



IPA President's Reception 2024

Thursday 17 January, 44 Belgrave Square

Good evening, friends. Good evening. So anyone who's seen my manifesto or heard me talk about my agenda for the IPA presidency will know that it's all about people and that mental health and wellbeing are central to that thing I've been banging on about for quite a long time.

And people often ask me why I'm so passionate about mental health and wellbeing at work. And the honest answer is because I struggle with anxiety that drives me to have terrible insomnia at night, and that's very closely linked to stress from work. And I imagine that I'm probably not the only one. So, I feel it's important to normalise it and talk about it now.

Mental health is discussed a lot these days, actually a lot more than it ever has been before, and I think that's a really good thing. But it's the term mental health issue. It's a bit of a catch all for lots of things these days and it's used in a blanket way and as a result of that, it can be conflated with things like stress, for example. Which we all have to deal with, frankly. It can be conflated with much more serious mental health problems and as a result of that, sometimes, leaders don't necessarily take it as seriously as they might do, so this is what I wanted to bring it to front and centre of our industry and my agenda. And I've been lucky because I've had great training and I've had really good support to help me understand the difference between a hard day at work and a proper mental health issue like neurosis or psychosis or other things like that. And I've also had support to help me find my own resilience. And we all have resilience inside us, but it's quite difficult to locate for us and a lot of the time. And I've been really lucky to have that and I want everybody to have that now.

As I've said before, in the ad industry, our people aren't just our greatest asset. They're literally all we have. We don't manufacture anything. We don't have lorries. We don't have factories. We just have our people. Attracting and retaining talent these days, it's



becoming harder and harder in our industry. It's a genuine challenge for us. It's something that we really need to think about and make health and wellbeing a key component of that now.

People spend on average 90,000 hours of their lives at work, and we know from the Harvard Business Review that the happiest employees are generally the most productive employees. But I think that sometimes we lose sight of this. Now I love this industry, as I'm sure all of you do as well. And I want it to be the industry with the happiest, happiest employees. That's my biggest ambition for this industry and at the same time I run GroupM and it's not lost on me that we have to grow our businesses and we have to make money. Having a job like that sometimes means having to make difficult decisions, and those difficult decisions impact our people. And therefore, I feel conflicted with that sometimes and actually that's even more reason to look after and support our people's mental health and wellbeing.

Now, according to some data that came out today that was commissioned by the IPA, 78% of our employees in our industry say that our workplaces should be taking more responsibility for supporting their mental health and wellbeing. So, my ambition isn't just to put focus on this and shine a light on. It's really to prompt us into action. So that's why I'm delighted that today really marks a milestone in my ambition for having the happiest employees in our industry, and we're going to be launching two industry wide programs today, which I'm really excited about. And they're actually my ideas and I never present my ideas to anybody. So, it's really exciting and I hope they're good.

The first one is what we're calling Adland's Wellbeing Lab and the second one is called the People First Promise. So let me explain to you what those are, starting with the Wellbeing Lab. Sometimes, as leaders, we launch wellbeing initiatives that feel like really good initiatives, and we think to ourselves "job done". And the reality is, I've launched initiatives that have had no lasting impact at all, and I've also launched some that have, and I think we need to be honest about that.



I think there's loads of brilliant work done across the industry, media owner side, creative agency side, media owned, media agency side, all across clients. Good work. But I think sometimes we compete with each other to be better at looking after our people and that's something that I just don't really want to see in the industry. I want us to unify around surfacing all the best stuff and for me what's really key is identifying the stuff that genuinely works, and there's evidence that it works, and really embedding it into the everyday workings of our organisations.

The Adland Wellbeing Lab surfaces the best-in-class training, advice and general resources for helping us support our people's wellbeing and mental health. And all the resources are categorized under one of three things: empower, support, and prevent.

"Empower" is relating to the individual and actually really empowering and educating them to find their own resilience and to really understand their own mental health.

"Support" is about what the business can do. Their duty of care to their people, particularly those struggling with genuine mental health problems.

"Prevent" is arguably the most important and is all about preventing toxic workplace cultures. It's about relating to senior leaders, about accountability, and involvement to ensure that we've got reliable checks and action plans in place, and they're constantly being looked at and checked out.

All individuals in our industry, all agencies and all leaders can access the resources featured on the lab, and we're going to be hosting workshops throughout the year to showcase some of the best-in-class examples out there that we can really share with each other. The lab is readily accessible. It's up now. It's on the website, you can see it's very clearly signposted, so you can go and have a look at it tonight or tomorrow and see all the different resources. And I really hope you agree it's a really great job the guys have done, an amazing job Leila and the team have done. I've thrown them loads of different companies and people to talk to and they've met all of them and they've



sourced all the best stuff and they've really done a brilliant editorial job of it. This is going to be continually updated and added to and I'm very confident that's going to be a really useful resource for everyone long beyond my presidency. So that's the Wellbeing Lab.

The second thing is the People First Promise. Many leaders and agencies, as I said before, are doing excellent work in this space, right? But good intentions can fall by the wayside when we have economic pressures on our shoulders. And those are the times, arguably, when you most need them. This can erode staff trust. And as we've seen in the NABS All Ears report, the gap between companies' policies around these things and what they're actually putting into practice is becoming a chasm. Particularly under times of economic pressure. It's really important that we close that gap together and that's what the People First Promise is all about.

What I'm looking for is for every leader who runs a business in our industry – it doesn't have to be an agency; it can be any type of business in our industry - demonstrates their commitment to their people's wellbeing and mental health. By signing up their agency or their business to that People First Promise. This will involve providing evidence of activity that they're doing to support their people's wellbeing. After successful assessment by the IPA, they will qualify for what I believe will be a highly sought after award, which is the People First Promise Badge of honour and it will demonstrate their duty of care to their employees. I think it will also attract potential new employees into their businesses. I think if you're in an agency hopefully it will attract clients to work with you as well because clients are taking this stuff really seriously.

Those receiving the badge will be invited to share their learnings with the industry at a series of lab days that are going to be happening over the summer. And I'll be sending out an e-mail to member agency leaders, but we'll make it really clear in social as well how to sign up to the People First Promise.



Now, I promise you it's not going to be a long, arduous application process. I know everybody's already very busy, but it is going to be something, because there's no point doing it if it's not so. So, we want to do it, you know, properly.

So that's it. Two things. Adland's Wellbeing Lab and the People First Promise. I hope you like those ideas; I want our industry to be trailblazers in this in this space. I want us to be really known for how we look after our staff and our people and I want us to be better than any other industry in the world, particularly better than the other industries that we're competing with for talent. It's really important we come together and do this. I mean, literally, I asked my wife. This does actually keep me up at night, this stuff. So, I hope that everyone will make good use of the lab and the leaders will sign up to the promise.

Before I close, I do want to say I'm having a good time being IPA President. I'm really enjoying it. I've been doing it for nine months and it's just so much more. I don't know. It's just great. I really enjoy it and we've seen lots of really good things this year. So, the Step into Adland TikTok campaign drove loads of applicants to member agencies, we killed our targets massively successful, so I'm really pleased with that. I interviewed a lot of agency employees as part of this government funded program, which was about driving diverse talent into our industry, and I was really blown away by how passionate and proud the agency employees were about the jobs they do. And it was just like, you know, you have conversations with young people, and you take yourself out of the stressful lives that we all have and actually listen to young talent who are quite fresh in the industry, and they love it and it's really refreshing.

I spoke to BBC News about my IPA agenda. And we had the most successful Advertising Unlocked day as well, where agencies all around the country open their doors to teenagers to give them a feel for what it's like to work in an agency. They get given briefs, and they respond to those briefs. And I went to The&Partnership and listened to some responses to briefs from a school in Walthamstow. And they came up with some really good ideas, but what was really pleasing was that some of these kids



had never heard of our industry when they'd arrived in the morning and at the end of the day, they wanted to work at The&Partnership.

And then this year we've got lots of People First initiatives coming. I'm not going to list them all, I promise. But we've got the IPA iList. Winners will be announced at the Talent Conference on 24 April. I'm going to be giving out the President's Prize at the Effectiveness Awards, which is for campaigns that reach underrepresented audiences. And there's going to be lots, lots more as well. So, it's going to be a really busy year. I really hope it's going to be a pivotal year where we all look back on it and say this was the year where we really put the health of our people first.

So, on that final note, I raise my glass and wish you all a happy and mentally healthy new year. Thank you. Carry on.

Josh Krichefski, IPA President