



Why financial wellness belongs in the workplace

Missing out on money skills can be tough on employees, and costs UK and Irish businesses billions every year. Employers taking on the responsibility to support this is crucial. Starting the conversation at work can turn things around for everyone.

What is financial wellness?

When you think of 'wellness', you probably think of physical or mental wellbeing. 'Financial wellness' is similar: it's how we measure financial health. If you were to list your attitudes to saving and spending or how you feel about your personal finances, you'd be describing your financial wellness.

Just as with other kinds of wellbeing, we all vary when it comes to financial health. Some people enjoy regularly working on their money skills, while others feel intimidated or unsure how to start. What research shows, however, is that everyone benefits from a positive relationship with their money.

What being financially fit looks like

There are several ways to measure financial wellness:

- Knowing roughly how much you have in your bank account without looking
- Be actively saving for future money goals, such as retirement or a holiday
- Having a pot of money to fall back on in emergencies
- Know your options about taking on or clearing personal debt
- Understanding the best banking products and deals
- Confidence about getting financial information or advice, and knowing who to ask for help.

Being financially fit isn't about being wealthy, just as being in good physical shape isn't just about the number on the weighing scales. The difference between well paid and wellness lies in being in control of your personal finances, rather than

feeling under the thumb of debt and worry. For employers, giving access to money skills, tools and advice can help their staff move towards achieving all of the above.

Financial wellness is good for business

Good financial health is empowering. It can help someone to clear debts which have been hanging over them, or give another person the means to achieve a life-long dream. For someone else, it could be a burst of confidence or release of stress that they carry into the rest of their personal and professional life.

In other words, financial wellness gives everyone the chance to make the most of the money they have. For employers, personal success means professional success. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos describes it as a circle: "If I am happy at home, I come into the office with tremendous energy ... And if I am happy at work, I come home with tremendous energy." (Business Insider)

Companies of all sizes, meanwhile, can appreciate the effects of stress in the workplace:

- Low mental health and physical illnesses (both of which can put even more pressure on finances or family life)
- People who struggle with money problems may feel less in control of their career or future opportunities, making it harder to feel motivated or satisfied
- A study by MetLife revealed that more than a third of employees lose focus at work because of money worries
- Research from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development has found that 1 in 4 employees feels less productive at work because of financial pressures.
- Avoidable absences or higher turnover cost businesses in extra recruitment and training, plus lost revenue or investment in staff.

There are few things which put people under as much pressure as money worries do. By supporting financial wellness, employers can help make

workers – and the workplace – more resilient, confident and happier.

Supporting financial wellness at work

We talk about money a lot more than we used to, at least online: many websites and social media accounts focus entirely on sharing financial tips, information and consumer warnings. But that doesn't mean we're any more comfortable with money talk in real life, or that everyone is included in digital conversations.

What can you as an employer do to encourage sharing information and concerns? This could be an internal process, such as a lunchtime workshop or money clinic. Or you may want to invite an external speaker or arrange access to a financial advisor. Either way, it's about promoting an open culture where it's OK (and even rewarding) to talk about money skills.

Automatic enrolment means employers must now support their staff to save for retirement. While that's hugely valuable, it doesn't necessarily equip

people to make good decisions about spending and saving. Access to information or financial products through your employee benefits programme helps bridge the gap: savings products, consumer discounts, mortgage advice or budgeting tools, for instance.

This approach to financial fitness is like a circle. It helps employees assess their wellbeing and choose their own short- and long-term money goals. It then gives them the information and tools to move towards their goals.

Just like physical fitness, gaining confidence with money encourages us to keep developing and assessing our goals.

Choosing the right tools —

What's right for your workplace depends on your people:

- Younger staff might value guidance about student debt, while others might prefer advice about mortgages or retirement plans
- Digital tools – such as employment benefits or information they can access online or by app – will suit some more than face-to-face meetings (and vice versa)
- For those struggling with debt or other money worries, counselling or personal support can be a useful addition, but may not be attractive to those who feel confident with money.

Building financial wellness in the workplace is about investigating what employees want, as well as a sense of which goals and tools will empower them

within the business. This is where the outline of good financial health above will help: it's a roadmap that any business can benefit from.



Content developed in conjunction
with The Money Charity

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