out in employees nowadays. Articles on this topic are probably piling up in your inbox. It is obvious and undeniable; employee mental health is at risk, and we cannot look away. It's not surprising that facilitating employee well-being has become a key HR objective. Having a resilient workforce is widely recognized as a vital asset for business success. Today almost 70% of senior HR leaders rate employee well-being and mental health as a top priority, according to the [Future workplace 2021 HR sentiment survey](#).

**Inuka Coaching** (a Dutch-based social enterprise) performed thousands of online coaching sessions for companies over the past years. Incorporated in HR strategies the Inuka method enhances mental wellbeing of employees. As partner of the wellbeing community, we organize round table meetings with HR professionals originating from different countries, sectors and of various sizes. Our learnings reflect the current situation on mental health. We do recognize stress as *the* most common reason why employees register for coaching.

Over the years we have been able to explore both perspectives: organizational insights and employee experiences and we feel confident enough to draw some conclusions and provide you with practical tips and guidelines for building resilience in employees and prevent burn out and chronic illness. We do not pretend to be extensive but we hope these insights inspire you and trigger to take a step further on your way to establish a resilient workplace where your employees will flourish. What is in it for us? Well, making mental well-being accessible for everyone, that is what makes us tick. Sharing know how is part of that mission!

# Key success factors in boosting employee well-being

We regularly host round table meetings with HR managers to share experiences on employee well-being, vitality, retention & prevention of absenteeism and burn out. You may even have been a participant in one of these.

On the other hand is data on coachee stressors coming to us on a daily basis through our coaching sessions. Combined, the practical findings on this subject ultimately led to five main insights that are believed to positively impact employee well being. Here they are:

1. **Lead by example**
2. **Create moments of connection**
3. **Establish an open and safe atmosphere**
4. **Emphasise well-being during the onboarding phase**
5. **Make the mental well-being policy inclusive**

## **Checklist**



inuka

[www.inukacoaching.com](http://www.inukacoaching.com)



# 1. Lead by example

If you are going to talk the talk... you will have to walk the walk. If your ambition is to motivate employees to take better care of themselves or to create an environment where employees feel comfortable to speak up when they are struggling, the answer is simple: **set the example**.

And yes, that is easier said than done, and doesn't come naturally to everyone. However, no need to rush to a commercial 'psychological safety' workshop. For a start, it is worth sitting down with staff and discussing the potential effect of sharing and opening up. It is proven to help create happier and healthier employees leading to more employee engagement and ultimately, more productivity.

*"My manager's expectations are so high and I feel like she is working 24/7, I don't dare to say that I am overwhelmed"*

*- Anonymous employee\**

\*The Inuka coaching method is chat based and anonymous- which is part of the success of the Inuka method: coachees tend to open up sooner.

## Ideas to empower your people

### 1 Encourage managers to open up

It is well known that showing authenticity as a leader pays off. Sharing struggles, stories, and the journey of what it took for a person to get where they are today builds understanding. Opening up enhances better interpersonal connections and can also result in innovation and learning. Authenticity inspires authenticity (Forbes, 2020).

Easier said than done, how to get your managers to open up?

1. Share the 'why' of preferred behaviours, and open up yourself as a HR lead.
2. Create an atmosphere where "I don't know" is sometimes the right answer.
3. Everyone makes mistakes. Suggest that managers share experiences where they 'learned by mistake'.
4. Introduce the "gratitude circle", this is an engagement tool where every team member mentions two things they are grateful for (one about work, one about personal life).
5. Emphasize that it is okay to have a bad day and to share it aloud.

## 2

## Groom inspiring managers with healthy habits

The ability to inspire is one of the most important leadership skills. How to help your managers to be more inspiring on wellbeing? Encourage that they:

- Empower their team by enabling team members to have autonomy.
- Focus on outcomes and allow team members flexibility on the 'how / when'.
- Schedule short breaks between meetings.
- Introduce walking meetings/phone calls.
- Prioritize and respect sleep.
- Avoid sending emails to their teams during the evening and weekend.

*" My boss is sending me emails during the weekend and I feel obliged to answer but it prevents me from winding-down"*

- Anonymous employee

## 3

## Model effective communication in the workplace

Effective communication builds trust, creates connections, strengthens engagement and increases productivity.

**Active listening** is the prerequisite for effective communication, since listening is much more than the process of hearing or not talking. As a refresher, these are the five key active listening techniques to support becoming a more effective listener:

1. **Pay attention.** Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message.
2. **Show that you are listening** by making eye contact or sharing small encouraging signals like "hmmm, I hear you", or nodding.
3. **Provide feedback** and ask questions.
4. **Defer judgement!**
5. **Respond appropriately** and be aware of your tone of voice and body language.

*"I don't even share my ideas with my colleague anymore since I can immediately see his condemnation, it is very demotivating"*

- Anonymous employee



## 2. Create moments of connection

This focus point has become even more important now in the post-pandemic world, where work sometimes seems to have shifted from more of a team effort to an individual effort. Staying connected and having genuine relationships and people who care about you at work has become more of a challenge, however it is a crucial component in supporting engagement and motivation. Investing in building high-quality relationships and a positive climate is critical to team wellbeing.

Why? Because connected teams drive collaboration, nurture healthy working relationships, and promote knowledge-sharing. The more connected we are as colleagues, the more enjoyable and efficient our workplace will be.

*"I miss my colleagues, everything is online, I am adrift and I feel demotivated".*

*- Anonymous employee*



inuka

[www.inukacoaching.com](http://www.inukacoaching.com)

## **1 Introduce a “check in” moment at the beginning of a meeting**

Like in yoga where it is said that “grounding” before you start your exercise enriches your performance, checking in with team members at the beginning of a meeting turns out to be an effective agenda item to get the most out of your meetings.

According to Braden Kowitz, who writes about high performing teams, check-in rounds help to create more inclusive meetings. It turns out that when everyone starts a meeting by speaking up once, it makes it easier to speak up later during the same meeting. So if you’ve been trying to encourage a teammate to participate more, a simple check-in round might be just the ticket to help them be more comfortable speaking in front of their peers. Here is Kowitz’s full [blog](#).

## **2 Celebrate moments of success or significant dates**

Paying attention to moments that matters to individuals and teams, pays off. Birthdays, project completions, the death of a friend, or the first time speaking to an audience. There are some moments and situations where the way in which managers respond carries a much great weight. These moments are an opportunity to build stronger and more understanding relationships at work. For example taking the time to celebrate completing a heavy project milestone will help the team glow with satisfaction and cement a feeling of team achievement. Equally, being understanding about moments when additional support is needed can create happier, more motivated, less stressed and more loyal employees.

## **3 Initiate activities outside work**

Making fun opportunities for connection where the topic and setting are not work-related, is another great way to achieve team bonding and strengthen relationships. Here are some fun quiz ideas for a team night:

- [Click here for quiz questions](#)
- [And here for getting-to-know-each-other-questions.](#)



## 4

## Host a compliment shower

If you are looking for an effective exercise to raise the self-esteem of the team members, find out if team members are aware of the positive characteristics others see in them, and boost the team spirit, a 'compliment shower' can be a good idea.

There are a lot of variations of this tool, here is one. One person is seated facing away from the group. One after another the team members give a compliment to this person, e.g. I appreciate that you are so thoughtful. Another way is to stand in a circle and throw a ball to decide whose turn it is. It is Inuka's experience that this exercise facilitates connection, we have embraced this tool in our company.







### **3. Establish an open and safe atmosphere**

The shared values and behaviours of a company shape the organizational culture. It goes without saying that a thriving organizational culture is best for employee well-being. Building a strong culture requires significant thought, behavioural activation and change management, which we will not dive into in this paper. However, feeling distrust or sensing a bad atmosphere is what we systemically hear from our coachees as a cause of stress. So here are a few suggestions to make a step towards a good atmosphere and to make employees feel more engaged.



inuka

[www.inukacoaching.com](http://www.inukacoaching.com)

# Practical steps to an open and honest culture

## 1 Install moments of feedback on a regular basis

- Plan 30 minutes feedback rounds every two months;
- Organize a feedback training. Giving feedback is a skill. Being done well it can be very constructive.

## 2 Promote a good atmosphere in your team

- Investigate your employees' needs and expectations on this;
- Introduce 'a day in the life of' agenda item, where team members gives a peek in their life;
- Organise events on vitality themes.

*"At my department, making a mistake is seen as a failure, so not making any is leading in my work and I feel it is blocking me."*

*- Anonymous employee*

## 3 Embrace mistakes

In her TED talk, [Amy Edmonson](#) - the professor who introduced psychological safety - explains her research on *Do better hospital care teams make fewer mistakes?* Her findings were the opposite of what she expected; better hospital care teams seemed to make more mistakes. She started looking for possible explanations and figured:

*Maybe the better teams are not making more mistakes, maybe they are more willing to discuss them. What if the better teams have a climate of openness, that allows them to report, and even get to the bottom of these mistakes? — Amy Edmonson*

To verify, a research assistant, unaware of the research hypothesis, investigated the team culture. The results were surprising: better teams are open about errors and explore ways of reducing these together. The concept of psychological safety was born: a shared belief held by members of a team that others on the team will not embarrass, reject or punish you for speaking up.

## 4. Emphasize wellbeing during the onboarding phase

The onboarding program is the first impression a new employee gets from the company. Only 20% of organizations have proactive, systematic, strategic onboarding across their entire workforce. A missed opportunity because this is the moment to tackle burn out by its root cause! And literature supports this insight. A survey of 7,500 full-time employees by [Gallup](#) exposed the top **five reasons for burn out**:

1. Unfair treatment at work;
2. Unmanageable workload;
3. Lack of role clarity;
4. Lack of communication and support from their manager;
5. Unreasonable time pressure.

According to onboarding expert [Talmundo](#), empowering your workforce to be happier and healthier is about culture more than about well-being initiatives. It's about creating a culture where your people feel heard, supported, respected and empowered.

*"Building a culture like that starts the moment you hire, with your employee onboarding program. It has to, because undoing a negative first impression is almost impossible. Stress is much harder to undo than prevent."*

- [Talmundo](#)



inuka

[www.inukacoaching.com](http://www.inukacoaching.com)



## Suggestions for onboarding

(That might seem a bit straightforward but are not always in place).

- Ensure new employees have a session scheduled with each key stakeholder / collaborators and assign a buddy who can provide ongoing support.
- Provide all the information they will need prior to starting so that your new employees feel prepared. Make time for any questions they might have.
- Clearly explain their role, what is expected of them and what is not, to avoid any confusion. Be open to revisit this in the first months as needed.
- Introduce employees to the well-being services of the company. If employees are struggling with mental health, it is important to make it as easy as possible for them to get help within the organization. Knowing who they can talk to is an important part of the onboarding process.
- Challenge yourself and address the causes for burn out, verify in your company / team:
  - a. If your employees feel fairly treated;
  - b. If employees have autonomy and flexibility in how they complete work
  - c. If employees consider their workload and deadlines manageable;
  - d. If roles and responsibilities are clear;
  - e. If employees feel heard, supported, respected and empowered by their managers;

*"I had no idea whom to turn to when I felt I was facing a burn out, I wish I had known earlier that we have an employee coaching program available"*

*- Anonymous employee*



inuka

[www.inukacoaching.com](http://www.inukacoaching.com)



## 5. Make the mental health policy inclusive

An important insight from our round table meetings is the fact that there seems to be a gap in accessibility between reaching employees who are genuinely interested in well-being and those who are not. The first group is easy to reach and open to initiatives to prevent burn out. This group tends to resilience more easily. The challenge is to reach the group for whom these kind of initiatives don't come naturally.



inuka

[www.inukacoaching.com](http://www.inukacoaching.com)

## A few tips:

1

Check the awareness and fit of well-being services offered by your company with different groups of employees.

2

Check if your employees know where to find the company's mental health policy.

3

Check whether your employees identify with the visuals, tone of voice and language used in the communication on mental well-being and interventions. Not everyone feels addressed by the same, so you might miss out here.

*"Yes, I did mention that I was stressed. HR mentioned a mindfulness workshop but I am a technician of 59 and I am not into sitting on a cushion to feel mindfull!"*

*- Anonymous employee*

We hope you found this Inuka paper useful and are excited to turn the suggestions to actions. The checklist below may come in handy.



inuka

[www.inukacoaching.com](http://www.inukacoaching.com)



## 6. Checklist

### 1. Lead by example

- Open up as a manager.
- Groom inspiring managers with healthy habits.
- Model effective communication in the workplace.

### 2. Create moments of connection

- Introduce a "check in" moment at the beginning of a meeting.
- Plan walking meetings.
- Initiate activities outside work.
- Host a compliment shower.

### 3. Establish an open and safe atmosphere

- Install moments of feedback on a regular basis.
- Promote a good atmosphere in your team.
- Embrace mistakes.

### 4. Emphasize well-being during the onboarding phase

- Create an introduction plan.
- Assign a mentor.
- Create an information package reading list + set a time for a Q&A
- Clarify role and set clear expectations.
- Explicitly mention the well-being services of the company.
- Indicate who is the mental health spokes person.

In place

To check

To do



	In place	To check	To do
Check out the root causes for stress in your company:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
• Do your employees feel treated fair?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
• Do employees consider their workload manageable?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
• Are roles and responsibilities clear?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
• Do employees feel heard, supported, respected and empowered by their superiors?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
• Do employees think their time and deadlines are manageable?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 5. Make the mental wellbeing policy inclusive

Check the awareness and fit of well-being services within different departments/teams.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Check if your employees know where to find the company's mental health policy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Check whether your employees identify with the visuals, tone of voice and language used in the communication on mental well-being and interventions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



## About Inuka Coaching

Inuka Coaching is an online coaching platform working with the Inuka Method, a scientifically proven, 7 step approach. With this solution based method we help companies foster employee well-being and prevent stress and burn-out.

25% of your employees are at risk for stress, burn out and absenteeism, but this group won't make themselves known to you. With an anonymous 5 minute WHO-based self-scan we identify this invisible group. Subsequently, these employees are offered a chat based, anonymous coaching program that helps 70% of them to a resilient situation after 4 sessions. Easily rolled out with limited involvement required from you.

**Profitable, accessible and with measurable results.**

## Curious?

Reach out for a digital cup of coffee..  
.. or find more info on  
[inukacoaching.com](https://inukacoaching.com).



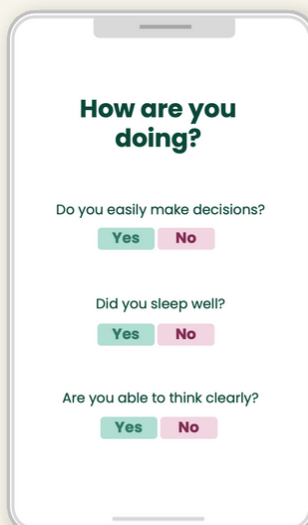
**Arjan Grootenboer**  
*Chief Business Development*  
**+31 (0)6 5378 6659**



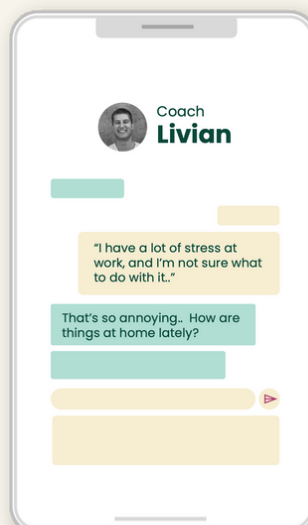
**Robin van Dalen**  
*CEO*  
**+31 (0)6 5160 4866**

## With Inuka, your employees can...

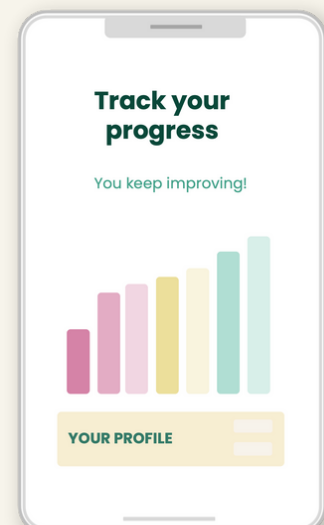
Find out how they are actually doing.



Talk to their own coach, wherever, whenever.



Feel better after 4 sessions\*



\*Our results are published in the Cambridge Global Mental Health Journal (2021)