

WHY AN UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, CAN HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT IN YOUR BUSINESS



Pauline Scott

Operations Director, TIGERS

As the ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) movement grows in Scotland one of our aims is to become an ACE Aware Nation. Throughout this series we will explore the impact that childhood adversity can have on individuals and what would ACE aware/trauma informed practice look like across a variety of sectors, including education, criminal justice, health and third sector. But what about business? Does understanding ACEs, trauma and toxic stress have any relevance to businesses? Why would a business invest both time and finance to understand ACEs and make cultural change, because of their knowledge? That is what TIGERS (Training Initiatives Generating Effective Results Scotland) have been doing.

ACEs is everyone's business. I believe this statement to be true. Why? Businesses need to be profitable to survive. To be profitable we require the right market conditions, the right product and a highly efficient, productive and motivated workforce. Most business leaders would agree that the most important factor in a successful business is the right people. We hear phrases such as, "our biggest asset is our people" and "you don't build a business, you

build people". If we truly mean these words and they are not just part of a marketing strategy, what does the authentic truth look like in a business that is truly people centred and why is ACEs awareness relevant?

We must start by understanding how "our people", are biologically programmed. We need to know that repetition to positive or negative experiences (ACEs) in life, especially during our most formative years, early childhood, will shape both our brains and our bodies. It is those experiences that will impact our ability to stay regulated, build resilience and enable us to move to the cognitive part of our brain that allows us to problem solve, be creative in our thinking and understand new concepts.

If people experience poor emotional wellbeing they are more likely to be stressed, disconnected and easily distracted, which can lead to low levels of productivity. Many of these characteristics have developed in childhood and are created by the environments and relationships we experience. This means that our experiences can change our biology, impacting on our ability to stay calm and focused in times of pressure, short deadlines or adapting strategy to meet unforeseen circumstances.

By providing our team with the knowledge and understanding of their own experiences we provide the insight into what can trigger our stress response system and why we all react in different ways. It allows us to take ownership of our own development needs and gives greater understanding to our physiological responses to build resilience in the workplace. It allows leaders to understand that our staff are unique individuals and that when we support their emotional needs we can help them to achieve their best performance for themselves and the business.

This development of self-awareness, in conjunction with strategies for self-regulation, have been highly effective within TIGERS. We have created and invested in a staff wellness programme that focuses on physical, nutritional and relational wellbeing. Twice a week we undertake whole company wellness sessions that vary from walking and running to tennis and yoga. This supports

the regulation of our bodies and brains and allows us to refocus on ourselves before we go home to spend time with our families. We have piloted an 8-week Mindfulness course, that we plan to roll out across our whole business. Mindfulness allows us to train our minds to be more focused, to gain clarity, have the space to be creative and to feel connected. All have benefits back to our business aims. We have monthly film afternoons where we view a short film, TED talk or documentary that is relevant to our professional and/or personal development and we hold discussions afterwards to hear the views of our team. This type of session creates more platforms for our team to connect, share their views and have debate through differing opinions. Our wellness programme has been designed to promote connection, self-awareness and trusting relationships. Our culture of trust creates a willingness, by our team, to challenge themselves, take risks and out with their comfort zone, with the knowledge they will be fully supported, regardless of the outcome.

At TIGERS, our knowledge of ACEs and understanding of human development has led to a focus on staff wellbeing. It is creating a significant impact on the relationships that our team have both, internally and externally. We are experiencing high levels of productivity, financial sustainability and business growth. There are direct benefits to our business and staff by prioritising emotional wellbeing which also has the power to ripple through our families, communities and entire society.

