

Strategic Mental Health in Santander

Like many modern-day organisations, Santander UK were experiencing difficulties. Sickness absence was on the increase and productivity was lower, suggesting that Presenteeism levels may also be higher. Turnover had increased along with the number of reported stress and mental health cases. I was brought in by the head of Health and Safety to help him improve mental health

“Financial Services Has Worst Mental Health” HRMagazine

Working in financial services was always seen as being quite prestigious They are high street names with good career paths. They are seen as good jobs which are well paid, so we would assume that bank workers are healthy, wealthy and happy. When we look at the statistics though, they tell a different picture: almost 3 out of 4 bank employees admitted to workplace Stress (Trade union Unite). More than 1/3 of absences are due to mental ill health (AdviserPlus 2017) compared with around 1/5th in Retail and Utilities, and the % of absences has increased year on year (AdviserPlus 2017).

Why Is Mental Health Poor in Financial Services?

There are a number of factors that have had a negative impact on staff mental health e.g.

- The financial crisis
- Regulatory upheaval,
- The poor public image of the Financial Services sector.
- Job security has decreased
- Heavier workloads.

In addition to these factors, there are the usual stressors of reaching ever demanding sales targets.

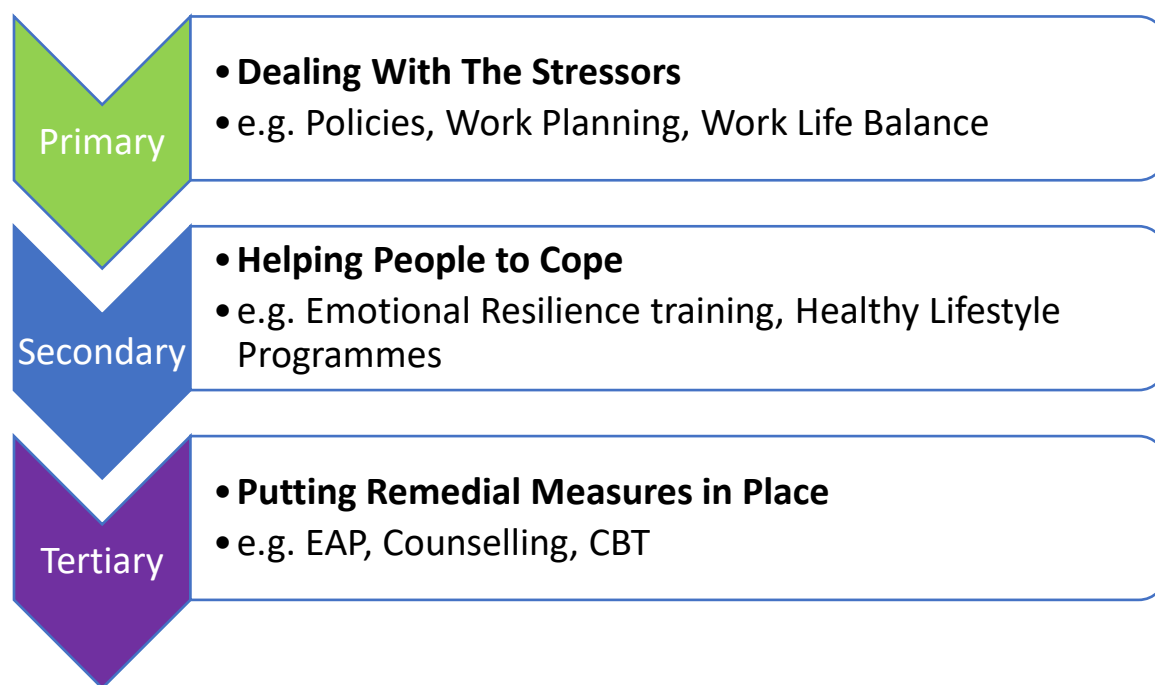
Addressing Mental Health Strategically

The Wellbeing arena can be very confusing, and many organisations do not know which initiatives to introduce from the wide range of options available on the market. So, they tend to pick a couple of things, so they might offer subsidised gym passes or lunchtime mindfulness classes. Although any intervention aimed at improving mental health is better than no intervention, these kind of interventions, in isolation are unlikely to make a

significant impact on bottom line figures. In order to really tackle mental health, and improve engagement and productivity, organisations need to take a strategic approach to managing mental health within the workplace and this is what we did with Santander.

We used a simple three level framework to ensure that Santander was addressing mental health strategically i.e. 1, Primary, 2 Secondary and 3, Tertiary.

A 3 Level Framework for Addressing Mental Health



Tertiary Level

The tertiary level is about putting remedial measures in place e.g. many organisations, particularly the larger ones have an Employee Assistance option where staff can access counselling or other types of support. This type of professional support is helpful, although it is predominantly reactive i.e. it is about closing the stable door after the horse has bolted.

Secondary Level

Secondary level interventions are about helping staff members to cope more effectively e.g. Emotional Resilience training, Mindfulness, Stress Management training or other interventions aimed at helping employees cope better with pressures. These can be very helpful in promoting better mental health but obviously some are better than others.

Primary Level

The primary level is about carrying out psychosocial risk assessments and identifying where organisational practices and processes may be impacting negatively on mental health e.g. management practices, work/life balance. Focusing on the primary stressors is more likely to solve the problem rather than just addressing the symptoms but addressing all 3 levels is essential in order to improve productivity/engagement and make an impact on the bottom line.

Implementing the 3 Levels in Santander

I worked with Santander to develop interventions at each of the three levels.

PRIMARY	SECONDARY	TERTIARY
All Departments reviewed against 6 workplace pressures using RAG rating	Keeping Pressure Positive training for managers	EAP
Improvement targets set for all managers	Managers trained in early intervention	Occupational Health
A Wellbeing Questionnaire	Regional managers trained to be Mental Health Champions	

All departments were assessed using the Asset model (Robertson Cooper), which is similar to the tool offered by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE Management Standards tool). This tool identifies the six aspects of organisational life that have been shown to improve mental health, engagement and productivity when managed well i.e.

- Workload
- Degree of control over work
- Organisational Support and Resources
- Conflict and Relationships

- Role Clarity
- Organisational change

A traffic light system was used to assess how departments were doing against these standards:

Green	Doing well
Yellow	Room for improvement
Red	Needs to improve quickly

All Departments were given targets for improvement. I helped Santander develop a wellbeing audit tool that could be used to take a ‘temperature check’ of how staff were feeling, at any point in time.

Managers across the business were trained to support staff with mental health conditions and to spot the early warning signs and act quickly in holding a supportive conversation. I also designed a ‘Mental Health Champions’ training course for Santander and they took the bold move of inviting their Regional Managers to be Mental Health Champions instead of appointing more junior grades. This sent a clear message across the organisation about the importance of managing mental health and put the responsibility for it very clearly in the managerial line albeit with support from the organisation.

The Outcomes

Santander now have a comprehensive programme in place to protect and facilitate good mental health, that identifies & manages psychological risks. The new management actions and training were well received by Senior Execs, line managers and colleagues as well as being fully supported by the Trade Union. Santander have started collecting data and early indications are that the programme is already contributing to sickness absence reduction. The Santander HS&W Management System is number 1 of 12 countries and the Santander Global Audit commented that that: the Santander UK model and application was “the best we have ever seen”.