



**Unleash Your
Organizations Potential:**
The Power Of The 5% Mental Health Pledge.



Foreword

As we navigate the turbulent waters of the modern workplace, a new priority has surfaced that requires our immediate attention – mental health.

It has emerged as a critical factor that influences not only our employees' well-being but also our organisations' overall health. In my role at Cigna Healthcare, I have seen the direct and indirect impact of mental health on work culture, productivity, and, ultimately, business success.

In recent years, the workplace landscape has dramatically shifted. Our annual 360° Well-being Survey illustrates this changing dynamic, revealing high levels of stress among employees and a profound disconnect between what employees expect from their employers and what they receive. Strikingly, more than half of the survey respondents expressed a desire to change jobs – a number that has significantly increased in the past year. These findings underscore a pressing need for action.

This is where The 5% Pledge comes into play.

The pledge represents a call to action for leaders across all sectors to commit 5% of their time to promoting and prioritising mental health within their organisations. This initiative, while seemingly small in commitment, has the potential to yield significant positive impacts. By recognising the importance of mental health and taking actionable steps to address it, we can cultivate an environment where employees feel valued, understood, and supported.

Investing in mental health is not just about mitigating stress or reducing employee turnover, although these are important outcomes. It's about fostering a holistic, supportive environment that recognises the fundamental role of mental health in overall well-being. As we spend a significant portion of our lives at work,

the workplace must be a space that promotes not just physical safety but psychological well-being too.

The workplace often represents their primary social interaction hub, particularly for single employees. A mentally healthy workplace can contribute positively to their overall mental well-being. On the contrary, a toxic work environment can have severe repercussions, driving employees to seek other opportunities, as our survey reveals.

The cost of ignoring mental health in the workplace can lead to a 20-50% increase in employee turnover rates.

Through The 5% Pledge, we encourage leaders to acknowledge this issue and take responsibility for mental health in their organisations. It's about fostering open dialogues, educating employees about mental health, and creating a culture where seeking help is not stigmatised but encouraged.

The launch of The 5% Pledge represents a significant step forward in our journey to prioritise mental health in the workplace. However, it's just the beginning. There is still much work to be done, conversations to be had, and changes to be made.

As leaders, we have a responsibility to our employees, organisations, and ourselves to prioritise mental health. By taking The 5% Pledge, we take a crucial step towards achieving this goal, setting the stage for a healthier, more productive, and overall more fulfilling work environment for all.

Let's make the commitment and take the pledge today.

Jerome Drosch

*CEO Domestic Health and Health Services,
International Health, Cigna Healthcare*

One small step for a leader, one giant leap for an organisation.

Two hours a week, just think about that, at first it doesn't seem much, does it?

But, as Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese philosopher, once wrote, it can be the first step in a journey of a thousand miles for organisations in the United Arab Emirates.

Let's frame it this way: a leader who works a typical 40-hour week (we know) decides to spend five percent of their working week focused on their organisation's mental health. That suddenly becomes a two-hour block in a CEO's diary every week.

This translates into more than 100 hours in a year when the individual leader focuses on the well-being of their organisation. In effect, that single individual leader blocks off more than four working days a year and dedicates it to mental health.

That leader then cascades that practice to nine more of their senior leadership team, and 100 hours becomes 1,000 hours, and the health of the organisation begins to improve exponentially.

That is the power of incremental gains, and that is the power of The 5% Pledge.

In this white paper, we'll explore how, by prioritising mental health, leaders can create a more positive and supportive workplace culture that encourages employee well-being and productivity. We'll dive into the benefits of investing time in mental health,

including increased employee engagement, reduced absenteeism, and improved retention rates.

Additionally, we'll explore practical strategies for integrating mental health initiatives into organisational practices and policies.

We'll feature insights gleaned from the launch of Cigna Healthcare's 5% Pledge in the UAE from experts such as:



Dr Nahida Nayaz Ahmed

Chair of Department, SEHA, and Chair of the Mental Health Task Force with the Department of Health Abu Dhabi



James Michael Lafferty

CEO, Fine Hygiene Holding



Jerome Droesch

CEO for Domestic Health and Health Services, Cigna Healthcare



The discussion was moderated by **Scott Armstrong** Founder of the mental health platform 'mentl'



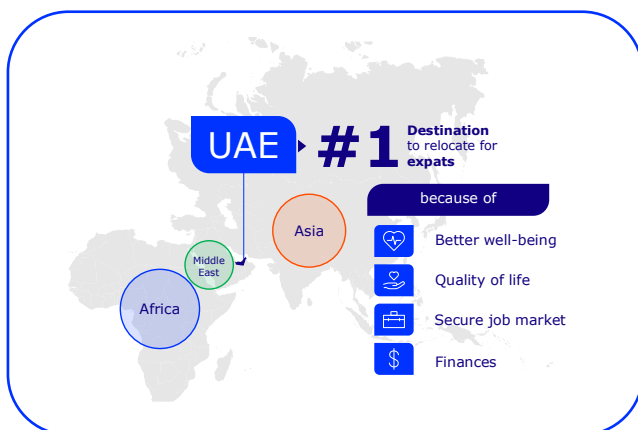
Understanding the Current Landscape

The Cigna 360° Well-Being Survey provides a helicopter view of well-being in the United Arab Emirates to understand individuals' experiences, particularly as the world built back from the impact of the pandemic.

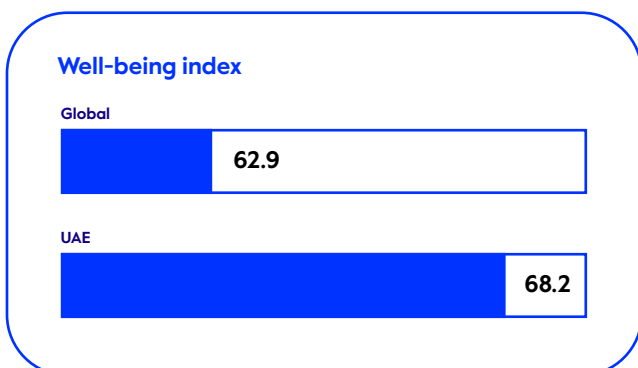
The research painted a mixed picture of progress due to progressive policy changes, new visa regulations, and increased resident confidence in the country's economic growth, but with much still to do.

Top-level findings included:

- The **UAE ranked #1 destination across the Middle East, Africa and Asia to relocate for expats**, reveals Cigna 360° Well-being Survey



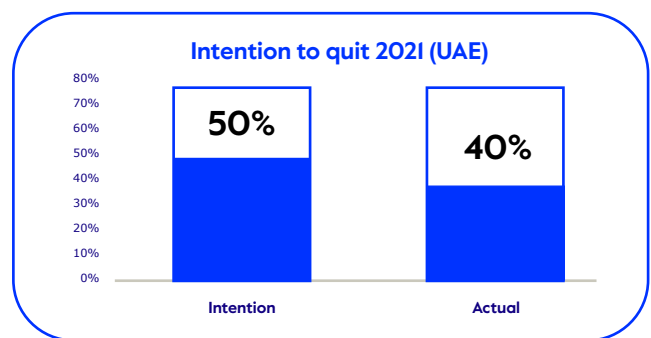
- Better overall well-being and quality of life, secure job market and finances make UAE an attractive destination for expats
- The **UAE's well-being index grew by 2.1 since 2021**, the highest amongst all countries – a reflection of the country's economic growth, proactive visa norms, and improved job opportunities



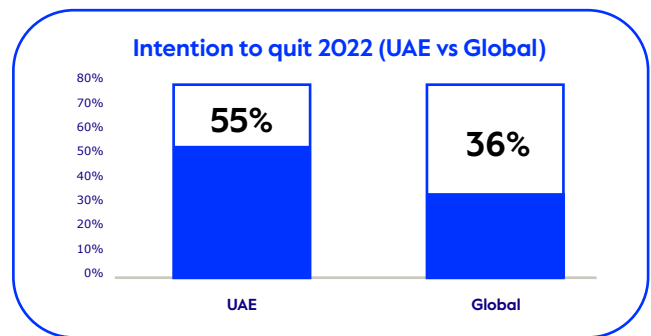
- The **UAE scored 68.2 on the well-being index**, considerably above the global average of 62.9, followed by the USA, UK, China, Spain, and Australia

But, despite world-leading statistics at face value, a deeper dive revealed findings that leaders or organisations much take notice of. These included:

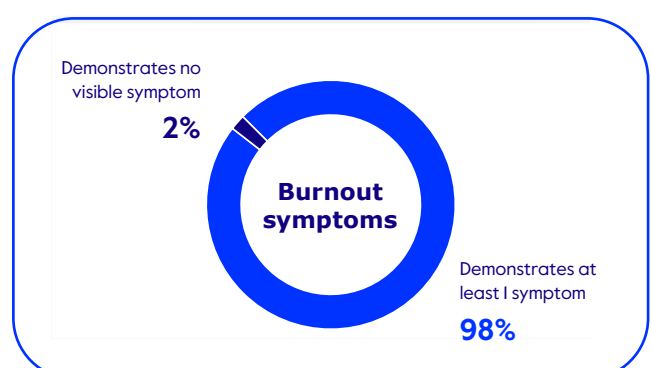
- In 2021, **50 percent of respondents in the UAE said they intended to quit**; this year, it found that 40 percent did, which means that four out of five who said they would walk did so.



- In 2022 that was even higher, with **55 percent saying they are thinking about quitting**, far higher than the global average of 36 percent



- **98 percent of workers in the UAE said they had experienced at least one symptom of burnout**, one of the highest levels in the world



- Working longer had led to an ‘always on’ culture, which saw the UAE far outstrip other key markets when it comes to ‘total stress’ and, more worryingly, ‘unmanageable stress’.

“When we reflect around mental health, it’s becoming a key issue across the world,” said Jerome Drosch, CEO of Domestic Health and Health Services, Cigna Healthcare. “There are many root causes that are creating that kind of situational environment; I think we can see lifestyle-related but also workplace-related issues and challenges that we’re all facing in our life.”

“When you think about it, we spent a decent amount of time dedicated to our work, and that’s important, and if you think about a specific population, such as a single person, it’s even more important. It’s sometimes their only social interaction in their life; when they go back home, they don’t interact with anyone. So, for them, the workplace plays a really important place in their life.”

- Jerome Drosch

“When you look at the UAE and our 360° Well-being Survey, it’s very interesting because you can think about it with two different approaches. On one side, UAE is doing an amazing job; the well-being index is really good, and we are in the top three countries across the world; that’s an amazing job. But on the other side, the flip side of the coin, we have a really high level of stress. And when we reflect on what are the root causes, we believe we’ve seen a disconnect between what people are expecting from their employer and what the employer is providing to the team.”



He continued to dive into more results from the survey, which highlighted not only people’s desire to change jobs, as captured in the statistics, but their changing priorities.

- The survey found that UAE survey respondents led the way with nearly 80 percent ‘Re-evaluating lifestyle, priorities and other changes.’
- With **53.2 percent**, were also the most ‘Happy to take a less paid job, for more time to do other things.’

Changing priorities

Happy to take less paid job



Happy to take less paid job



- And UAE respondents were among the most willing in the world to consider retiring early to enjoy life, even if it meant having less money.

“It means the landscape is changing,” said Jerome Drosch. “People are re-evaluating the way they spend their life. But also, they are stepping back to think about what’s the real purpose in life.”

Returning to that world-leading level of burnout, Dr Nahida Nayaz Ahmed, Chair of the Department, SEHA, and Chair of the Mental Health Task Force with the Department of Health Abu Dhabi, pointed to a lack of accountability among leaders for the emotional well-being of their employees.

“People are not rewarded; they’re not acknowledged. People feel like they bend over their backs and keep providing, and the leaders get away with a bullying attitude.”

“I feel there is no accountability on leaders when they become aggressive. Most of the time, assertiveness is mistaken for being aggressive. And people can be emotionally abusive and get away with it in the workplace. While we talk about harassment and being exploited, we also have to pay attention to emotional exploitation, which often times goes unnoticed.”

For James Michael Lafferty, CEO of Fine Hygiene Holding, a leader with decades of experience in the C-Suite, increasing connectivity fuelled the ‘always on’ culture, with phones, email, WhatsApp and social media reaching out to offices and employees’ home lives.



“No one gets a break,” he said: “We think the laptop and the smartphone are beautiful. I think the opposite. They call to you, and they say, ‘Open me, just for a minute, check me, check the email, please.’ They call to you, and people don’t relax.”



The seasoned CEO also pointed the figure at ever-increasing demands for productivity and profit with ever-decreasing resources. In a brutally honest assessment, the leader who today is a champion

for well-being said: “I’ve done this to my own people; there’s a constant profit pressure, you’re constantly downsizing, and none of the work goes away. So you downsize, and then you tell 20 percent less organisation, ‘You got to still cover everything’. I’ve done this, and shame on me.”

Turning to stress, the CEO said it was impossible to create workplaces with no stress and that, in fact, some level of stress at certain times was a catalyst for growth and success. But ‘how much stress is fair, and how do your people handle it?’ He believed it was leaders’ responsibility to educate their people not only on handling the inevitable stress that exists in high-performing teams but also creating a space where employees could bring their full selves.

The direction of travel

Scott Armstrong, founder of ‘mentl’, turned the discussion to the future landscape, citing current research his organisation had extrapolated from recent Gallup research, which showed that the UAE was losing \$1.175 million per hour due to disengaged

employees. So, with that clock ticking ever upward, what was the expert view for companies?

“Definitely worse,” said Dr Nahida. “I can see a lot of resignation and even absenteeism, lots of people showing up to work, punching in and punching out and not delivering or optimising their full potential, not being invested into the entity itself.”

“There’s cost-effectiveness from a leadership perspective. I think it is more necessary now than ever before that leadership, and all the corporates or entities, address the overall well-being of their employees.”

“If you’re looking into investing time and resources, and efforts towards mental well-being, you are going to see benefits and profits out of it.”

- Dr Nahida Nayaz Ahmed

Staying with the root causes of burnout, Dr Nahida highlighted the need for employees to take breaks, even in committed, passionate teams.

“Sometimes you are so excited about delivering or being involved in so many things that you forget you need to pause. But pausing gives you that moment to accelerate when you come back. You’re going to be so much more productive as compared to keep speeding and losing track of where you’re heading or not being mindful enough of what you’re doing. When you pause, you get that time to connect with yourself, the idea, where you’re heading, and what you need to do.”



“While stress can be good, a pause can be even better.”

- Dr Nahida Nayaz Ahmed

What can leaders do?

“Thinking is also working.” Jerome returned some of the findings in the Well-being Survey, which showed that UAE respondents had some of the highest stress levels in the world, particularly younger respondents with Gen Z struggling more than any other age group.

“I think it’s really important to step back and think about how we can change the culture in the workplace and have a positive impact,” he said.

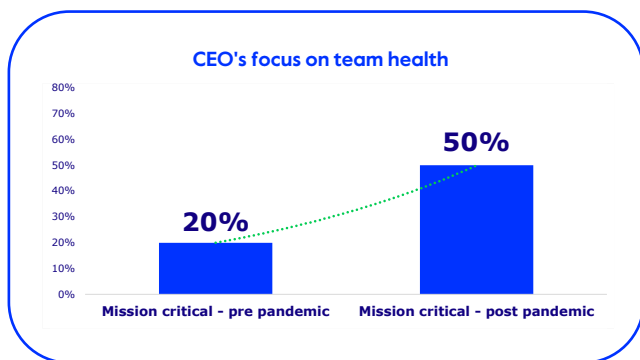
“I think we as CEOs have to be the role model. And that’s where we are pushing for The 5% Pledge. For me, I love the way it is expressed and where it can make a difference.”



“Many people believe that if you have a full agenda with every single minute in meetings, you are doing a great job. I’m not so sure. How many real decisions are we making in a day as a CEO? Not that many. I think the question is more about taking the right decision. And to do that, you need to step back and take time to pause and evaluate all the elements. It’s true at every single level. It’s true at the manager level; it’s true everywhere.

Another statistic in the research was how focused CEOs were on their team’s health.

- Pre-pandemic, roughly 20 percent of CEOs said it’s mission critical.
- Post-pandemic that had changed to 50 percent.



“With The 5% Pledge campaign, what we are advocating for is trying to move from 50 to 100,” said Jerome Drosch. “Now, 100 is probably a dream, but by saying it, the more we can convince you that we have to change the culture, we have to change your

“Ultimately, if you think about a very engaged workforce that finds the right balance in their lives, they will deliver much more than if you have a team suffering the pain and a company with a large turnover.” - Jerome Drosch

environment, collectively. And, if we do, I think we’ll achieve the goal of the country as well as have a happier population in the country.”

The effect of ineffective leadership

“I think if a leader doesn’t get this, they’re not going to survive,” this was the view of James Lafferty. “For talent, there are options that weren’t available 20 or 30 years ago. What I see is when I joined the workforce in the early 1980s, people wanted a job. Nobody wants jobs anymore, they want a vocation, and a vocation is fundamentally different.

“Companies need to manage the physical health, manage mental health, manage the quality of work but also the quality of bosses. The times of a leader saying, ‘I’m always tough, and I have to stand up, and I never make mistakes,’ that’s over.

“When the leader acts like the macho, tough guy, nobody feels they have the freedom to talk about their issues. They say, ‘I have to put up a front’. And so, you have a whole organisation of professional actors; everyone’s acting happy and healthy when they’re not. So for me, it’s about survival. And the companies that don’t do this will not get the talent because every company now has a reputation.”

Beyond the tick box – effective leadership strategies

“Nurture and nourish.” That was the advice from Dr Nahida to leaders inside companies which wanted to flourish.

“I can speak from my experience, having worked with efficient and inspiring leaders. When a leader, a true leader, comes in, they are already looking for a succession plan and grooming your team to be their successor; I think that promotes an environment of wanting to do better. You go in with that mindset



“The leader has to set the example that ‘I’m also human; I also make mistakes. I also sometimes have stressful periods.’ And that enables other people to admit it.”

- James Lafferty

“As leaders, I think our role is more of nurturing and nourishing, giving them the best environment, watching out for where the loopholes are, and having their back and letting them thrive.”

- Jerome Droesch

that I want to make my CEO happy because I could potentially be their successor one day.

“It’s a collective effort that we have to achieve,” said Jerome Droesch. “If we truly want to think about dedicating 5% of our time. It’s everyone in the company; it’s not only me, as a CEO, or HR, who will create that but everyone. It’s not only spending time on work, goals and achievement but creating a different environment where people feel comfortable.”

“It’s not only HR, it’s not only the top manager, but it’s everyone. It’s creating a culture where you have the freedom to speak, and you have the capacity to speak.”

- Jerome Droesch

For James Lafferty, the ability for leaders to be human was now a key strategy. “I think leaders have to step up. What people want to work for now is authenticity, and authentic human beings cry. Authentic human beings have emotions. Authentic human beings have

“In neurobiology, when a person feels safe in an environment, there is a release of oxytocin, which does the opposite of what the very famous cortisol does, which we know to be the stress hormone, which makes us insomniacs and knocks our immunities down. Oxytocin does quite the opposite; it makes us feel connected to each other, feel like we are in a safe place where somebody has our back.”

- Dr Nahida Nayaz Ahmed

empathy. Authentic human beings have a range of emotions. We’re not robotic or one dimensional, just giving orders and acting like the big CEO.”

Dr Nahida built on those sentiments, saying: “It’s not just about comfort; it’s about feeling safe.

Why The 5% Pledge is a must for companies

“In the UAE, every day, you have 4,200 people reaching a GP for a stress-related illness. And more than 160 actually admitted to hospital every single day for stress-related disease,” said Jerome Droesch. “So, it’s time to do something; we cannot wait any more.”

“I think mentally, physically, emotionally in whichever way possible that thriving happens when you have a mentally empowering leader,” said Dr Nahida.

Why The 5% Pledge is a must for companies



The cost of ignoring mental health in the workplace can lead to a 20-50% increase in employee turnover rates.



In a recent survey, more than half of employees considered changing jobs due to stress and workplace-related issues.



Over 50% of employees are willing to accept less income for a job that allows them to allocate more time to their families or passions.

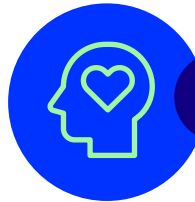
Five key takeaways

Address the Disconnect:

There's a significant disconnect between what employees expect from their employers in terms of mental health support and what is currently being provided. Leaders must work to understand and bridge this gap.

Promoting Balance is Key:

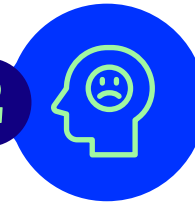
Leaders need to acknowledge the importance of balance in their employees' lives. Encouraging employees to take time to pause and disconnect leads to increased productivity and satisfaction. Leaders themselves should model this behaviour to create a culture that values mental well-being.



1

Mental Health is a Priority:

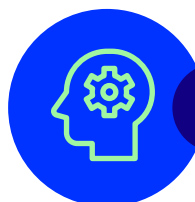
The overall well-being and productivity of an organisation are strongly tied to the mental health of its employees. Prioritising mental health in the workplace should be considered a key responsibility of leadership.



2

The Consequence of Ignoring Mental Health is Dire:

Neglecting mental health issues in the workplace can lead to higher stress levels, increased staff turnover, and reduced productivity. It could also result in employees not utilising their full potential, leading to decreased overall performance.



3



4

The 5% Pledge Matters:

Leaders can make a considerable difference in their organisations by dedicating 5% of their time to promoting mental health. This small commitment can significantly impact the workplace culture and overall organisational health.



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