



Steering mental health challenges  
into a drive for positive change for  
automotive businesses

## Steering mental health in the right direction

**Steer** is a quick-reference guide which has been co-designed by The Motor Ombudsman – the Ombudsman for the automotive sector, and Ben – the automotive industry charity, to provide a useful toolkit for businesses to help team members in their time of need, and to signpost to a range of resources and support options for those who work, or have worked, in the motor industry.

Mental health struggles can affect anyone at any age, at any stage of life, at any level of job role – it doesn't discriminate. Some people may be more susceptible to mental health issues than others, subject to factors including personal circumstances, life events, their financial situation, physical health, their employer, and their working environment.

**Increased pressures on the mental and physical health of staff due to rising bills and the cost of living, was a primary concern for 49% of vehicle repairers when it came to workforce challenges.**

*Source: Survey by The Motor Ombudsman (November 2024)*

**Stress, lack of sleep and feelings of anxiety are most likely to affect the health and wellbeing of those working in the automotive industry.**

*Source: Ben's Health & Wellbeing survey*



## Broaching the subject of mental health

Everyone has mental health. Mental health refers to an individual's emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. It affects how people think, feel, and behave in both their personal and professional lives, as well as their relationships with others. Mental health, like physical health, varies all the time. One day a person can feel low in mood, and the next they can feel happier, more positive, and satisfied with life.

Looking after the mental health and wellbeing of staff proactively is not only good for the here and now, it can also help them deal with and manage difficult times in the future, building personal resilience.

Proactively addressing and having an environment that promotes openness about mental health challenges is not only an investment in the morale of team members, but is also a key driver to improve productivity, reduce staff turnover, and create a positive and welcoming work environment. This all helps to allow staff to thrive both physically and mentally.

**Poor mental health is estimated to cost employers £51bn per year.**

*Source: Deloitte*



## Fostering a positive working environment

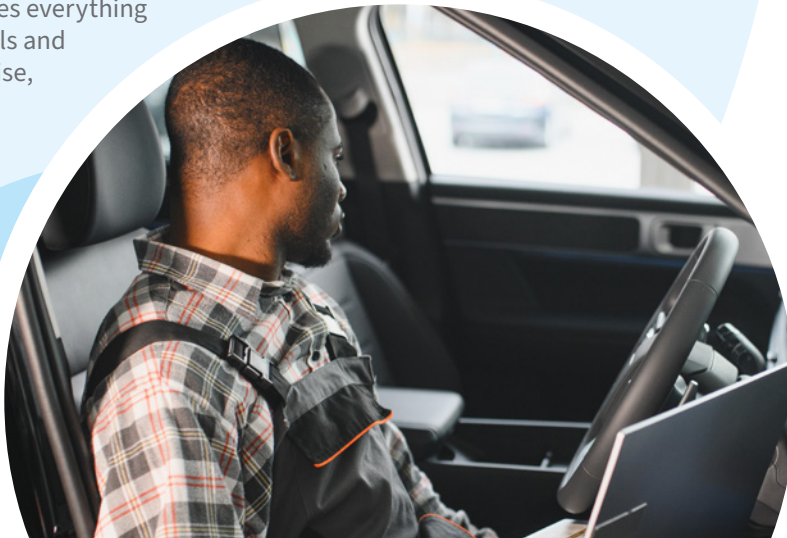
Creating an open and approachable environment which encourages individuals to speak up, in a confidential setting, is vital to promoting change and determining effective avenues of support.

If mental health is seen as a taboo; an ‘unspoken’ subject; a sign of weakness, or as highlighting a possible deficiency in the ability for individuals to do their job, it is undoubtedly a deterrent to seeking much-needed help.

It’s also important to acknowledge the close link between a person’s mental and physical health. By looking after our physical health and wellbeing, this has a positive effect on our mental health, and vice versa. By supporting and actively encouraging employees to take care of and improve their physical health, you’re also supporting their mental health. This includes everything from managing stress levels and health conditions to exercise, nutrition and sleep.

Therefore, by creating a positive working environment which embraces mental health awareness, this highlights the importance of looking after mental health and actively promotes open conversations, thereby encouraging individuals to turn to others when experiencing challenges of their own.

“  
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## First-hand experiences

Hear from a couple of Motor Ombudsman-accredited garages about the importance placed on the subject of mental health, and how Ben has positively supported the businesses and staff members:

**Because of my own experiences with depression and loneliness, I am very aware how difficult it can be for men to talk about mental health with their peers. Fundraising for Ben has been a great conversation starter and has encouraged more discussion at work.**

*Chris Jenks, Service Manager at RC Motors (Shrewsbury, Shropshire)*



**Our team is our most valuable asset, and we pride ourselves on our happy, nurturing, and caring workplace, where the subjects of both mental and physical health, which work in tandem, are talked about freely in a completely non-judgemental and safe environment.**

*Rebecca Pullan, Managing Director at Carmaster Garage (Harrogate, Yorkshire)*





## Ben's annual health and wellbeing survey

Ben has launched an annual health and wellbeing report, revealing results from its most recent survey, which polled over 1,000 automotive workers. The top five health and wellbeing issues identified for automotive workers are:

- **Stress** (57%);
- **Poor sleep** (52%);
- **Anxiety** (44%);
- **Low mood** (41%); and
- **Not taking time out** (to rest or relax) (43%).

Almost all survey respondents were personally affected by a health and wellbeing issue during the previous year. Poor work-life balance has increased by 6%, to 38%, and this issue is most common for those working in showrooms, parts departments, and garages. Long hours, low staffing levels and high workloads are also growing concerns.

The findings also revealed that mental health scores have got worse over the past 12 months and automotive workers cited they believe employers need to do more to support them, with one in nine people personally affected by a lack of support for mental health in the workplace.

The survey results continue to show that automotive workers are more likely to experience issues with work-life balance and mental health, compared to UK counterparts. Furthermore, mental health issues remain the most prominent of the top 10 issues, affecting hundreds of people in the automotive industry.

The survey also revealed that almost one in four automotive workers are considering leaving the industry and, of these people, one in two are considering doing due to poor mental health.

Money worries remain a big problem for automotive workers, with many still impacted by cost-of-living pressures. One in six people reported skipping meals, one in five have experienced issues with debt, and one in four of those considering leaving the industry reported they had financial problems.



**43%**  
Not taking  
time out

**44%**  
Anxiety

**57%**  
Stress

**41%**  
Low mood

**52%**  
Poor sleep

## Mental health struggles

### Common drivers

Mental health struggles encountered by staff can be the result of a single or combination of factors. It is important to be aware that mental health issues may not be obvious, as individuals can be guarded about their situation and afraid to speak out, as it makes them feel vulnerable. In fact, mental health concerns can stem from a whole host of life experiences and issues:

- Stress over a prolonged period of time;
- Financial difficulties and debt;
- Strained and broken relationships with others (e.g. with family members, spouses, partners, friends, and colleagues);
- Discrimination / unfair treatment;

- Harassment / bullying;
- Physical health issues;
- Short or long-term illnesses / conditions;
- High pressure workloads; and
- Bereavement or loss (e.g. personal or financial).

Mental health and physical health are also closely linked and can affect each other. If we feel unwell, our mood can be affected. On the flip side, if we are stressed, our heart beats faster, we tend to breathe more heavily, and it can lead to other physical symptoms, such as neck or back pain, stomach complaints and headaches.

It is important to be aware that these 'drivers' can be felt in different ways from person to person, meaning there is no single solution to most effectively support them.

## Key signs

Even though it may not be immediately clear that a staff member is struggling with their mental health, there may be some visible signs that an individual is feeling the strain, and these can include:

- Prolonged absenteeism;
- Visible fatigue from a lack of sleep;
- A lack of interest in their work, coupled with lower standards of performance, such as frequent errors, and a lack of urgency to meet deadlines;
- Out-of-character behaviour;
- Being reserved in contrast to normally more animated / extrovert;
- Appearing sad or depressed;
- Happy or overly friendly to overcompensate and mask real feelings that they may be struggling;
- Feeling exhausted / burnt out; and
- Snappy, irritated and angry outbursts.

This list, is of course, not exhaustive, as each person is an individual.

## Openness and vulnerability

One of the 'keys' to unlocking progress in this area, is an individual who is open to being helped. Men are known for being less vulnerable with their feelings than women. They can often feel pressure to be seen as a beacon of strength and inclined to show invincibility in front of others. This makes it harder for them to open up about how they are really feeling, often moving into solution mode and locking this in, rather than reaching out for a listening ear or support.

It can also be down to personality that some individuals are less willing to come forward and admit the challenges they face, which puts added pressure on them in the workplace.

Although the topic of mental health is higher up on the news agenda these days, there is still a stigma attached to it - both in and outside of the workplace. A lack of awareness and understanding, coupled with a perceived lack of advice and support, can lead to mental health issues in the workplace being ignored or downplayed, or acknowledged.

“Men are known for being less vulnerable with their feelings than women.”



There is also a generational component to not wanting to open up about mental health struggles, with an attitude of keeping a 'stiff upper lip' and 'just keep going'. Yet, modern society is now a very different place, it is more complicated and there are greater pressures from all walks of life.

There are also inconsistencies regarding support offered to staff and how openly mental health is discussed. Yet, the stigma that still exists isn't just down to employers, it can also be because individuals find it difficult to be open about their challenges due to their own perceptions of mental health. Some may avoid the prospect of professional help, not want to admit there is a problem, or they aren't comfortable speaking about something affecting them.



Mental health is still a difficult topic to talk about – it's a very personal subject. If an individual is visibly showing signs that they are struggling, approaching them in the right way is vital, to avoid any sense of confrontation, or it being viewed as a formal meeting. Steps to avoid this can be to:

- Approach the staff member in a setting where a conversation can't be overheard;
- Position it that you would like to 'check in' with them;
- Ask if they are OK, listen, and let them talk freely;
- If they say they are struggling, outline internal and external support and resources available to get help; and
- Give them the opportunity to take steps in their own time and not be pressured.

“Mental health is still a difficult topic to talk about – it's a very personal subject.”

## Key resources and contacts

### Working with Ben to support your employees

Ben is the automotive industry charity, providing health and wellbeing support for life for those who work, or have worked, in the automotive industry, and for family dependents. For 120 years, Ben has supported the automotive industry's people to overcome some of life's toughest challenges. Ben's vision is of an automotive family that thinks well, feels well, lives well and, in turn, is able to work well.

A key focus for Ben is to work in partnership with automotive industry employers and stakeholders to build a resilient and motivated workforce, as well as champion and promote positive change for automotive workers and the industry as whole.

Ben can work with companies to create a tailored programme of awareness, training and services, to suit individual business needs. Here is an outline of next steps for employers and services...

#### BenLife

By partnering with Ben, employers can improve the health and wellbeing of their workforces, adding value to support greater employee satisfaction, productivity and retention.

BenLife is the only health and wellbeing solution designed exclusively for automotive, helping people to think well, feel well, live well and work well.

BenLife provides confidential health and wellbeing support for automotive workers and their families – for free, forever. Through BenLife, employees have access to 24/7 help and support over the phone, online, in-app and via SMS, WhatsApp or email.

Ben is asking employers to get involved, tell everyone and give, to support their automotive industry family. Visit [www.ben.org.uk/benlife](http://www.ben.org.uk/benlife) or call 01344 892135.

#### Inform your employees about Ben

As an employer, you can spread the word to your employees about Ben and the support the charity offers to automotive people, by providing the following information and contact details.

Ben supports individuals to navigate through life's challenges, empowering them to make positive, lasting change.

Ben works with people to improve their lives by enhancing their health and wellbeing through its free and confidential online self-help, helpline and support services.

Ben provides life-changing support to those facing crisis, as well as helping them prevent crisis. You can chat with Ben online or call their helpline - it's free and confidential.

08081 311 333  
[supportservices@ben.org.uk](mailto:supportservices@ben.org.uk)  
[www.ben.org.uk](http://www.ben.org.uk)

#### Ben Training

Ben delivers effective health and wellbeing training to people working in automotive, supporting everyone from shop floor to top floor to build the self-awareness and good habits that promote resilient mental health, and the skills to help others. Find out more about BenTraining ([www.ben.org.uk/training](http://www.ben.org.uk/training)).

#### Urgent Response Service

Ben's Urgent Response Service provides support to industry partners for the following:

- Critical incident - a critical incident involving loss of life or traumatic event
- Complex cases or situations – information and advice provided to Managers / HR when an employee is presenting with complex issues or situation
- Safeguarding, suicide or self-harm – guidance for Managers / HR when a safeguarding, suicide or self-harm risk has been identified by the employer.

#### Access to SilverCloud

You and your employees have fast-track access to Ben's digital therapeutic platform, SilverCloud, and can get started straight away.

SilverCloud uses an evidence based, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) approach which focuses on the relationship between our thoughts, feelings and behaviours. SilverCloud can also help you develop positive

coping strategies to better deal with life's challenges.

Sign up for FREE, by visiting [www.ben.org.uk/silvercloud](http://www.ben.org.uk/silvercloud) and enter the access code *ben* to get started today.

#### Life coaching

Ben's life coaching is free for everyone who works, or has worked, in the automotive industry. Life coaching gives you the opportunity to set and reach your desired goals. It will help you identify areas that you'd like to change or improve by looking at 'where you are now' and 'where you want to be'. A qualified Life Coaching professional will be your motivator and your mentor – empowering you to stay focused and create the life you want to live. Visit [www.ben.org.uk/lifecoaching](http://www.ben.org.uk/lifecoaching) to find out more.



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Find out more about how Ben works with businesses online:  
**[www.ben.org.uk/business](http://www.ben.org.uk/business)**

Email:  
**[partnerships@ben.org.uk](mailto:partnerships@ben.org.uk)**

Call: **01344 892135**



# Steer

**Steering individuals towards positive change with their mental health, and addressing individual concerns, is about working together, not in isolation. Employers have a huge role to play in supporting the mental health of their employees. By raising awareness about mental health and working together, we can shape a brighter future for automotive people and the industry as a whole.**

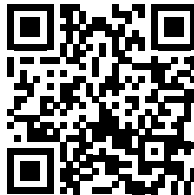
*Rachel Clift, CEO at Ben*



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