



CREATING BETTER WORKPLACE

Mike Hagan



Unstress HEALTH

with Dr Ron Ehrlich

Podcast Transcript

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:00:00] Hello and welcome to Unstress. My name is Dr Ron Ehrlich. I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which I am recording this podcast. The Gadigal people of Eora Nation and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. I believe we have so much to learn from our First Nations people about connection and respect, not just for the land on which we live, but the people with which we interact and the planet as a whole.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:00:35] Well, over the last couple of years, I have been increasingly focusing on workplace well-being. I just feel it's a great focus, a great opportunity to impact positively on people's lives in the workplace, but also their families that they live with. So this is an opportunity to reach a lot of people and make a very big difference and interesting developments have occurred legally in Australia. And... Are happening globally but a recognition that perhaps the idea of work-life balance was a very 20th-century concept and perhaps what we all need to be looking at now is a life balance. My guest today is Mike Hagan, who is all about creating better workplaces. Now Mike is a mental health workplace consultant with over 20 years of experiencing... Experience, managing health, safety and well-being and human resources in both public and private sectors. Now, as a senior executive for a very large international company, Mike has implemented holistic mental health and well-being strategies designed to remove the prejudice and stigma associated with mental illness in the workplace, as well as helping organisations implement pragmatic processes and practices that have resulted in a positive commercial outcomes for the businesses along with improved employee engagement and, well... Wellness. And yes, there are holistic thinkers moving into every space, not just health care, not just agriculture, but creating better workplaces as well. And I hope to join those ranks, and I have joined those ranks. As I said, it's been a focus for me as well.

Mike's career path has provided him with a comprehensive overview of the legal, economic and moral factors that are prerequisites today in enabling business leaders to meet their obligations. And then, yes, as you will hear, recent initiatives globally and in

many state governments here in Australia, the legal obligations on corporations and their leaders are very real. This is all to provide a duty of care to their employees whilst not forgetting to look after their own mental health and well-being in the process. Paradoxically, the very people, leaders who are given the responsibility, are themselves often the most stressed and stand to gain the most from any well-being initiatives within the workplace. Throughout all of this, Mike draws on his own diverse career journeys, as well as his own mental health journey, which he shares with us today. As an accomplished and respected coach and mentor. Mike has, over the years, supported many individuals to overcome significant mental health challenges created as a result of their working environments, practices and behaviours. I hope you enjoy this conversation I had with Mike Hagan.

Welcome to the show, Mike. [00:03:41][76.1]

Mike Hagan: [00:03:43] Good day, Ron. How are you?

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:03:44] I'm very well, I'm very well. We're going to be talking about that as well today. I know, you know, workplace wellness has become a huge topic. I mean, it always was, but it's really been elevated to a whole new level. And the whole subject of mental health, in general, is a big one. I mean, I know it's a subject that's not easy for anyone to talk about, and particularly for men. And I speak from personal experience here. I think men have a more difficult time. And I know you're passionate about this on a personal and professional level. Can we talk about that and why it's okay not to be okay?

Mike Hagan: [00:04:20] Of course, Ron, of course. Yeah. So... I've been around mental health, whether I knew it or not, for most of my career. What I mean by that is, so you're probably gathering from this accent already that I'm not originally from Melbourne and Ferntree Gully, and I actually came through the ranks many, many years ago in the nuclear industry in the United Kingdom as the TV... The elevator pitch, which is a very short bio, actually a veteran turner originally, and then got involved with health and safety as a health and safety rep, as many people do through that journey. I then went back and done some study in my sort of mid to late twenties. It's

much easier when you're 15 and 16, I must add. But I went back, and I was trained up in the organisation that I worked for and ended up as the plant manager on a nuclear waste silo. And yeah, there's not many of those about it's funny, you know, around the question I get asked most when I talk about the nuclear industry is, is it really like The Simpsons? Obviously having signed the Official Secrets Act, I can accommodate the lie. But it was during that time my own personal experience from mental health eventuated. I thought I had insomnia and couldn't sleep at night and couldn't put my finger on it at all. And that led to feeling anxious quite a lot of the time and not when you are front and centre on a nuclear plant. It would be a supermarket in the UK equivalent of Bunnings, and I just didn't want to talk about it because I thought it was something wrong. And eventually, I had a colleague who I used to work with. He was very old school. He was also a union representative for many years, and this guy was... He was in the union ranks hard as nails, and he opened up and then told everybody about at work-related stress and what he described as I thought is, this guy being followed me around. He's just describe exactly what I'm feeling. So that's sort of give me an entry point to start a conversation after five years of not talking about it.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: *[00:06:30]* Wow. So you had been... How long had you been working in the industry at that point?

Mike Hagan: *[00:06:35]* Well, I set up there as an apprentice, so a young 16-year-old. And by this point, I'd probably been in the industry for maybe 12, 15 years.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: *[00:06:39]* Wow. And the last five years, it took you five years for that penny to drop that maybe this was more than just not feeling at my best?

Mike Hagan: *[00:06:56]* It did, Ron. It took me five years even to tell my wife about it. It was just I assumed there's something wrong and I would eventually want to see a doctor. And I went to see the doctor and said", Look. So I've been feeling," and he said, I think he said, "So what do you do for a living?" So I explained, and he said, "Yeah. I said, I think it's stress, and I think it's work-related." So being male, you know, I said, Of course, it's not.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: *[00:07:26]* And?

Mike Hagan: [00:07:26] And I laughed, and he laughed, and he said, "You're the first this week, Mike," He said, it's pretty common. He said, well, you know, the things we can do. And he said the first thing I'd recommend is you go and speak to your organisation. You're going to speak to work. So I did, and that was an interesting conversation because, you know, we'll talk a lot about... I'll talk about the narrative around wellbeing. And what I said back then was I want to say my boss said, look, I've, I'll to see a doctor in. He said I've got work-related stress. Well, please don't think I'm damaged goods.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:07:59] Mm-hmm. Well, that's the first... That's the first reaction, isn't it? It is an admitted vulnerability.

Mike Hagan: [00:08:06] It is... I always reflect on that and think, you know, that's how my head was. You're damaged goods If you've got a mental health challenge. You know, it's... you wouldn't sell it with a cruciate ligament. But... And the organisation were fantastic and they clearly had dealt with this a lot and had professionals in place and they were very supportive. And then I started to work through better understand not only mental health but how my behaviours were. I guess it's aspirin and the habits that you form when you keep to yourself for that long. And I went back to doing a lot of learning and reflection and some further qualifications. And the irony was that's when I stepped across into OHS, into health safety. And I went full circle and ended up as a safety manager for the nuclear plant that I used to look after.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:09:03] How long ago are we talking now?

Mike Hagan: [00:09:07] Ah, So I moved to Australia, what, 16 years ago? And prior to that, I was all said and done about 25 years in the nuclear game.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:09:16] Wow. Wow. That gives you... Well, gee. And moving into the OHS as well. We're talking about people here, not just plants, the nuclear plants. And the pressure on people in those plants must be, well, huge.

Mike Hagan: [00:09:33] It's an interesting and much-maligned and much-misunderstood industry, the nuclear industry. So to give you an example, the technology, if you're putting technology around now, I'm 15 years out of the game, so it might have moved a little bit since then. But if you're going to build any safety apparatus from the of radioactivity or contamination, the equipment you use has to have a failure rate of ten to the minus six. So a one in a million failure rate. And you have to have two of them. And the two pieces of kit have to work on different technologies so if it's a failure of a technology type, you've still got this ten to the minus six. So the levels of technical integrity around the systems is extreme. But what about me and you? If we have a Monday or Friday. You know, this still requires a person to press a button and to initiate the process on many occasions and really speak in the human as over. You know, and it's the weakest link. So yeah it's an interesting space. So I actually started working with... On some projects. I had a very enlightened director at the time, well ahead of his time, and he asked me to go to grassroots level and start to talk to people around the some of the softer OHS skills, as it were saying at the time. You know, it was less about machine guarding and more about where people were and how they were travelling and why they behaved in certain ways. So that was the first real project I was involved with. We took it to the horse's mouth because we want to go back to the horse's mouth and ask people how they felt at work, why they do certain things at work. And that was a real interest in the learning curve.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:11:22] It's so interesting, isn't it? Because at the end of the day, we are dealing with individuals, whether we're talking about the CEOs of companies or the cleaners and how they show up to work is a very individual experience.

Mike Hagan: [00:11:41] Yeah, and that I still think we scratch the surface, you know, at least well, having conversations to hear, you know, on and which in Australia. Australia is in my opinion, very far ahead of the curve in terms of the conversations and the level of maturity around mental health. And it does differ culturally from country to country, where it can be an open conversation. But as you correctly said earlier on, men, we're not the... we're not always

an open book and often people doing some great work in that space around men's health to particularly make environments where it's easier for men to go and have conversations. I've never come across the concept of the Men's Shed which have got in Australia, which is a great mental health initiative. So now that the conversation started, it needs to go a lot further, and it needs to become normalised. And the organisations that I've worked in, where I've put in mental health strategies, you know, the usual challenge to the project is what do we or success look like? What are we trying to achieve? And the only thing I would try to achieve is to instil a culture in an organisation where it's a normal conversation to talk about. Your anxiety or your mental health challenge in the same way you would talk about the cruciate ligament that you pull kicking the footy with the kids at the weekend. It's normalising that conversation, really, Ron.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:13:04] It's one of the interesting things. I mean, I've observed as a father, watching my daughters grow up and watching my nephews grow up as well, and having grown up as a boy and man myself, to see how different plays at a very young age and how that prepares us and gives us the vocabulary almost because I know my wife and still to this day will say to me, "What's wrong?" And I'll go "Nothing." And she knows something's wrong. And it actually takes me a day or two for me to articulate in my own head. This is a conversation going on in my own head, even to this day, about what is wrong and I just don't... I think we... I think this Men's Shed... I think we did a program on the man cave, which is addressing that in young teenagers and schoolchildren. But we just don't have that... We're better off talking about the cruciate ligament, aren't we?

Mike Hagan: [00:14:05] Oh, it's a much more comfortable conversation to have, really. And look, as a species, generally, we avoid difficult situations. You know, that's how we've evolved as a species. And now we're asking people to go and have, you know, challenging conversations that it's a really good thing to start the conversation. But, you know, we're not always best-equipping people to close those conversations out, you know, And that's a challenge that's across all gender. But men, particularly, we can be slow to start the conversation and to eventuate for sure.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:14:39] Hmm. It could also explain why our life

expectancy is a little bit shorter than women's, but there could be a few other factors there.

Mike Hagan: [00:14:47] I'll leave that to your medical expertise, Ron. I won't get myself in a world of trouble by...

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:14:53] When you... When you were OHS at this nuclear plant and you were in that for quite a few years, I'm assuming. What was some of the initiatives when you did start that conversation? You know, 15 or 20 years ago, what was some of the initiatives early on that tried to address those? Because it's interesting to see how they may have changed over the years.

Mike Hagan: [00:15:14] I think it's things that we see now as more as a standard practice. And it was about what I always term as genuine consultation. So there's always been, you know, enshrined within or just law forever. That's always been the rights around consultation. But it was really starting the conversation with the people who are, you know, as we say on the coalface, who will they know what happens on night shift? You know, I always talk about culture as three circles. And if I had my whiteboard or I would write all this out where you get... If you picture these three circles intertwined and your culture sits in the middle, and this model applies not only to mental health and to many things. The three circles of influence really it's what I would term as the formal organisation. So whether it's policies, it's process, the things we write down and then there's the second circle really of influence is the informal organisation. So every organisation has got an informal organisation, you know, it's not epitomised by, you know, if you want to get that done, see Frank on the night shift or Betty on afternoon shift, she knows that we're around that. And the third part is the individual. So you got the individual and all the attributes and baggage that we all bring along, Ron. And you know why we're all plumbed in different ways as cultural issues, as behavioural issues, as education. So when you think about us that on Holy Trinity, you know, I think from a business point of view, how much influence have you got over the formal organisation? You've got 100%, you know, you write the policies, you write the procedures, you run the training script, the informal, well the informal only really prospers when the formal structure isn't good. Informal is used to

work around for the things that don't work. So a lot of the initiatives we put in place, it was about, well, tell us what really happens. You know, and I used to look back on some of the IR topics of the, you know, the eighties and the nineties where a threat was will work to rule, not to follow the rules. And that was that...

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:17:20] That was a threat.

Mike Hagan: [00:17:23] And I always used to think, well, it's a bloody nuclear plant. I kind of thought everybody useful in the role, so yeah, you've got your informal organisation, you got your formal organisation then you got the individuals which harm your influence, you got over those. And you know we used to say, well you know, you sleep for a third of the day, you work for a third of the day and hopefully the third of the day after realising that you do something, you enjoy. I don't think it's that simple. I think now, and I think it's commonly acknowledged now, that the workplace is the single biggest influence on most mental health and well-being topics. So I guess, you know, that's a very, very windy answer to your question. We concentrated a lot of initiatives around making sure we didn't need an informal organisation. And we've done that through working with the individuals that knew how things happened. And just, you know, having a long, hard start at the formal processes and procedures. And that's what I spent probably the rest of my career doing, You know, of people that have worked with me will be getting tired of me seeing it, get it down to one page. They want to see big text pitches because if you can't get someone's attention with one page, it's unlikely they're going to read the page too because that's how we are as humans.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:18:41] Interesting to hear you say, though, that the more successful, the better the policy is, the less the informal policy has an influence. And I mean, yeah, and it's also... I'm sure... There was a report just recently coming out of, well I think it's UKG which is a big HR firm, that said 70% of people that was surveyed said that their work manager had more of an influence on their mental health than their own partner or equal to their own partner and more than their doctor or their therapist

Mike Hagan: [00:19:21] Yeah, yeah. I think I've read that report, Ron. And

it's, you know when you think about in the workplace, and I'll generalise a little bit, but you know, when I speak to people the causes of stress and challenges to mental health in the workplace, it's not the flickering light, it's not, you know, the forklifts which make too much noise. And you know, we've got that side of safety all boxed off by and large. It's the behaviours, the encounter, the things that fester. You know, if you're working in an organisation this... I often say you're not going to address mental health with bowls of fruit on a Friday. I've never known anybody felt better for eating a banana. You know, it doesn't work that way. If your biggest concern in the organisation is you actually don't think you've been paid appropriately and you haven't been for a number of years, are you saying people not being appropriately managed when the behaviour hasn't been correct, those things can now wear at a person and can gnaw away at the fabric of an organisation. It doesn't matter how many policies and procedures you have in place if the behaviour is you know, they use the term toxic as it is, you know if it's a toxic organisation that begins and ends with leadership. Now if leadership is strong and authentic and understands the wellness, discussion, and fairness, you know, wellness and fairness are hand-in-hand. If the organisation has their practices, it has people who can be approached and you have a reason conversation with. And look, none of us are right all the time, none are wrong all the time. But if you don't feel you can have an open conversation, especially with the people who determine, you know what you're going to do for now through the rest of your career, potentially, that's a big problem. It's a big problem. So I do believe that. I think if you're fortunate to have somebody who hasn't got your best interests at heart in the workplace, get out. Get out, that's my advice.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:21:16] Yeah, well, but then you... oh, well, we're about to leave the nuclear industry, but I can't help but ask you because we digress here from workplace wellness. But in terms of energy, you have had an inside... You've talked about a one-in-a-million-times-two fail-safe. You know things. I mean, if it hasn't got a bad rep, nuclear energy, is that something we should be exploring and do you feel... What do you feel?

Mike Hagan: [00:21:43] I think it's got a terrible rep. Yeah. And it's a much-maligned industry and it's such an easy industry sector to rally against what the World Health Organisation says

that you are safe for working on a nuclear plant than you are in the CBD.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:22:03] Right. I thought you were... I thought you were going to say coal mine, but that's something we can all relate to the CBD.

Mike Hagan: [00:22:10] And that's down to the pollution really. You know, it's... Over the last 50 years have been over 100 million people have died through the impacts of fossil fuel on the environment. Now, there are certainly challenges around nuclear, but there's the... A climate scientist, James Hansen, and he has put a piece of work together that says that because of the nuclear power plants that have existed and negate the use for further fossil fuel, it's responsible for seven 1.8 million lives over the... Over the history of nuclear industry. That the nuclear industry... This is one of the pivotal things came out of Hollywood, it was the movie *The China Syndrome*, which dealt with there a fictitious plant and a runaway reactor and 21 days after the film was released, Three Mile Island happened in the US, which was an issue with the reactor over the next nine years, was 67 nuclear plant build scrapped in the US because public opinion is strong so far—best piece of Hollywood movies ever had but yeah, so the nuclear industry, you know, the technology today, you know, think about the technology on your wrists, think of all the technology in your car that technology is advanced at the same rates in the nuclear industry. But when people are rally against the nuclear industry they'll show you a picture of an atomic mushroom, which is so far removed from what a nuclear plant actually does. The thought... All the debate now has swung around to for a carbon-neutral future. Nuclear has to be part of that, but it has to be a strategic and a holistic approach. So all I would say to people is go on and read some things about some chap called Michael Shellenberger who was a very anti-nuclear and viral author. I think he was originally in the US, and he's gone back to revisit the topic, and he presents quite an interesting view of where nuclear would sit in a carbon-free future. So when you think about people, say, well, what about the waste? You think about the waste. The waste is often vitrified, so it's enclosed, encased in glass, and it's put into secure bunkers, and it's monitored, and it sits there. Solar panels there is still no end of life. The solar panels still are going to hold lead, cadmium, a lot of heavy metals in there they will be toxic forever. And where does

e-waste go? We tend to send e-waste overseas to countries that have not fantastic regulatory processes. So it's a whole interesting debate. So again, a long answer to a short question, Ron, and I apologise for that.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:24:51] No, no, no, but I think it's good. It's great.

Mike Hagan: [00:24:54] I think the... In terms of it's you only genuinely... No, it's not the only, it's the major clean power source that we have at our disposal at the moment because solar panels and, and wind power, it's not going to power cities, you know, the battery capacities that we have to store all the energy. There was a really interesting piece in it was in Germany in 2016. So they increased the volume of solar panels by 4% in 2016, which resulted in a 3% loss in energy efficiency from the previous year. It just wasn't sunny in Germany that year.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:25:38] Mm-hmm.

Mike Hagan: [00:25:39] You know, I had a similar experience with wind turbines, increase the number of wind turbines by 11%, and the efficiency dropped by 2%. It wasn't that windy in Germany that year. So there's a part for all of that technology and all of that energy. But I think to disregard nuclear as a viable part of a carbon-free new... carbon-free future, I think that I would encourage people to dismiss the current and read some of the current literature around the topic.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:26:09] Yeah, and I imagine building nuclear sites on earthquake zones probably isn't a great part of planning and wouldn't be considered the holistic approach.

Mike Hagan: [00:26:19] But that's, that's correct. And yeah, there's been quite a lot of commentary around that since, you know, Fukushima, obviously. But again, it's down under the human Yeah, it wasn't a piece of software that determined what to build upon it.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:26:32] But coming back to workplace wellness because that's something we're both very interested and passionate about. You then came to Australia, and you stepped

into a role with a company that I think a lot of people are familiar with the name, but I learnt something about the whole company ethos that I was really impressed with, you know. But tell us about your next move, because that's where you've been for most of the time since then, up until a week or two ago.

Mike Hagan: [00:27:02] That's correct. That's correct. So I want the organisation that you're talking about is Bosch, the German company. So I won't speak on their behalf because, as you correctly said, I stepped over a couple of weeks ago from a fantastic organisation that are doing some great things. I imagine what you're talking to is the fact that they're owned by a charitable foundation.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:27:24] Yes.

Mike Hagan: [00:27:24] That's not something that's the that Bosch choose to publish. It's part of the company's constitution, which came down from Robert Bosch, who died in 1943. And Bosch's ethos is invented for life. So all the products, all the services that they provide with a view to improving the quality of life and they're owned by a charitable foundation. The charitable foundation determines by and large where the profits go, and the profits are used through the look of the foundation... Looks after six areas of philanthropy needs to do with internationalism, with education, science, medicine. So I always thought, you know, when you have your most taxing day and the organisation like that, you know, at least, you're working towards a great cause. Yeah, they're a fantastic organisation. I used to say to people it was the second best-kept secret in the world and then people was asking what was the best-kept secret in the world. Clearly, I couldn't tell them, Ron because...

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:28:28] Nicely set up there, Mike. Nicely set up, but I did. But it is. I mean, I was really impressed with that. And, you know, in a time in our history, economically, politically, where shareholders' supremacy seems to trump everything else. And I use that term very advisedly. You know, it trumps everything else shareholders' supremacy to have a company like that. And it doesn't even go out and promote that. I mean, that is just insane. I mean, that must drive their marketing division totally crazy

because it's such a useful thing. I mean, such a great thing.

Mike Hagan: [00:29:05] I used to say the marketing guys would like to put it on a blimp above all the factories. But yes, but that just isn't how it rolls. So yeah, no to a non-publicised values piece that, yeah, makes it a great organisation that it is really.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:29:19] But your, your role there Mike, let's talk about your role there.

Mike Hagan: [00:29:22] So my entry point was actually from an OHS chair so that was a starting point and through a number of changes and a bit of a journey, I ended up as a general manager looking after not only health and safety but HR and the wellness area and all the claims were the claims that used to be termed. And yeah, and it was a real opportunity to work in a corporate environment where you can look at the wellness topic holistically. You know, what I talk about to organisations now about the needs to be a holistic approach. And the holistic approach to me is, you know, it's from how you to retire, it's how you brand yourself. When people read in the LinkedIn ad, you know the wording around there should be a clear indication that wellness is valued in the work environment through to, you know, if you think of the common touch points in an organisation, you'll join, and you'll be inducted and you maybe put it up with somebody for a while, and then they'll be the training courses that you go through, and you get paid to do training courses and wellness and fairness that should be cornerstones of all those conversations. It should be a feature in every interview, whether internal or external, right down to the, you know, you want to hear it in the retirement speeches. And that's what we worked really, really hard on for a holistic strategy. And then and I sort of shared with other organisations that some success. I think the... One of the challenges that is today is because the legislation and the evolving legislation in particular regarding mental health in the workplace, a psychosocial risk as we term it psychosocial factors. It comes from the framework of all OHS legislation. So it's clear, you know, it's an OHS problem so we'll give it to the OHS team. Plus, by the time it gets to an OHS topic, the damage has been done by and large from a wellness point of view; you

know, it really needs to be only the fact, as I mentioned earlier, that if people think... All people know that the in an environment where fairness is valued, that can't have an open conversation, that is much more effective than the bowls of fruit on Friday. And many years ago, I went to an organisation briefly as a consultant for a while. I want to first come to Australia prior to working for Bosch, and I remember going into one organisation, and the general manager proudly told me they have fruit on Fridays.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:31:50] Now you've used the word holistic a few times and I think the idea of, of holistic context, overlying everything that happens within a company, we've explored this theme, obviously holistic, something I'm very passionate about and, and I've spoken to a guy, Allan Savoury is a mentor of mine who talks about holistic management and says overlying every decision that governments, corporations, individuals make should be a holistic context. For example, we're not going to do anything that's bad for your health or the health of the planet. That would be a holistic context. What does holistic mean to you?

Mike Hagan: [00:32:30] Great question. So I'll do what I do and digress a little bit around the answer, but I will, and I will land at some point, Ron. Holistic, all-encompassing all... And I'm not saying, you know that an organisation has to become a commune and, you know, I just spend all our time meditating and doing Zen things. That's not what I'm saying at all. And what I'm putting out there is that wellness is the oil in the engine for an organisation. We'll have an organisation with parts that come into contact with each other and perform certain activities. Without the oil around the engine, it's going to be a fairly short and quick end. So holistic, you know, I used the term earlier from higher to retire on it. It is every touchpoint through the cycle of the employment experience. The one I would focus on mainly who decides on what is the scope of that holistic approach. And it starts with the top. It starts with the senior person in the organisation, and it's quite a challenging conversation in many ways because when you go to an organisation, and you talk about the culture around wellness, you're talking to probably the person who's under the most pressure in the organisation. And you know, I often I've got a bit of a soft spot really around executives because the really, really difficult jobs are really, really stressful jobs.

And you can be talking about, you know, the facts and the figures and what it's like to an organisation. And then not only having to listen to the conversation from, you know, the organisational point of view, in strategic point of view, they could be thinking, "Gee, I'm talking about how I feel, I want to go home," you know, So it's really. And, you know, leadership traditionally, you know, it's a strong position, and you've got to stand up, and you've got to be at the front of the boat, and you've got to point the direction, worst permission to be vulnerable there. So I spent a lot of time. I do executive coaching as well, helping executives just to just give himself a break. You know, and acknowledge that they're also a human, you know, in a significant position. The... You know, the argument around the business case around and the ROI on wellness in the workplace, it's a no-brainer. It's the numbers and I'm happy to talk to the numbers. But, you know, the people that you're asking to make those decisions now, bear in mind that, you know, they have they have Mondays and Fridays as well.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:35:13] Yeah. No. Well, I mean, I think that is one of the barriers that a lot of HR people encounter and it's ironic, really, because, as you say, the managers are often the most stressed of all the leaders. The executives is buying... Leadership buying so... Let's talk about I mean, we're going to get into some of the issues and challenges, but let's go with that, that first one. And that is what is the return on investment. I know you shared with me some things about physical and mental injury and workplace covers, but to share with the listener what is the what is the return on investment?

Mike Hagan: [00:35:52] So. Whenever I'm approaching any topic, I'll always talk about the moral, the legal and the economic aspects. So there's always those three aspects about any business case, depending how you speak to might change the order that you're on. But I want to talk to the economics, to the to the dollar for a moment. And I'm always a little bit uncomfortable doing this because I'll do it to prove a point that there is a return on investment that every organisation should make. But I'm also talking dollars, what I'm sort of about people, you know, significantly impacted. So if you put a market in that one for a moment. So the average cost for a mental health claim in Victoria, state of Victoria, in 2020 was \$200,000. \$200,000. Compare that to a non-psychological claim

non-mental health claim about 96. So what does that 200 actually mean? I've had this conversation with a number of business owners. I said, okay, then. So let's talk about a bit of your earnings before interest and tax. You know, the bit you are left in your pocket when you're finished doing business. How much do you have to actually generate in terms of revenue to get that 200,000 from one claim back? So you've got to have got a healthy, you know, a bit of 20%. You know, you'll run of the mill in revenue because you've had one mental health claim. Oh, it's staggering. You can show me an organisation that can't put a healthy strategy in place for less than 200,000, and they're not doing the right things. You know, I've put strategies in place for less than half of that in very large organisations and I remember speaking to a financial colleague, and it was another company a few years ago, a couple of years ago, and they said, well, as you saw on the profit and loss. What does it show on the ledger? It doesn't. I want to talk about the issue of how much it would cost. Any OHS personnel will tell you about the iceberg and the iceberg what only 11% of the costs are visible. I'm only talking about the cost that you could see, so the cost to industry, you know, the impact to individuals. Hugely significant. But I would say it's a no brainer. The business case, it was it would always be much easier to prove a business case around mental health and, you know, your traditional OHS.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:38:14] Mm-hmm.

Mike Hagan: [00:38:15] Now you can have a latent OHS problem in the machine, and it's there, and it's not good, but nobody's been harmed by it. If you've got a wellness issue, it's impacting your business now. It's impacting your business today to some level.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:38:29] Yes, and you make the point about only 11% being visible, the tip of the iceberg, because there are, I mean, the cost of turning over staff, the cost of absentees, the pressure it puts on others in the workplace that are left behind, it's just a snowballing effect, isn't it?

Mike Hagan: [00:38:46] Absolutely. It's an avalanche. And recruiting has never been harder, you know, And so the aspect on a podcast goes worldwide. But in Australia at the moment, you know, we're enjoying some of the lowest unemployment rates since the mid-seventies. To go out and

actually recruit people and find people is extremely difficult at the moment and extremely costly. So again, apologies for speaking dollars when I'm talking about, you know, people's wellness and pain and suffering. But yeah, think about those numbers.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:39:16] Yes. Well, you mentioned there were three aspects and morally, legally and economically in Australia has... And it was interesting to hear you say we were leading because in certainly in Victoria, in New South Wales and Queensland, Victoria on the eastern seaboard, and I think it's going national there. There's new legislation introduced in October last year in New South Wales at least that put a legal obligation on not just companies but their leaders. Is that right, Mike? The... You know, there's a legal obligation now to manage or mitigate psychosocial risk. Is that... Have I got that right?

Mike Hagan: [00:39:57] I'll put a little bit more colour around that Ron. So different states and territories are in the process of implementing the psychosocial health regulation and what it is. It's a piece of legislation that introduces some of the terminology you would now use and some of the obligations around duty of care, particularly from a psychosocial or a wellness point of view into the legislation that already exists. So all the states and territories apart from Victoria are under the Workplace Health and Safety regulations. Victoria, for reasons that I won't go into, didn't cross over to the laws, and regulations; everybody else did. So Queensland, what all the other states have now put in a version of the psychosocial health regulations which says the duty of care that you had to provide to, to console, to have a safe working place, all the things that we know and love around, OHS, is now an obligation from a wellness point of view, a mental health point of view where Victoria differs. Victoria, as we speak today, I checked last week there isn't a definitive date. They talked about the end of quarter one this year, that the regulations would go live in Victoria. The regulations are going to be different in Victoria there's more obligations on an organisation. So one of the points of difference in Victoria is that for organisations of a certain size, there's an obligation to report to WorkSafe where there has been any complaints around discrimination, sexual harassment or discrimination to make those reports on a six-monthly basis.

So when you think about that, that's quite a game changer. The... You know, you always had a report for fatalities for falls from heights, serious injuries. Now this and what is there is an investigation but something that can cause mental harm and distress. We want to know every six months.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:41:58] Wow.

Mike Hagan: [00:42:00] Victoria have done what they do some time, and they've took a slightly different path. But yeah, and the legislation, there's always been an obligation to look after people's health and wellbeing. This is really a little bit retrospective to say yes, now these terms need to be better defined and under leadership of organisations will be held responsible. So you know what we're talking again about Victoria, where that OHS legislation lives in as criminal legislation. It's not civil legislation, you know, for breaches of health and safety. You know, you're in the same courts as the as the gangsters and the... The people that do terrible things. So the legislative landscape is changing very, very quickly. It's built on by and large and under international standard 45003 so if you need to get some... An early night, an awesome light reading, it's a great standard. And that really builds a very robust framework for what how wellness should be managed in an organisation. It's very, very holistic. It talks about from... You know, the inductions, the trainings, the supervision, etc... And it clearly, as you mentioned, it clearly puts the responsibility with the senior people, the company directors. And then this is... You know, when you think about you should go back 15 years and you talk to a company director. You know, if the forklift hits you Ron, God forbid, you are at fault, it hits me. It's move on. That's it. If I work a 60-hour week for a year and you work a 60-hour for a week, it might just bounce off you, but it might significantly damage my wellbeing. So all of a sudden we've got a duty of care. You know, the legal term, a duty of care. You've got to do what is reasonably practicable. You know, I think we've invented a new language based in FOG, and that was then. Okay. I can understand, you know, the forklift analogy, you know, the fall from height; you're going to land, it's going to be bad. But now we've got a hazard that's not that well defined that... It impacts Mike, but it doesn't impact Ron how do I manage that? How do I manage that? How do I know I've done enough? Another question I'm getting every week. What is it that we need to do? How do we know it's working?

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:44:23] Well, I know in medicine the move is hopefully toward personalised medicine because we are all individuals, and what's stressful to me may not be stressful to you, but it doesn't mean it's not stressful to you. And it's interesting to hear you talk about because internationally that ISO 45003 has certainly set a standard. I... When I became aware of this legislation in New South Wales and I think it's going to be rolled out nationally at the same time. The Grattan Institute just recently released in February of 2023. Now they're a big research organisation for our international listeners, put out a report saying that Australia was sleepwalking into a health care disaster. And so I saw these two things juxtaposed on one another. Here is an admission that government has failed in public health. And on the other hand, I think, you know, in rugby, it's used to be called a hospital pass. You know, you'd pass the ball to somebody else to take the heavy tackle. And this is what actually I can see is happening for organisations. I mean it's a great opportunity and you talk about moral and legal and economic case. Well, the moral case for a third of our lives to be focussed on health and wellness is a pretty compelling argument. I mean, we really have handed corporations a tough gig.

Mike Hagan: [00:45:56] We have, we have. I'll just flashback to something you said then that reminded me of a conversation I had only last week where somebody was putting an argument to me. They said We don't have a health system. We've got a sickness system.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:46:08] Yes, well, this is a common theme on this podcast, Mike.

Mike Hagan: [00:46:12] It's why... We've got a system that is... It's reactive, you know, and there are proactive elements there, by and large, all of which have come in the last 20 years and are far, far outweighed by the reactive aspects of the sickness system that we have. The laws, albeit... the challenge, I guess, that were put in in not just corporates because, you know, there's 42% of Australians work in organisations of less than 50 people. Now that organisations that haven't got big budgets to do things where almost half of the workforce that we have, you know, it's all this, it's not just a corporate topic, and I've talked corporate for a while, but I'm stunned.

But it's I'm talking to small to medium enterprises. I'm speaking to a Chamber of Commerce later this week regarding what kind of small organisation do you know? We don't even have a health and safety first, and what can we do? And there is some fantastic free resources available from... So going back to the legislation, it won't go on national as a piece of legislation, but it will be enacted nationally via territory and there's some excellent information out there that tells you what you need to do. Unfortunately, still, it still needs a bit of decoding. So, you know, as a small business owner that's got a microbrewery or a fruit and veg distributor, it's not an easy read. And that's where the need people to go in and break this down and, you know, not monetarize it, you know, they need to be able to go out and get some short, sharp direction in terms of if you do these things, you can negate these things. And that's actually a piece of... It's a piece of work. And I'm pulling together now, and I'm going back to the horse's mouth and saying, what do you know? And what do you not know? Because the first thing within a covered organisation are John, Paul, George, and Ringo have got a removal firm. You know, what do you know today? What are the problems today that you might have? I'd start in that conversation because until you know what your challenges are, it's very, very difficult to put a solution in place. And again, across such a broad topic that impacts so many individuals out there and it impacts on others. So it's a really, really challenging one for any business or any organisation to manage.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:48:38] Hmm. Again, the talking and getting talking to people, asking how they are, how... Are you okay? This is how we started our conversation. You've now... You know, if I was going to ask you if you were going to design the perfect HR system, you know, what would you do? But you've just found out that the company that you've been head of the HR division has won a global health and safety initiative award. Well, you know, that's a reflection of something being done right. I wondered if you could tell us what it was. I mean, you've obviously outlined some of the things holistically that you've been doing there.

Mike Hagan: [00:49:20] Yeah. Again, I won't talk on Bosch's behalf because I'm no longer employed by them.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:49:25] But generically talking.

Mike Hagan: [00:49:28] We put a strategy in place in Australia and New Zealand, and that's been acknowledged at a global level and ahead of many of the projects that are to look for a project that shows initiative and value add every year. And the announcement hasn't got out, but it may have done very, very well and took out the first place. So, you know, I'm absolutely thrilled for the guys who will now continue to put that strategy in place. And I'll just talk a little bit to the points of difference. The question that you often get when you put in a mental health strategy in place is how do we know it's working? You know, the first question is, what does success look like? What are we trying to achieve, and how do we know it's working? And, you know, if you look at 45003 that suggested measures for improvement, we took the usual, you know, ROI-type KPIs. We could monitor... Monitor progress. But we also took another set of metrics and how many of a senior leadership group attend the wellness events that are scheduled. So most organisations or many organisations, they'll schedule lunchtime events and after-hours events around wellness, whether it be yoga classes or, God forbid, bowls of fruit, but how many of the executives actually show up for those? And that was one of the questions that we got across from a couple of organisations to say, Well, yeah, they're available, but you never see the senior management gone along. Now I don't think I look good in a leotard. I'll put that out there. But the fact that you're present and you participate and then, you know, through your presence in an event, you know you're adding legitimacy to it. No, it's people do what's important to the boss, you know, invariably. And if the boss has shown an interest around that topic, one of the things that we've done as part of the launch was we asked every senior executive to make a home video, 30 seconds. So I said, Look, I just need 30 seconds of your time. Easiest request you're going to get today. I want you to do a video that the first part of the sentence, is I look after my own mental health and well-being by and then fill in the dots. And it was great. It was a lot about people, and I want to get up to an hour at work, but it really opened up a conversation and that went global. I went over to the internal systems about 400 thousand people. I guess we have got to see that. And you've got people being vulnerable, talking about what they do to ensure they've got a balance. You know, I don't believe in work-life balance. I think everything is a life balance. And so

some of the key aspects and the focus were around leadership at a senior level, because until you got the senior buy-in and the day that the team, the team run with it.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:52:25] Fantastic. I could just imagine that that would be a real eye-opener for the whole team. It's interesting, too, because you said that in your culture circle of three things. Individual health is still there, isn't it? And I started with, you know, this doesn't matter whether you're the in... The executive telling us how I look after my health and well-being or whoever in an organisation. That's a really fundamental question which... How does an organisation affect that? What are some of the things you've tried and worked that have been there?

Mike Hagan: [00:53:06] Things that have... You know, I think it's always good to learn from the things you don't get right. And I've worked with organisations where, you know, we run with the You Walk Here, which is a great initiative, a fantastic initiative. But what if someone is not all clear? What if somebody really opens up and says, well, you know, I've got debt issues, and you know, the kids are probably using drugs, and you know, I don't think I'm going to make the mortgage at the end of the month. How do you close the conversation? So I've worked with organisations to back end that conversation, to say, okay, then this is where the help is available, etc., and we put a framework around there on what are the things that blow me away to the point I'm actually trained to be an instructor was a mental health first aid training. That's an Australian thing. You're extremely proud to say that the mental health first aid training, I would say it's the best two days training. I would recommend for anybody because it tells you the unvarnished. This is what mental health is, the unvarnished truth, and it tells you how to start conversations and didn't try to sell you into, you know, Freud or a doctor. But it just helps you get people to the people that can help them. So, yeah, I was blown away with the training. I went and followed up and now deliver mental health first aid training because it's all about the conversation. It's all about the conversation.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:54:32] Yeah. Now, another issue that's pretty big in all industries, a lot of industries, is burnout. You know, it's a topic on many people's minds, whether they know it or

not. They took, you know, like sounds like, you know, from your initial compass... Our initial conversation, you know, it's not always obvious to an individual. How do we define... How do we define burnout?

Mike Hagan: [00:54:56] Burnout, the term gets thrown around quite a lot. You know, "I'm burned out. You know, I'm over this week. I'm just burnout." And burnout is it's actually described by the World Health Organisation as a workplace phenomena. It's not described as a sickness. It's described as a workplace phenomena. And the talk about the talk about emotional exhaustion, a depersonalisation and a lack of sense of personal accomplishment are the three academic triggers that they'll look for. And what does that actually look like when you're having a conversation with someone burnt out, you're not going to get... You're not going to feel better after the long weekend. You're not going to feel better after the week in Byron Bay. You're still going to come back tired? You're still gonna come back fatigued. You find people who were once very, very proactive, will have a very, very nugget... Negative narrative on things. And it's hard to shift, hard to move. So it's the burnout is where too much for too long and you're not getting the chance to recover. You don't get the chance to pull back. So first of all, what's the difference between stress and what's the difference between burnout? The burnout is the long haul, burnout is where it's not peaks and troughs. But that's the best layperson's synopsis I can give around that. But... And it's prolific. It's prolific.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:56:25] Do you have statistics or any idea of how prolific that is or your own personal I mean, you know, it's a...

Mike Hagan: [00:56:34] Tough question, but there's lots of data out there. I always think with this topic; it's hard to put a metric you can hang your hat on because, as we mentioned earlier Ron, we don't like talking about it.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:56:46] Yeah... Yeah. Who knows?

Mike Hagan: [00:56:48] You know, by the time we start picking the statistics, what the back into the equation, all the things you've tried haven't worked. But, burnout, chronic fatigue, you just can't think positively about things. You know, you're often associated with the long hours or big

hours where people just are not even functioning at 60% of the best because they are just tired. Somebody once said to me I knew I was going towards burnout might be because I was waking up tired. And we all know how important, especially I think as we all get a bit older, how important sleep is and...

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [00:57:24] And how do you think what... I know you've talked about this professionally. What... How do we have good ways of managing it? What do you think some strategies for managing burnout are?

Mike Hagan: [00:57:35] I think we've all got to take responsibility for our own health. I think first and foremost, I think it's easy to say, oh, well, you know, it's just the job I've got. It's just the boss I've got. And I've said those things to think of over the years, you know, especially when I look back to the formative years. So for me, you know, the deal set off going to the office half past five, and I go and hit the road. I got out. I'm not a runner, but I live in the Dandenong foothills, so there's lots of hills to get up and down. And I'll do that, and I'll come back, and I'll do 10 minutes meditation and then 10 minutes yoga and stretches and again, don't look good in the leotard. I call it yoga for not bendy people, and that's the start of the day because I'll wake up and I've got work things in my head because that's how I'm wired. But that walk and it, you know, it's not... I think it was a bit of a chore for a while, and now it's... I look forward to it. It's best for a good day. And then in terms of how I've managed my professional life. I try and compartmentalise things. I'll put thresholds around things. And I have for quite a while, I had an alarm that will go off, and I'd go off to 5:00. It went off a little bit later in the evening, but that was the point where I was going to stop doing my thing and be whole Mike and behave in my life. So it really to me, I don't think there's a silver bullet that works for everybody. But for me, it was about a discipline of... And I often say to people, when I'm speaking in gigs, I'll ask people how many people have brushed their teeth that morning? And everybody put their hand up. How many people have meditated this morning? You know, so we do help ourselves. We do look after ourselves. It's going to be important and we've got to understand why and that comes back to the education. So, you know, If I hadn't spoken to a doctor many years ago and then a counsellor back in the UK and learnt one of the things and the behaviour of not get enough sleep on all the things that

I was doing wrong from a work point of view that wasn't good for myself. I thought I was doing a great job for the company, but I wasn't doing a great job for Mike. So it really is getting some perspective and taking some responsibility around looking after yourself and looking after others as well. Because, you know, community is a huge thing. And you know, the solution for wellness in society, is community, is helping each other. You know, it's asking, are you okay genuinely meaning it, you know, asking because certain day is celebrated. You know, it's just a normal conversation. I always challenge people and say, look, when you want to redefine or improve the culture in your organisation, think about the organisation that you want your wife or your son, all your daughter to work in and aspire to that start working towards that because it often gives people a different perspective when you personalise it to say, you know, what would you want for the people that you love?

Dr Ron Ehrlich: *[01:00:38]* Hmm. Gee, Mark, that's a great note for us to finish on. And if people wanting to find you, how... I know you're just moving into a new phase in your career. Tell me... Tell us a little bit about that.

Mike Hagan: *[01:00:51]* So Mike Hagan consulting services, which, oddly enough, looks at holistic solutions to mental health in workplaces. So it's an area that was always part of my portfolio for many years. And it's an area that I just love working in. I've seen the negative impacts that can have on an organisation, on an individual. I've experienced it, and the solutions aren't that hard. You just need to know what you need to apply in which area. You need to understand your own organisation first. So I've actually picked up a couple of clients where I'm working with them now to just do all the material and let's look at the organisation. What's the solution to the narrative that we use? Let's listen to the stories that we tell about ourselves. You know, what do we celebrate? You know, and if were or were telling those platitudes or stories about, you know, good old finance, that the work that 75 hours a week and, you know, isn't it fantastic? No, it's not. And we need to stop talking about that. We need to talk infinitely to fix the hours and the resources first. But we need to be careful about the culture that we, through the formal, the informal and the individuals within the organisation, the culture that we develop. So I'm spending a lot of time around those conversations and also helping organisations adapt to the oncoming I

legislation that you mentioned earlier on as well. So there's a lot to do out there. There's a lot of good that can be done out there, and we need to do it.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [01:02:24] Well, Mike, thank you so much for sharing your knowledge and wisdom with us here today and thank you.

Mike Hagan: [01:02:31] Thank you Ron, much appreciate it.

Dr Ron Ehrlich: [01:02:33] Well, I think, as we outlined there, I guess there are four reasons for companies and their leaders to engage in proactive, positive workplace well-being initiatives. I mean, the return on investment financially is a no-brainer. There was a study done by Gallup about ten years ago, and I'm sure it's even worse today. It was done with over a million people in 140 countries, and they interviewed well; they interviewed millions of people. And what they found was that around 15% of those people were actively engaged in their jobs. About 65 to 70% were indifferent, and the balance were actually actively disengaged or sabotaging their work environment. So that's kind of alarming to think that something like over 80% of people are either indifferent or not engaged in their work. And that, of course, raises all sorts of issues about workload, stresses, stress in the workplace, stress in life, burnout, which we've covered on several occasions recently with Clark Gaither and Sharon Grossman, and of course, the wonderful Susie Green from the Positive Psychology Institute. So workplace well-being is part of life. And so this idea of a work-life balance seems a little bit old hat. Life balance seems to be what we should all be focusing on. And the positives about engaging in this are almost a no-brainer. I mean, as I was about to say, the return on investment financially, I mean, some estimates put it that for every \$1 spent is a \$6 return. I think that's probably conservative. But because these initiatives are not particularly costly, but the impact that they have is huge. So financially there's that considering that at least a third of our lives is spent at work. And again, another poll done recently by the big HR firm UKG, which I referenced in the podcast, said that 70% of people interviewed said that their managers had... As big an impact on their mental health as their own life partners and a bigger impact than either the doctor or their therapist. So leaders are really at the core of this.

And so we have the financial gain of doing something, the moral responsibility of doing something. And now there is a legal obligation to do something. And in Australia, the legislation is being rolled out, certainly on the east coast of Australia, New South Wales in October 2022, followed by Queensland and Victoria. I think the other states will follow. It's all built around an international standard called the ISO 45003, which is being embraced globally. So the recognition that workplace well-being is an excellent opportunity to impact positively on people's lives is very real. It's interesting, too, that the Grattan Institute, which is a major research institute here in Australia, published a report in February 2023, just a few weeks or months ago, saying that Australia was sleepwalking to a health care disaster. And the reason it was weak was because only 2 to 3% of our expenditure is on prevention. And that's a whole story about confusing and contradictory health messages because health and food, and the environment have become commodities. Our health has become a commodity. And while good health may make sense, it doesn't make dollars for the companies that are often behind many of the public health messages that we hear and the evidence-based marketing or medicine that is practised. And this is a story that, for most people, is very easy to miss, but once you hear it, very difficult to ignore. So these initiatives are very positive. And finally, the biggest potential gain, because the paradox is that these very leaders that are being asked to deal with this very real and difficult problem are often the most stressed themselves. So the biggest payback here is not financial, it's not moral, it's not legal. It's in the potential health benefits to the very leaders themselves. So creating a better workplace is something I'm feeling particularly passionate about now and into the future. And talking to someone like Mike Hagan and, of course, have links to Mike's website. Hope this finds you well, until next time. This is Dr Ron Ehrlich. Be Well.

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