

# Keeping mums



When it comes to supporting and recognising the value of ‘working mum’ employees, some employers just don’t seem to get it. Gabriele Wehler is on a mission to help reduce the stress and guilt for working mothers and educate employers on the need to create a more supportive culture. By Glenn Baker.

**Sadly** stress and guilt are what many working mothers have to live, and work, with daily.

Gabriele Wehler knows this only too well. A business and life coach, Wehler recently conducted a three-phase research project on working mothers. It consisted of a survey of 201 working mums, three trial community workshops, followed by a post-workshop survey to investigate the affects the workshops had on the stress and guilt levels in the participants.

Overall, across all three groups, stress dropped by more than 30 percent and guilt by more than 47 percent. Such was the positive feedback from this trial that Wehler has since conducted further workshops.

During these workshops, participants expressed disappointment in their employer’s attitude towards them. “Some employers are not supportive enough regarding flexible hours. Some won’t

employ a return-to-work mother in case she requires time off to attend to a sick child. This is especially so in corporate roles,” says Wehler.

It’s no wonder working mums are stressed and guilt-ridden. It’s all part and parcel of balancing work/family commitments, and this came out during the trial workshops.

“Lack of time is a major issue as they are juggling multiple roles and commitments,” says Wehler. “They always place other people’s needs first in the order of: work, kids, partner, self. So they neglect themselves. They skip lunchtimes and work hard to get the work done in order to leave on time – part-time workers especially are under a lot of pressure.

“They feel that as a part-time worker they are looked upon as having an easy-going, no-pressure life and are made to feel guilty if they come in a little late or leave earlier. However, they often do more work in less time than other people in a full

day job. Essentially they are expected by employers and fellow staff to carry the same workload in less time,” says Wehler.

But it gets worse – many working mums are having serious problems balancing their commitments. Wehler speaks of self-neglect, engaging in negative coping skills such as binge eating and substance abuse – which results in more stress and leads to health and relationship issues at home and work, as well as lack of focus and increased errors at work.

“All this results in further stress and guilt as well as self blame: ‘I am a bad mother, I am a bad wife, and not good enough at work’ – it’s an ongoing negative cycle.”

## Message for employers

Wehler is appealing to employers to offer true ‘flexi’ hours and realistic workloads to part-time working mums. “Insist on lunch breaks, offer wellness programs – for example, my Switch workshop teaches working mothers how to deal with stress and guilt. Offer time management workshops that include work and home-life management.

“Recognise that working mothers are the most valuable staff you can get, provided they are looked after and learn to handle the pressure of juggling multiple commitments. So,

it's worth investing in your staff to increase productivity by creating a supportive culture."

Her advice for working mums is to acknowledge your achievements and celebrate your successes.

"They must nurture themselves more; place themselves on the top of the list in order to fill the [emotional] 'bucket' and to re-energise so they can keep on giving. Otherwise they risk burnout, depression, divorce, and losing their employment."

They also need to become aware of their personality, adds Wehler. "This teaches them who they are and how they operate. Awareness of barriers in their personality trait and advantages of other traits engages them actively in different choices and behaviours to create positive results.

"A disorganised person can learn to be more focused and save time to get things done faster. A step-by-step, detailed thinker can learn to see the big picture and become more creative. The creator with the greatest ideas often

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doesn't know how to put their ideas into action and by learning about the different personality traits can become aware of their handicap, stop in their tracks, engage in active planning and turn that idea or goal into reality."

Wehler's workshop consists of five modules over five weeks – impacting positively on people's emotional, physical and mental wellbeing and affecting their thoughts, choices and actions. Feedback shows they become more balanced and at peace with themselves and others. People relationships improve noticeably; they look after themselves better; enjoy work; take on more responsibility at work; become more focused, efficient

and productive at work and at home; and create a more supportive and empathetic culture at the workplace.

Wehler plans to open the workshop to working fathers as well. "This will multiply efficiency at work, raise awareness between the genders, and understanding and empathy between couples at home – thereby improving interpersonal relationships, lowering stress and increasing happiness, which is mutually beneficial for the employee and organisation."



Gabriele Wehler has a degree in business psychology and is a certified life coach. She is an ICF member.

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