A **Leapers** Little Guide

Why mental health at work matters for the self-employed.

What is the most valuable resource in your business?

Time? Clients? Projects? Your laptop?
The Internet? Money? Biscuits?
Your work?

Nope, it's you.

Without you, your business doesn't exist.

If you're not able to work, your business
is not working.

So looking after your own wellbeing
when self-employed needs to a critical
part of your business plan.

Not just something when you've got time
or when you want to treat yourself.

The long to-do list…

When you're self-employed, generally you're a team of one. And with that comes many responsibilities.

Doing the work, finding new work, chasing invoices, marketing, sales, admin, accounting - and then keeping on top of all of the other things you've going on your life too.

It's not surprising that taking time to look after yourself can often get deprioritised or fall off the to-do list. There's always something else that's more important or more urgent.

Or, more commonly, you might not even be actively thinking about your own mental health at work because it isn't something you'd worried about before.

We all have mental health.

1 in 4 people will be affected by mental health challenges at some point within a year - but if you've never experienced poor mental health, **you might not even know symptoms to look out for, how to manage your own stress levels**, what causes you worry or concern, or recognise that often many small things can add up to take their toll on your wellbeing.

There are things which we are in control of (like our own working habits and attitudes), but there are also lots of things we aren't in control of which impact our mental health (like how our clients behave or global pandemics).

You might not even think about these things as 'mental health', I've heard people say "I'm too busy running the business to worry about my mental health": not being busy enough, chasing payments, frustration around tax changes, a client going quiet, not feeling you can take holiday, setting your day rate - **they don't seem like mental health issues, but they all have an influence on your mental health.**

And if they become too much, when you are struggling, you may not have a team-mate you can chat to, there's no supportive boss, and even turning to friends and family isn't always the right option if they don't understand the reality of self-employment ("but you can take as much time off as you want - why don't you just take the day off?").

Good Days…

We're not trying to paint a negative picture of self-employment, or put anyone off the lifestyle. **The reality is self-employment is full of highs, lows and lots of middle bits**. There are great days, there are bad days, and there are plenty of average days.

On the whole, **the self-employed report averagely better mental health than employees**, as often we have more control over our work, more freedom, autonomy and get to work on projects which are meaningful and rewarding, we can design our days to suit how we work best, and it gives us time to balance and integrate our lives with work in a more harmonious way.

and Bad Days...

But at the same time, for those bad days, where things aren't working as well as they could be, when you aren't in control of the situation or not sure how to cope with the challenges that your job is throwing at you - if there isn't a support structure in place for you, it can be hard, really hard.

For some, stress, anxiety and worry can get in the way of doing work, which means poorer mental health has a direct impact on your business and profitability - which can create even more stress. And sustained stress or poor mental health can lead to further complications and mental illness, or prevent you from working all together.

As you know, there's no sick pay when you're self-employed - so **making sure you're proactively thinking about your own mental health at work**, putting things in place to build a support network and build resilience for the good and bad times, for today and tomorrow, needs to be a critical part of building your business.

Invest in you

In the same way you put money aside for taxes, spend time on invoicing, go looking for new work, or getting your website built - putting aside time to invest in your own mental health at work is an important part of running a successful business, and because it's unlikely you have an HR department or line manager to make sure you're coping, you need to put those things in place yourself.

Fortunately, just because you're working for yourself, doesn't mean you have to do it by yourself.

There are increasing numbers of wonderfully supportive community groups, resources, tools and content on the topic of mental health at work, and mental health in self-employment.

And it doesn't need to take a huge amount of your time - **just 15 minutes a week to reflect upon how you're doing can help immensely.**

We might not be working together, but we can collectively support each other when working for ourselves. Even if you're doing great right now, talking about how you're feeling, sharing your experiences, supporting others and making it okay to ask for help is the way we can together be a team for people without a team.

Even just asking someone "how are you?" and listening to their answer, can be the difference in someone's day.

We're here to help

Our aim, as a project, is to **help people actively think about their own mental health at work when self-employed**, provide useful signposting and resources towards understanding what influences your mental health at work (positively and negatively), and to build yourself a way of working well which includes a strong support network, healthy habits and positive working relationships with others.

If there was just one thing we would want to do, it would be to **encourage every single individual within the 5m+ self-employed community in the UK, to take a moment to think about the importance of their own mental health at work**, and take steps towards making it an essential part of their business plan.
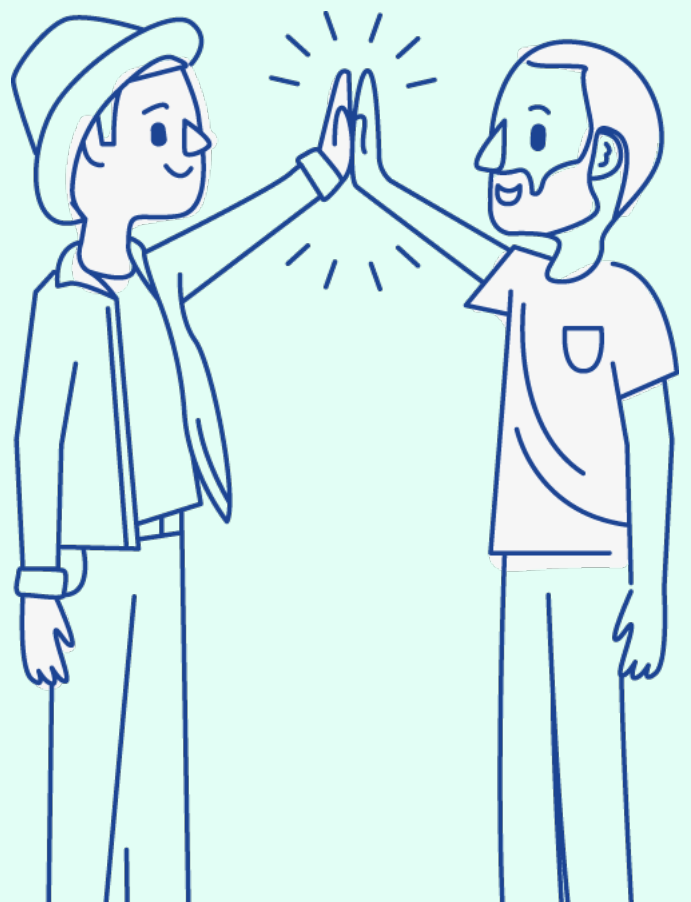
Just take 15...

The first step for anyone is to take 15 minutes for yourself right now, take a deep breath, and remind yourself that you're the most valuable asset to your business.

After that first deep breath, if there are things you want to start doing to reflect upon how you work, and put things in place to work well, we're here to help too.

With resources, guides, a supportive community and just somewhere to look for help - **Leapers** can be part of your support network.

But for today,
take that breath,
take care of you,
and remember to work well.

Leapers supports the mental health of the self-employed.

We're a peer-support community, curate and create things that help, and help businesses work well with freelancers.

Free, non-judgemental, and always here - we're the team for people without a team.

www.leapers.co

About the Author

Matthew Knight is a community host at Leapers, and advocate for the mental health of the self-employed. Based in London, Matthew is a father of two, and drinks an inordinate amount of coffee.

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