

Let's talk about mental health...

Objective

Having recognised the need to address what many still consider a taboo subject at work and in wider society, global financial services provider Citigroup invited Steps to run a drama based interactive programme designed to enhance their existing initiatives aimed at raising awareness of Mental Health issues in the workplace. As part of one of Citi's well established Diversity Weeks, Steps' interactive session was designed to increase staff confidence in recognising and dealing with the signs of mental illness at work. The session explored some of the often sensitive issues involved and addressed existing gaps between people's perception and reality.

Approach

The research for this programme relied on information shared by Citi's internal stakeholders. Engaging with stakeholder focus groups helped us to uncover some of the key issues and concerns relating to staff mental wellbeing at work. Expertise shared by Citi's partner agencies Bupa and AXA ICAS Wellbeing helped inform the content of the session and ensured it was relevant and credible.

The springboard for this session was a scripted scenario designed to bring some of the key challenges to life. Focusing on a 'return to work' situation, the actor-facilitators enacted a poorly managed conversation during a meeting between a manager and a team member following a second period of absenteeism. The tone of the piece and the behaviours portrayed within it were carefully placed in order to create a non-accusatory and non-judgemental environment for learning. This was further enhanced by the intimate layout of the room, which helped engage the delegates in honest and insightful discussion, allowing them to identify, share and feedback some of their key concerns relating to the effect on the individuals and the risk to business.

The introduction of a third character served to illustrate the knock-on effects that further absenteeism and reasonable adjustments can have on wider team dynamics. Facilitated discussion and hot-seating gave delegates the chance to explore how to manage miscommunication, challenge preconceptions and raise awareness within their teams.

Steps' interactive drama techniques enabled the delegates to discover for themselves how they might confidently and effectively handle what can often seem to be difficult situations. By inviting a wide cross-section of staff from Citi, the diverse make-up of the delegate group not only ensured that the ideas and opinions shared were varied but that staff at all levels were engaged with the learning. Sessions were attended by representatives from Citi's HR department and partner agencies BUPA and AXA ICAS Wellbeing who were on hand to contextualise and validate the issues and to offer specific guidance, including legislative input.

The interactive learning was embedded by a Stop Start Continue exercise. This exercise allowed the delegates to reflect on how to apply the learning on a personal level by evaluating their own behaviour and assumptions. It also helped plant the seeds for sustained confidence in the learning beyond the training session.

A wider support package was made available, including factsheets relating to:

- managing depression;
- recognising the signs of psychological ill health;
- tips on how to maintain positive mental wellbeing;
- where to go and who to contact for further information or support.

Outcomes

Feedback was resoundingly positive and throughout the session there was visible engagement with how the scenarios were presented. Delegates took an active role in successfully exploring the issues - which was a great step forward in fostering a culture of inclusion and open communication.