



TRANSFORMING EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Laura Sturt



Unstress HEALTH

with Dr Ron Ehrlich



Podcast Transcript

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:00:00] Hello and welcome to Unstress Health. My name is Dr Ron Erlich. I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which I'm recording this podcast, The Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. I believe we have a great deal to learn from our First Nations people about respect, connection and reflection on country and people. We have a great deal to learn.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:00:34] Well, workplace well-being. It's a focus moving forward for me, and I think it's actually a wonderful platform for improving global health. This may seem rather paradoxical, but I do believe that in health care there's a conflict of interest. Good health may make sense, but it doesn't make dollars. And health care is a multi-trillion or billion-dollar, certainly. The pharmaceutical industry is a one-and-a-half trillion-dollar industry. So good health in the workplace, on the other hand, does make a lot of sense and it makes a lot of dollars. There's a great return on investment. I mean, we read a report from Deloitte's in the U.K. just recently which estimated that for every dollar spent or pound spent on workplace wellbeing, there's a £5 or dollar 60 return. So there is definitely a confluence of interest in the workplace. Not only is a great financial return on investment in Australia, it's become a legal obligation in many states for the companies and their leaders and people in leadership positions to ensure the psychological safety, the psychosocial safety of the people that employ with the... they employ. And of course, considering workplace is such an important part of people's lives, at least a third of their lives are spent there. There's a moral obligation for workplaces to ensure that the health of their team is good. And apart from all of that, just improving your health is a great... The best possible return on investment. So today we are talking to Laura Sturt-Addicott who is an organisational psychologist. Laura has worked in organisations in the UK and Australia in large organisations, most recently in one of the big four banks in Australia and has recently taken on a role with Ramsay Health Care as Director of Digital Mindset and Literacy. And she's covering that position globally. So Laura has a great deal

of experience in the work in organisational psychology and the workplace wellbeing, and we talk about a lot of those factors about creating a psychologically safe space for people, about a vision and purpose that people need, and that autonomy, mastery and purpose are three features of our lives in our everyday lives, but in our working lives that are particularly important. Look, it was a great conversation. I hope you enjoy this conversation I had with Laura Sturt-Addicott.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:03:16] Welcome, Laura.

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:03:18] Hi, Ron. Thanks for having me.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:03:19] Laura, you're an organisational psychologist. You've worked in some big corporations. I just wondered if you might share with us what is organisational psychology?

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:03:29] Yeah, it's an interesting one. It's actually got a few different names globally, depending on where you're based. So the different names just means slightly different pathways. So you might also people might have heard of it In terms of industrial organisational psychology, that's very much what it's referred to in America, whereas UK, Europe, organisational psychology, same in Australia, although funnily enough it's not recognised the same way England and Australia. So the pathway is a little bit different. So at this foundation though, what it is, regardless of its name and the pathway, is really thinking about the psychology of people at work. So psychology is a science about human behaviour quite typically is what we're focusing on. And therefore when we put people in an organisational context or in a working context, what is it about those people in that situation that we can really think about? That is organisational psychology. It might be motivation, it might be social psychology. So it's looking at that kind of branch of psychology.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:04:35] Well, I know you shared this wonderful book, Psychological Capital or Psych-Cap and the by-line of it is developing the human competitive edge. Can you share with us what that is and how can it give a company a competitive edge?

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:04:50] Yeah, actually, this is one of the things that really attracted me to organisational psychology is that understanding of not only can we help individuals thrive using organisational psychology and some of the theory, but actually we can make organisations and businesses more successful. So there has been a plethora of research that has come out over the years that indicates different factors really can give that competitive edge. So you might see organisations with great cultures that have more innovation, so they bring more products to market. We've even seen it in research that shows great leaders and therefore creating great cultures can also impact on business performance. So they actually performed better in terms of their returns and position in stock market and competitive, etc... So when we talk about organisational psychology with about the person thriving and the organisation thriving, and that's why that by-line of that book giving that competitive advantage, we really see it play out in multiple ways when we think about really creating the right conditions for success in culture.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:06:03] But that word corporate culture is an interesting one too, isn't it? I mean the... Historically, how has corporate culture addressed health and wellness? Because it's clear that if you get your... Use your psychological or human capital to its max, it's going to benefit everybody. But how have corporations approached that in the past?

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:06:26] Yeah, and this is the thing when we specifically think about wellness and well-being that you asked about there, I think historically things have been done more on the need of a regulatory basis and more what I would say is, is some of the basics. So organisations might have focussed in on things from a health and safety perspective or because they're regulated that they have to or because they've become very common practice, like what's referred to as EAP's, employee assistance programs. So they all great things that are there, but they're almost like the fundamentals. So historically, that's where we've seen a lot of the wellness focusing in on where I think we're seeing things really progress as people are thinking about wellness and much more holistic way and what are the conditions for people to really be set up for success is culture, is leadership and is thinking about wellness quite differently to how it has been perhaps a bit more lip service or kind of foundational in the past.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:07:30] Yeah, because it's interesting, isn't it? It's a bit like school sport. It's something you have to do. But actually, if you do it, it's quite good. I'm guessing that attitude of both management and staff about how sceptical, how they embrace it, I must... That must make a big difference that come... Yeah. I mean, does that come from the top?

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:07:55] Yeah. So this is really an interesting point when we think about culture wellness and is it believed we're starting to look at some of that difference of what said, you know, what is espoused versus the reality of it. And actually we get into some of the differences here from what an organisation sets the culture up to be versus how it's felt. And if the words that are written on the wall, for example, values often get put up on the walls, they're very much the same thing. The purpose statement, the strategy, the structure, the scene components is one aspect. But then if you walk into that organisation and what are people really saying? What are the stories that are being told? What's the language that's being used? If that's very different, then there's a disconnect. So if we say yes, we believe in employee well-being, we value our people. Yeah, every decision that is made is process first, not people first, or a promotion is given to someone who's known to be a bit of a toxic or bullying leader. We're seeing that actually the words that are espoused are not being really lived. And that's why you see a lot of the scepticism that comes out from employees in particular.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:09:12] Have you seen programs that work really? I mean, you must have seen programs that have worked really well. What distinguishes them?

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:09:20] Hmm. I think really, when we're thinking about it, the things that work really well when we're looking at things much more holistically, what doesn't work is when we tend to see things which are done as a bit of a bandaid. As an example, burnout is a huge issue and we've seen more of that during the pandemic. A bit of a kind of Band-Aid version for burnout would be, okay, Ron, you need to be more resilient. So I'm going to give you some resilience training and therefore focus is very much on you as an individual. Whereas actually if we look at that much more holistically, we need to think that a program that's really going to

support burnout, for example, might focus in on what's actually causing the systemic issues of burnout. So is it lack of role clarity? Is it overwork? Is it poor communication from a manager? These are some of those unfair treatment. These are some of the top things that cause burnout rather than just being these people need to be more resilient, for example. So that's when it doesn't work, is when it's just a Band-Aid. When it does work, we look at a holistic solution which is organisational, the leader and the individual.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:10:36] Hmm. It's interesting because, you know, I think the statistic is like 50% of people deal with mental illness in their lifetime. You're talking about it with your boss or manager can be really difficult. What can people do if they suffering from depression or anxiety to make them feel safe?

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:10:55] The way that I've worked with leaders on this is is creating a safe culture and climate. So really we start to thinking about what can a leader do and what kind of environment can they create to make it so that it's comfortable, so people feel comfortable being able to talk about different aspects. We found very early on in the pandemic that one of the sticking points for leaders is they just don't know how to have those conversations. They don't know how to have the more human to human interaction. So really at the foundation is psychological safety. And creating an environment of psychological safety is what can support people to feel more comfortable raising issues and discussing them. I can go into a bit about psychological safety. That's interesting.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:11:40] Yeah. No, no absolutely.

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:11:42] Yeah. So psychological safety, you could think about that is do I feel comfortable challenging the status quo, bringing new ideas up, even challenging my teammates, for example, in a positive way. But you know, positive conflict you can have within the team that's needed and in a psychologically safe environment, you feel comfortable to do that. When it doesn't exist, you end up with more toxic cultures where there's a fear of failure, where there's gossip, where there's negative

competition between teams, etc... So psychological safety, actually Google did a big project, Project Aristotle, and they wanted to understand is this group of left does what is it that really makes the difference between an amazing performing team and just an average one? And they looked at all the data and they cut it every single way that they could because they have heaps of data on their people and it didn't matter if the team was big or small, they couldn't figure out if it was diversity. They just kept looking at it and just couldn't quite figure out what the difference was until they kind of stepped back from all the theory, all the research and data, and then really looked at it from a different lens. And they found that it was when leaders had created this environment of trust. It's another way we can think about psychological safety. And that was the biggest difference. It didn't matter if a team turned up and almost from the outside it would look like they were having a really heated debate and arguing if they spent time socially or not. It was whether they felt this feeling of trust and that psychological safety that made the difference. So working as a leader and with leaders to create that environment of psychological safety is really going to help in terms of making that difference for people feeling comfortable and confident to go and speak to their leader, to speak to the people that they work with about the struggles that they're having, and a team that's got that would discuss about how many of us have been through this or know someone who's been through this and we're human and we need to navigate through that as we navigate through work as well.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:13:57] I mean, it strikes me that my listening to you, because so much of what you say, wow, this makes so much sense, taking the holistic way by the barrier, I mean, the the the drive has to come from the top down, clearly.

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:14:09] Yes.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:14:10] Here. Yeah. And the barrier is actually getting buy in from your CEOs and senior management. I mean, do you spend a great deal of your time actually, you know, consulting them to convince them of the importance of what you're saying?

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:14:27] Yeah, absolutely. You know, really these days, it's it's board level.

Even we see boards, particularly in times of crisis, are getting more involved at that C-suite level than we've seen before. So, yes, if you if you don't have the buy in, you're going to have a massive problem. So I do a lot of work and culture change and culture change has to start from top down. Don't get me wrong, you absolutely need a groundswell change. But if you're trying to convince, you know, people day to day that we want to move towards a different culture, we want to invest in a psychologically safe culture, and you've got leaders who are going into meetings and shouting at each other and not living that it doesn't it just doesn't work. So really getting that true buy in from senior leaders to not only buy into the concept and understand that actually this benefits not just that people, but that business, we also then have to work with those leaders to get them to go on a journey of change. So you've got to convince them two fold. One, that there's a business case and a reason to do it, and two, that they have to do the work themselves. We're probably seeing a lot more understanding from senior leaders today than we did ten years ago, 15 years ago, of the importance of this, getting them to realise that they're part of the issue, that sometimes that needs to be changed. That still depends on the individual. So that's a work in progress.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:15:57] I guess the challenge is because money talks and certainly in business it does. I guess it's it really must be a strong component to make a business case for this. I mean, it's one thing to feel good about what you're doing. How do they measure that? How do they measure, you know, when you come when you approach somebody? Okay, Laura, how are we going to measure the success of this buy-in that I'm doing?

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:16:22] Ron... Well, if you get the perfect answer to this, then you could definitely capitalise on that. So it is incredibly hard to truly, truly show return on investment that doesn't have noise within the system. What do I mean? I mean that we can look at, for example, does a leadership program or does a culture change positively impact business. And with a degree of certainty we can see changes and we can track things, but there's other things that might be happening as well. So one leadership program, does that transform the business? Well, it might also be that at the same time, a new policy was put in, a structure was changed or

something else was happening, or you might do a leadership development program and a global pandemic hits. And it doesn't matter how good your leadership program is, people are going to be going through some challenges of the business, will be going through a challenge. So there's definitely ways to look at it in terms of the impact. And there's been a lot of studies in terms of the kinds of cultures and focussed on well-being and more holistically that does lead to likely to occur for greater innovation, greater profit margins and more products going to market, etc... It's just sometimes hard to get a very, very accurate return on investment measure from one program.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: *[00:17:43]* The last two years, though, have been hugely disruptive to life in general. I think that's what you're saying. But work in particular, what challenges and actually what opportunities have... Has the post-pandemic environment presented organisations?

Laura Sturt-Addicott: *[00:18:00]* I think some of the biggest opportunities that have been referred to are things such as being able to open up the talent, the talent market. So where people work, for example, is less of a barrier, so people are starting to be able to apply for jobs or recruit talent that they perhaps didn't have access to before. So that's an interesting piece that came up. And, you know, a lot has been talked about flexibility, but when we talk about true flexibility, we talk about freedom not only of where location but when and how you do your work. So there's a lot more emphasis on that. And I do think as well, there's genuinely the opportunity for an increased focus on well-being and a kind of a bigger push to understand that the human side as well. So those are probably some of the opportunities and that have probably been most talked about or researched the biggest challenges... There's a few of those. I think the challenges that have come up post-pandemic are really they have been things, for example, of a lot of people are still working online is we've seen a lot of people starting to work in silos and whilst interactions within your own team have typically gone up. What we found and what research was showing was that those interactions between teams, so intra team interaction actually decreased during the pandemic. So in the past, you might have crossed over with different teams connected more that a lot of that dropped quite significantly. That leads to a bit more of that kind of

siloed thinking and mentality, not necessarily thinking about the whole organisation, but a bit more about my patch, my world, which can limit than what you can actually achieve as well. So there's some interesting pieces that we've seen in interactions in organisations, let alone to your point, life heavily disrupted and leaders perhaps having to have conversations that they aren't necessarily equipped to have. They're struggling themselves and having to support people who are struggling. So some of the challenges there have really been how do we help people to help others to be able to have some of those? So again, we're seeing some organisational issues and some more individual team issues as well.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:20:25] Yeah, because. I guess, you know, we've kind of turbocharged the legitimacy of working from home, which was always seen as a soft option in the past, but it's opened up so much free time for people in there not having to commute. Have you seen an improvement in a could one say there's been an improvement in mental health through that?

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:20:53] Well, that I don't have the research on.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:20:55] No, not an impression. What would be your impression?

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:20:57] Yeah, I think I think it's really interesting in that, you know, obviously during when we're in the height of the pandemic, we saw a really negative impact on well-being and mental health. But we also saw people starting to adopt some habits and perhaps getting a bit of a better balance. The elusive word balance, but getting a bit of a better balance and also starting to create some of those habits. The risk is, though, is that, you know, we're starting to see some organisations mandate no working from home and we're seeing also that return and people are just trying to get into a new rhythm and a new set of habits again. If it can be sustained and for those who set those really good habits I think is an increase. And some people just struggled and didn't get on on the on the train or the habit of actually sustaining as well. Even if you've reduced commute time though, and you have more time at home, you have less stress in terms of getting back to see family or to care for someone or to get to that exercise class, then well-being, yes, should go up. But it's again, I

think we're now moving into a phase of getting a new habit, a new routine of this hybrid world of work.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:22:13] Yeah. So, you know, you mentioned this word holistic, which I love, I have to say. But if you were organising the perfect corporate response to this new environment, what would be some of the elements that you would, you know if you had? Laura, this is your... Your baby now, let's do exactly what Laura what you would suggest. What are some of the elements that you would include in a perfect world?

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:22:43] Let's go for striving for excellence rather than perfect. But if we if we're striving to really set an organisation up for success in terms of for their people and for the business, which includes, you know, wellness and includes the pieces that we've been discussing, again would probably take it by layers. So if we think about organisationally and systemically, we would create an organisation with a really clear vision and purpose. So one that is truly bought into and believed by the leaders and the organisation. It would have a purpose that people can really resonate with, they can understand, they can buy into and have that great sense of what the organisation's trying to achieve, the why. It would be something that was very real and felt within the organisation. It would be aligned to the strategy. We would see it in the values. The values would be lived, not just written on the wall or on a... In the old days, a mouse mat. I don't think anybody uses those anymore. But the idea that actually it's is truly embedded in terms of how people behave. So that purpose and that vision linking into the strategy, linking into how we structure the organisation, getting that set up, which of course means we need to have the buy-in. So in this perfect organisation, we would have the buy-in from the board, we'd have it from the... All of the senior leaders from the group executive all the way down. It would be something that they had bought into, something that they really wanted to accomplish. I think we then would probably look at what is that culture that we are creating every day in at the team level. So really thinking then for teams, how do they take that? Some of the organisational pieces, some of the structures and the systems and the purpose and how do they make it real and relatable for that team? How does that team set up so that it is one that has got psychological safety within it? And if it's an

organisation where this hasn't been had, then you know, probably a perfect response would be really supporting leaders in developing some of the capabilities and skills that would set that up.

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:25:00] So thinking about emotional intelligence, psychological safety and those aspects is what I'd be looking at and the right team environment. So at what organisational, I'd work across leaders and I'd work at the team level as well to set teams up for success. And lastly, you know, we'd have to think of course, about at the individual level, and that's everything from, you know, all we bringing the right people into the right roles. And it doesn't matter what level you are in an organisation, but if you think about having the wrong leader at the top of an organisation or anywhere for that matter, that the leader's shadow can really impact on how the organisation or how that team feels and whether it's successful or not. So the right people in the right roles, the right talent would be important and then unlocking the potential of the people in your team, I would be thinking about how do I really help the people in my team thrive? How do I, how do I coach them? How do I develop them? You could think of Daniel Pink's work here around autonomy, mastery and purpose. How do I give them some freedom within their work? So autonomy, How do I mastery? How do I help them to get better and better at what they are doing? And that sense of purpose, which you talked about all the way through in terms of what is that? Why for being here and how do they do it? It's probably not an exhaustive list. We could probably do a whole hour on the perfect response, but that would be some of the that's the key component.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:26:28] Well, I think that's just so honestly, Laura, if I was if this was an interview for a CEO, for any corporation at any level, you would be it. Because I think that just sets out such an important framework for us to be thinking about our working environment. So I know and I will going to I'm going to take you up on that. We're going to do a whole hour on autonomy, mastery and purpose, because.

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:26:51] We can.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:26:52] Because that is whether you're working for a big

organisation or you're a sole employee of your own business. That is a challenge for us all. Laura, thank you so much for today.

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:27:04] Pleasure.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:27:04] Thank you.

Laura Sturt-Addicott: [00:27:05] Thanks, Ron. Cheers.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:27:07] I became interested in workplace wellbeing when I did a course qualification at the Institute of Executive Coaching and Leadership. And I thought it was interesting because when you are executive coach, you're talking about people's goals, the reality of their situation, what the options are, and you try to wrap that all up into a plan moving forward. And I've found that actually focusing also on health coaching was an important aspect of that and because if you're not in good health, it's a lot harder to achieve your goals. But it's so interesting to look at this idea of creating a psychologically safe space and also this idea of being clear as to the vision and purpose of what it is you are actually doing, the why of what we do. So I think that's an interesting thing to reflect on. The other interesting thing that Laura mentioned was the work of Daniel Pink, of focusing on autonomy, mastery and purpose, and whether we're talking about that in a work situation or just in our lives, it's clearly an important thing to reflect on and wonder about where you stand as an individual on that on that basis, how much autonomy do you have in your life? What mastery, what is the purpose of what you do? How good are you, what you do, what you're doing, and what is the purpose of what you're doing? And that dovetails into the work of Martin Seligman the father of well... In the nineties was focussed on happiness and in the 21st century in the noughties, focussed on wellbeing and had a model for wellbeing which was the anagram was PERMA. And the P stands for positive emotions, positive engagement, compassion, showing gratitude, being positive about your situation, how engaged that's the E how engaged are you in what you are doing? The R is an interesting one because it talks about relationships and that dovetails into the longest study done in medicine in health care from the Harvard Medical School on what is the greatest predictor of health and longevity, and turns out that relationships are so the P, E, R part is

relationships, meaning all purpose, as Daniel Pink put it, but meaning what is the meaning of what you do and accomplishment? Are you accomplishing things? Are you being acknowledge for that? And interestingly, Martin Seligman and we've done various programs with Susie Green from the Positivity Institute, which is based on the work of Martin Seligman. Martin Seligman realised that he actually had to add an extra letter and that letter was H standing for health. So here we are coming back to health. And when we're looking in the workplace and at our mindset and we're thinking about do you have a growth mindset, do you see challenges as, as that an opportunity to learn and grow? Or do you have a fear mindset or a threat mindset where you are being very protective and of things as they appear and trying to and don't see things in that positive light? So mindset is one thing, but how you recover on a daily basis is another. And this all dovetails back into what Laura was talking about, which is a holistic approach to workplace well-being, which is exactly what I'm trying to focus on moving forward. Look, you can explore that on our website Unstresshealth.com and we'll be exploring that further in podcasts moving forward. I hope this finds you well, until next time. This is Dr Ron Ehrlich. Be well.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: *[00:31:14]* This podcast provides general information and discussion about medicine, health and related subjects. This content is not intended and should not be construed as medical advice or as a substitute for care by a qualified medical practitioner. If you or any other person has a medical concern, he or she should consult with an appropriately qualified medical practitioner. Guests who speak in this podcast express their own opinions, experiences and conclusions.



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