



# EFFECTIVE UPSKILLING FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK MANAGEMENT

How to have **MENTAL HEALTH  
CONVERSATIONS SAFELY** - with **EMPATHY**  
and **WITHOUT OFFENDING**

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One of Australia's Leading Mental Health,  
Resilience and Wellbeing Performance Coaches  
& Trainers for Business



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# What is the Number One Skill That Leaders and Managers Need?

**It has previously been overlooked and it took a global pandemic to make it front of mind – empathy.**

Empathy is defined as ‘a high degree of understanding of other people’s emotions. Empathy is about them – the other person.

Sympathy is about self.

Managers have to be careful about talking about their own experiences, thinking that it will help solve the problems that their team members are experiencing.

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“ *There is no standard normal. Normal is subjective. There are seven billion versions of normal on this planet.*

**Matt Haig, Novelist**

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Unprecedented times is an overused phrase today, yet we know that we are experiencing greater demands on our mental and emotional health than ever before. Remote working from home was not necessarily the choice we wanted to make, yet for our businesses to survive a global pandemic, it was the choice many organisations had to make. And for some team members, remote working has not been as easy or stress-free as they had hoped.

Prior to the covid-19 pandemic – diagnosable mental illness has been at levels in Australia of 1 in 5 people. [ABS, 2007,2013]

This number has risen substantially as this pandemic refuses to be tamed globally.

The magnitude and severity of mental health problems are now at least twice as prevalent as they were in pre-pandemic circumstances. In Australia, the prevalence of clinically significant depressive symptoms is running six times higher than that usually found, with an eightfold increase in suicidal ideation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mental health of people in Australia in the first month of COVID-19 restrictions: a national survey. Fisher et al. Published online: 10 June 2020 in Medical Journal of Australia

In research Inspire Learning Australia conducted recently, the critical skill today's leaders and managers are needing, is the combined ability to be able to identify mental health challenges impacting work performance and then to empathically speak to their team about these challenges, without offending, insulting, shaming or blindsiding those in question.

In many cases, leaders may be having their own issues with high anxiety, depression and substance use.

Yes, this pandemic has shone a spotlight on this skill deficit, which unfortunately in many organisations has been lacking for years.

Australian leaders must address this mental health issue. They have a duty of care to their on-site staff, their remote teams and themselves to do this.

### **Executive Director of Inspire Learning Australia Pty Ltd, Bill Carson shares:**

Over the past three years, one of the programs I have been delivering to major Australian companies has been the two-day Mental Health First Aid certificate training. Of the 1000+ workshop participants, more than 50% have been leaders, managers, and team leaders. What I observed and I have become hugely passionate about - is that I am providing to these managers a critical missing skill. Most managers do not have the ability to ask the question "How are you going?, without the fear of "what do I say if they are not ok?"

The inability to connect with their team members as human beings, who may be going through some difficult problems, is a major challenge for many managers.

### **Some fears that managers deal with are:**

"What if I say the wrong thing?"

"What if I make it worse?"

"What if their personal stuff comes up?"

"I am not a therapist, I don't want to cross the boundaries of what is appropriate"

"What if I don't have the answers?"

"What resources are there to help?"

"It is not my job to talk about these things, and besides, it is none of my business"



## The Motivators and the Barriers

THE MOTIVATORS	THE BARRIERS
<p>What Makes a Leader/Manager – MORE Likely to Provide Support</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 A SENSE OF CARE AND COMPASSION</li> <li>2 ABILITY TO RECOGNIZE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS</li> <li>3 FEELING WE HAVE KNOWLEDGE &amp; SKILLS</li> <li>4 EMOTIONAL RESOURCES</li> <li>5 CLOSENESS OF THE RELATIONSHIP</li> <li>6 LEVEL OF DANGER</li> </ol>	<p>What Makes a Leader/Manager – LESS Likely to Provide Support</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 FEELING IT IS NOT OUR "PLACE"</li> <li>2 FEAR OF REJECTION</li> <li>3 FEAR OF OVERRELIANCE</li> <li>4 FEAR OF BEING OVERBURDENED</li> <li>5 LACK OF CONFIDENCE</li> <li>6 PERCEPTIONS OF PERSON'S MOTIVATION TO CHANGE</li> <li>7 PERCEPTIONS OF IMPACT OF HELPING ON OUR LIVES</li> <li>8 PERCEPTIONS OF SEVERITY OF SYMPTOMS</li> </ol>

“ Developing a Model of Help-Giving Towards People with a Mental Health Problem  
**2015 - Prof. Tony Jorm & Dr Alyssia Rosetto, University of Melbourne** ”

During the workshops, I share one example of my lived experience that in my 15 years of working for various bosses, I never once had a boss who asked, "How's Bill going?"

At one stage, I was the Production Manager of a 250 million dollar manufacturing plant and I had a particularly challenging time when my wife was seriously ill in hospital on several occasions. At the time I was judged for my decreased performance with no consideration for the reasons behind my actions and was consequently sacked by the General Manager. From my own research in the resiliency and mental health field, I know my experience was not unique”.



# What does this inability currently cost a business?

1	The Team Member - they suffer and struggle without getting any guidance and support, which they desperately need ... particularly our remote team workers.
2	The Manager puts up with the underperformance, rather than have the person-centred guiding conversation. Or worse still, by not understanding the situation, they let the person go with no safety net and the situation for the individual worsens.
3	The Team - often will not know what is going on and they will be impacted and confused by underperformance of others.
4	The Organisation is impacted by the sum of all the above impacting on culture, performance, productivity, and profits.
5	The Customers are impacted because the company is impacted.
6	Human Resources departments are stretched to the limit because team member issues seem to increase by perceived insensitive bosses. These managers who cannot or choose not to see what is going on, potentially ignoring the situation, hope it will go away or someone else will deal with it. As a result, the team member's situation escalates both in poor behaviour and performance forcing HR to rescue a situation that could have been handled more effectively.
7	Your team is looking to you for leadership. If you do not have the skill of empathic conversations then you are 'Missing in Action'.
8	You may be having your own challenges in this area. You need someone to have person centred guiding conversation with you. Yet you are expected to lead your team out of the pandemic, and you have no idea how to do that?

Where can you get help for the above challenges you may be facing – reach out for a discussion of your needs by contacting us at

<https://inspirelearning.au/contact-us/>

# What is Mental Health?

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as a state of well-being and happiness in which:

1. A person has positive relationships
2. Every individual realizes his or her own potential
3. Individuals can cope with the normal stresses of life
4. Work productively and fruitfully
5. Can contribute to her or his community.



## What is Mental Illness – as defined by Mental Health First Aid Australia?

A mental illness is a health problem that significantly affects how a person thinks, behaves, and interacts with other people.



There are different types and degrees of mental illnesses. Some examples are:

**Severe Anxiety Disorder** – anxiety over an extended period

**Major Depressive Disorder** – significant low mood that lasts more than two weeks

**Substance Use Disorder** – impacts on a person's functioning – work, relationships, life

**Psychosis** – mental illness with symptoms of delusions and hallucinations

# THE STATISTICS – PRE COVID 19 from Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017-18

**20%**

Of Australians aged 18-65 experience a diagnosable mental illness in any year

**45%**

Of Australians will experience mental illness in their lifetime

**54%**

Don't access treatment

**8 Australians commit suicide every day**  
– 6 men & 2 women



## Anxiety Disorders

Affects 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men

## Depressive Disorders

Affects 1 in 5 women and 1 in 8 men

## Substance use disorders

Are the third most common mental illnesses in Australia

## Feelings of anxiety, stress and boredom have spiked – so too has solidarity

Proportion of Australians experiencing the stated feelings with a high frequency

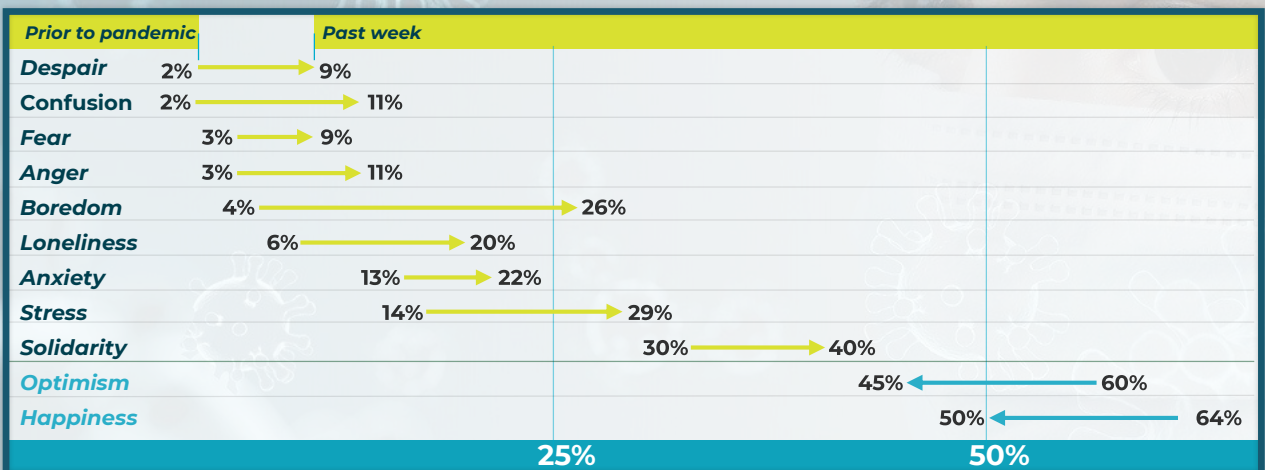


Chart: ABC News Story Lab  
Source: Vox Pop Labs





# What are the psychological and emotional signs of stress?

- Depression or anxiety.
- Anger, irritability, or restlessness.
- Feeling overwhelmed, unmotivated, or unfocused.
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much.
- Racing thoughts or constant worry.
- Problems with your memory or concentration.
- Making bad decisions.

## POSSIBLE EARLY SIGNS

BEHAVIORAL	PHYSICAL
1 Not Getting Things Done	1 Tired All The Time
2 Changes In Behaviour	2 Sick And Run Down
3 Withdrawing From Others	3 Headaches
4 Reduced Participation In Work Activities	4 Persistent/Resistant Muscle Aches And Pains
5 Inability To Concentrate	5 Moving More Slowly Or Appearing Agitated
6 Indecisive	6 Changes In Sleep Patterns
7 Difficulty With Memory	7 Weight Loss Or Gain
8 Loss Of Confidence	8 Dishevelled Appearance
9 Conflict With Team Members/Manager	9 Gastro-intestinal Problems
10 Excessive Fear Or Worry	
11 Increased Errors, Accidents	

# Mental Health and Work Performance

Signs and symptoms that employees are struggling can appear in the work context through:

 Increased lateness / absence	 Low morale	 Lack of cooperation
 Decreased productivity	 Increased accidents / incidents	 Frequent fatigue
 Poor concentration/ memory	 Missed deadlines	 Decreased involvement

**The Big Problem –  
Many Managers don't know how to respond appropriately**

**“Remember, many remote team members working from home can hold it together and fake that they are okay for the length of a Zoom call, but what happens when the Zoom call ends? The fact that you are not seeing them in the office every day, does not mean that they are coping.”**

Managers can be an effective first responder to assist their Team Members before crises happen.

We know 20% of employees struggle with their mental health at some time. Unfortunately, many of those employees fly under the HR radar or became adept at hiding their symptoms, believing their organisation have a low tolerance for mental health issues.

Break a leg, no problems, take a month or two off. Experience anxiety or depression, you will not progress your career here!??

# Who is this for?



HR Managers who are stretched due to staff mental health issues



Managers who need to build their skills to have mental health conversations with their staff



Companies who have remote and working from home team members whose mental and emotional health are being impacted by the pandemic

What if the real problem was the leaders and managers did not know how to have a conversation with their team members about mental health issues?

What if the leaders had never learned the conversation skills and ability to connect with their team members as human beings, who may be going through some difficult challenges in their lives?

## Conversations That Matter

BE BRAVE ENOUGH  
TO START A  
CONVERSATION  
THAT CARES

# How to have Mental Health Conversations Safely

1. You are not the therapist/doctor/counsellor – and you are not expected to be.
2. Take off your manager-problem solver hat. It is understandable as Manager and a caring person that you would want to try to help your team member to solve their problem – but it is not your problem to fix.
3. This is a person-centred guiding conversation. It is a very skilful conversation. You are not trying to solve their problem, but help the team member come to their own awareness, and to explore with the team member where they might get the right help and support for them. That support might be their own self-help strategies, or their doctor, or your EAP [Employee Assistance Program/Provider]. You are empowering the team member to be responsible for their own mental and emotional health.



Task-focused  
Conversations



Person-centred  
Conversations

# What Other Managers Have Experienced

” A very important topic and very relevant to our current situation. Thanks Bill. Well-presented and facilitated. Loved the open discussion and sharing of ideas too

**Sales Manager – Healthcare**

” Listen, listen, listen, don't focus on my 'I' but focus on their YOU. Take my Manager hat off - job not to solve their problem

**Engineering Manager**

” I really enjoyed the breakout groups; it was stimulating conversation and they didn't go for too long. It was a good mix of theory and discussion which I liked. It was also very easy to follow on with the material

**Gov't Dept Manager**



# The Business Case for Proactively Approaching Mental Health in Your Workplace

IMPACT		RESEARCH	SOURCE
1	<b>Early Intervention ROI = 492%</b>	Early intervention (specifically early identification access to quality mental health care) is associated with a 492% ROI (calculated by comparing early intervention and treatment costs with subsequent reduction in absenteeism and improvement work performance).	Whiteford, HA, Sheridan, J, Cleary, CM, & Hilton, MF (2005). The work outcomes research cost-benefit (WORC) project: The return on investment for facilitating help seeking behaviour. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 39(2).
2	<b>Engagement 8 times higher</b>	A global survey study has found that when organisations prioritised employee well-being, engagement increased from 7% to 55%. That is, engagement was 8 times higher in organisations that prioritise well-being.	World Economic Forum. (2010). The wellness imperative: Creating more effective organizations.
3	<b>Mental Illness In Workplace in Australia</b>	In Australia, the 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Well-being estimated that 15% of the working population had a history of major depressive disorder, of these: 21% reported depressive symptoms in the past year and were in treatment, 17% reported depressive symptoms in the past year and were not in treatment, 11% were recovered and in treatment and, 52% were recovered and not in treatment.	LaMontagne A.D., Sanderson K., Cocker F. (2010). Estimating the Economic Benefits of Eliminating Job Strain as a Risk Factor for Depression. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth).

# The Business Case for Proactively Approaching Mental Health in Your Workplace

IMPACT		RESEARCH	SOURCE
4	<b>The Costs to a Business of Untreated Depression = \$9,665 pa</b>	According to an Australian study, on average, every full-time employee with untreated depression costs an organisation \$9,665 per annum.	Hilton, M. (2004). Assessing the financial return on investment of good management strategies and the WORC Project. University of Queensland.
5	<b>15 Weeks off Work</b>	An Australian study found that almost one quarter of the workforce suffer from mild depression, which leads to absenteeism of 50 hours per person per annum. A further 8% experience moderate or severe depression, leading to absenteeism of up to 138 hours per person per annum.	McTernan, W.P., Dollard, M.F., and LaMontagne, A.D. (2013). Depression in the workplace: An economic cost analysis of depression-related productivity loss attributable to job strain and bullying. <i>Work and Stress</i> , 27(4), 321-338.
6	<b>The Impact on Productivity</b>	Without an integrated approach to workplace mental health, efforts will not be embedded in organisational structures and culture, resulting in wasted investments and ad hoc, disconnected initiatives lacking sustainable change.	University of Tasmania. An integrated approach to workplace mental health: Nine priorities for implementation in Australia.

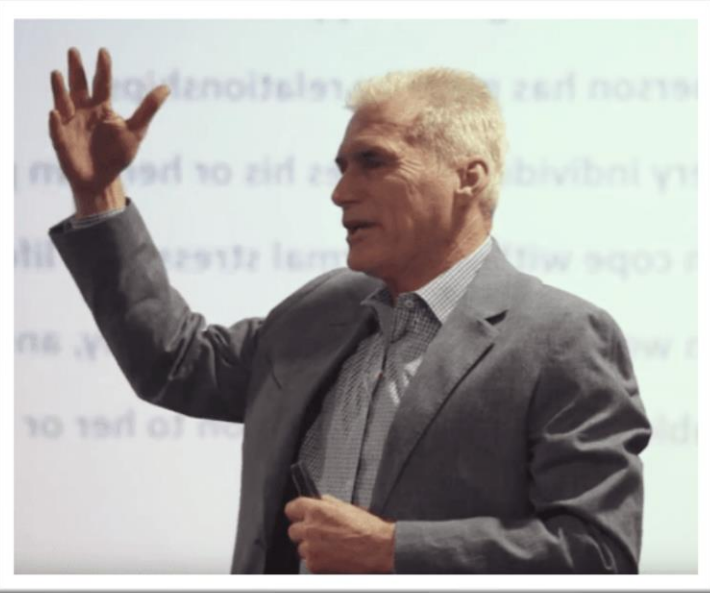
## Like to know more?

If you would like your Leaders and Managers to have the same high quality learning experience as these Managers below then we invite you to visit

<https://inspirelearning.au/contact-us/>

or ring BillCarson on 0425555268

## What People Say About Bill Carson and the Mental Health Conversation Skills for Managers of Remote and In-office Teams.



” Bill was an engaging person and you could really see his passion for the topic on mental health in the workplace.

” I really appreciated the practical approach the presenter took with real life examples.

” A very important topic and very relevant to our current situation. Thanks Bill. Well-presented and facilitated. Loved the open discussion and sharing of ideas too.

” Bill was terrific at drawing people out to add a comment. I thought he handled that extremely well.





## What will you do differently based on your learning from this program?

- Adjust my language from 'I' to asking more questions.
- Focus on meeting the individual where they are at on the day which we connect - and listen more effectively
- Be mindful of how many people may be struggling or just coping - Focus on Empathy
- The one thing I would do differently is when discussing an issue with someone is avoid going into solutions mode and focus more on them, and ask more questions to get them thinking about their own solutions

## What was most valuable about the program?

- The tips and ideas with adjusting behaviour and language.
- Raising the profile of mental health and how to engage appropriately to ensure there is trust and the person feels safe to bring up what is important for them.
- How to connect and communicate with team members that may be struggling.
- Learning some tips on how to engage people in a conversation. I liked that the intention wasn't to turn us into counsellors but rather to get the first conversation going.
- A framework for structuring conversations.

If you would like to explore more, then we invite you to –

1. Call to have a chat – **Bill Carson 0425 555 268**
2. Visit the website - **[www.inspirelearning.au](http://www.inspirelearning.au)**
3. Email - **[bill.carson@inspirelearning.com.au](mailto:bill.carson@inspirelearning.com.au)**

## About the Author



Bill Carson is a passionate Mental Health Advocate who speaks from a lived experience of mental health challenges of depression, anxiety and addictions – for over 30 years.

Bill experienced childhood traumas of major heart surgery at four, the death his father at five, domestic violence during his teens, major illness of his first wife, had over half a million dollars stolen from him in 2002, and bankruptcy from the GFC in 2008 – losing his home and his business – but kept his marriage together with his wonderful wife Lee-Anne.

In 2015-16, Bill healed himself of anxiety, depression, panic attacks and suicidal thoughts and began his journey as a Mental Health Advocate.

His commitment to give back and help others led him firstly to train as a Lifeline Telephone Crisis Supporter and currently volunteers eight hours per month on the Lifeline phones.

He also trained as a Mental Health First Aid Instructor and has since delivered over 80 two-day workshops to Managers and their team members in Retail, Manufacturing, Legal, Healthcare, Childcare and Education.

He has additional qualifications as a Resilience Coach, Emotional & Social Intelligence Coach, Wellbeing Coach and is doing further study in Neuroscience and a Counselling degree.

Bill started his career with a Science degree from Melbourne University in Metallurgy and he has worked for over 20 years in leadership and technical roles and as a Leadership, Sales and Service Skills facilitator and coach.



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# Bill Carson - Biography



Bill Carson brings expertise in Mental Health Safety and Resilience as a Principal Master Instructor of Mental Health First Aid to organisations in Australia across a wide range of industries- Manufacturing, Retail, Legal, Tertiary Education, Healthcare and Community Care, Bill has been a regular volunteer Lifeline Telephone Crisis Supporter for over 6 years.

Bill has over 20 years, experience and expertise in sales, marketing, management, service culture, business development, key account management, facilitation and coaching across a wide range of industries

Bill has a strong background in personal and professional development, including facilitation and coaching gleaned from many different industries from Manufacturing, Professional Services, Banking and Finance, Insurance, ITC, Healthcare and Retail.



## Bill's Expertise:

- Mental Health First Aid - Principal Master Instructor
- Resilience Coaching
- Social and Emotional Intelligence Coaching
- Executive Coaching, Train the Trainer and
- Presentation Skills
- Lifeline Volunteer Telephone Crisis Supporter
- Leadership, Organisational Culture & Values
- Personal Development
- Team Alignment and inter personal skills
- Sales Training, Sales Coaching, Sales Management, Negotiation Skills
- Customer Service Excellence, Call Centres and Service Management

## Bill's Qualifications:

- B.Sc. University of Melbourne
- Diploma of Management - BSB51107
- Accredited Mental Health First Aid Master Instructor
- Accredited Resilience Coach and Social & Emotional Intelligence Coach
- Adult Education and Certification IV - Training and Assessment - TAE 40110
- Certified Coach and Master Trainer in Sales, Leadership and Service
- Executive Coaching - ICCP (Sydney University)

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