

A Guide to Support Young Employees

About Us

Global Future is a think tank dedicated to using psychology to provide fearless and original insight into the challenges facing our times. We aim to guide leaders – from businesses to politics, arts and civil society – to ask bigger, deeper questions about how we can best serve our communities.

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The Authors



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The Crisis of Wellbeing

Young people today are facing a crisis of wellbeing. With our recent report, 'Nothing About Us Without Us'¹ – we draw attention to the crisis. With these guides we hope to implement action.

According to the YouGov survey we commissioned with 16–24-year-olds across Great Britain, nearly a third (34%) report feeling dissatisfied with their lives. More than half (59%) experience periods of poor wellbeing 'sometimes' 'often' or 'all of the time'.

Poor wellbeing in adolescence is a strong predictor for poor wellbeing later in life – so there is a clear need for early intervention, for proactive solutions that prioritise young people's mental, emotional and social health.

We believe these solutions should be designed from the bottom-up and put young people's voices at the centre. Keeping this in mind, our guides draw directly from the insights of our report, offering a practical tool for young people to pursue happier, more fulfilling lives.

The business case for action

Businesses are well-placed to tackle this crisis- they are the next point of contact for most young people, after school, college and perhaps university. Businesses are increasingly recognising the importance of wellbeing, not only as a moral imperative but as a business necessity.

If society continues to fail its young people, businesses will continue to grapple with the consequences of poor mental health. According to a global study², 98% of Gen Z workers are dealing with symptoms of burnout. Additionally, where one in three young people are reporting³ symptoms of a mental disorder, and one in

twenty⁴ working age people are economically inactive due to ill health, it's clear businesses cannot afford to ignore the wellbeing problem.

Further, the business case⁵ for investing in wellbeing is clear: companies that prioritise the mental and emotional health of their employees tend to see improved retention, greater engagement and higher efficiency. A recent study⁶ showed that **for every \$1 spent on mental health programs, employers receive a return of \$4 in improved productivity and reduced absenteeism**. Investment in young people pays off.

1. <https://globalfuturefoundation.com/reports/nothing-about-us-without-us/>

2. <https://www.cigna.com.hk/iwov-resources/docs/Cigna-360-Global-Well-being-Survey.PDF>

3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-68399392>

4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-68534537>

5. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2024/07/30/the-business-case-for-mental-health-investing-in-employee-well-being/>

6. <https://unitedgmh.org/app/uploads/2024/06/UnitedGMH-The-Return-on-the-Individual-2019.pdf>

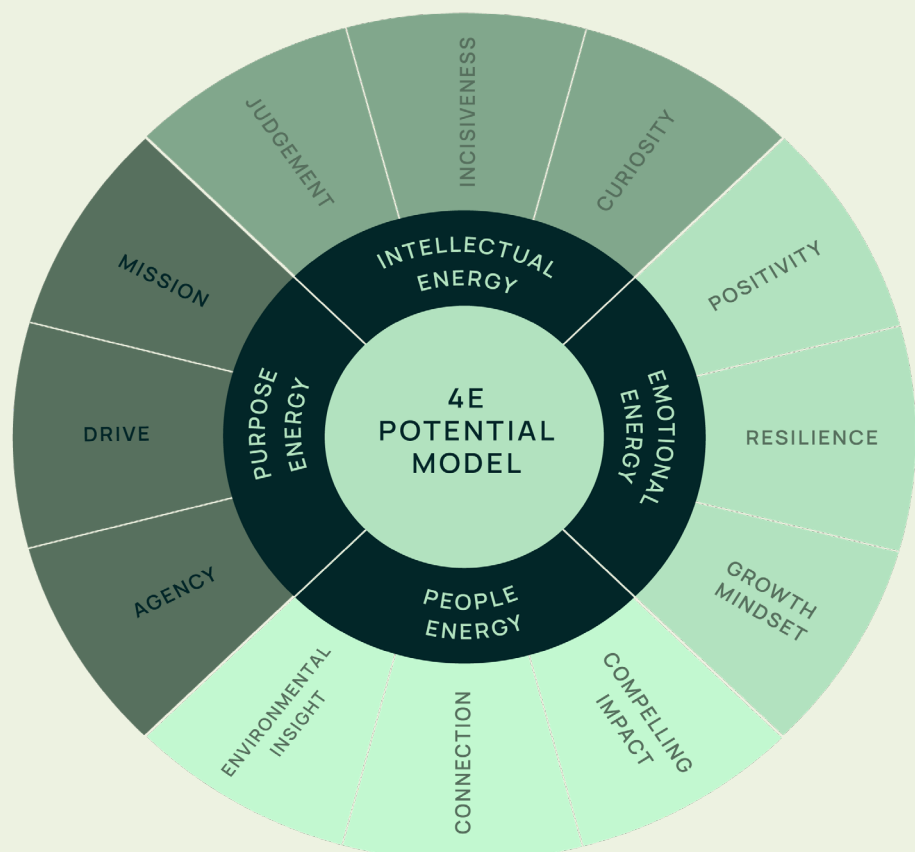
The Four Energies Model

Progress on wellbeing requires action both at the individual and institutional level. With this in mind, we have created two guides to be used in conjunction - one that presents a framework for businesses to foster a culture of wellbeing, and one which offers guidance to young people.

In both practical guides, we draw from the 'Four Energies' model, which was created by expert psychologists in our sister consultancy. Built off the back of thousands of interviews and years of experience working with some of the most successful FTSE 100 businesses - this model highlights the core energies and characteristics common to people who live holistically successful lives. Here, our work is led by the belief that by cultivating these energies, people can build their overall wellbeing and improve their potential for success.

In using this model, we follow the principle that wellbeing fuels success, and in turn, success fuels wellbeing. When we experience success, it boosts our sense of accomplishment and confidence, it leaves us feeling more energised and focused. Additionally, when we prioritise and nurture our wellbeing, we are likely to perform better - approaching challenges with more resilience and positivity.

Where there is a virtuous cycle between success and wellbeing- we believe our model can be applied to help young people achieve more balanced and fulfilling lives. With these energy-oriented guides, we offer actions for individuals and businesses to forge a path to sustainable success.



Purpose energy

Purpose is both a driver of success and a powerful safeguard against mental illness. Research shows⁷ that having a sense of purpose can reduce depression, stress, and anxiety⁸, significantly boosting well-being⁹ by giving people a hopeful sense of direction.

Purpose is particularly important in the current climate where economic concerns and worries about the future are impacting young people's wellbeing. In our recent YouGov survey, we found evidence that young people believe it is harder now than it was for previous generations to secure a good job (74%), buy a home (94%), and maintain a decent standard of living (85%). Accordingly, a Harvard study¹⁰ found that in a context of social, economic and political concern, 3 in 5 young adults are struggling to find meaning, purpose or direction – and it's impacting their mental health.

Intellectual energy

Intellectual energy involves curiosity, creative thinking and the ability to approach complex issues with incisiveness. These skills are essential for young people navigating life's challenges, especially in today's often overwhelming and uncertain world.

While schools are generally expected to equip young people with the intellectual energy to thrive, our recent study¹¹ found that only 20% of young people leave school feeling prepared for the real world.

By helping young people strengthen their capacity for critical thinking¹² and curiosity¹³, research shows we can improve mental clarity and emotional wellbeing.

7. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10566624/>

8. <https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/purpose-in-life-less-stress-better-mental-health>

9. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4779362/>

10. <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/reports/on-edge>

11. <https://globalfuturefoundation.com/reports/nothing-about-us-without-us/>

12. <https://www.thevirtualtrainingteam.com/articles/intellectual-curiosity-the-power-of-the-inquisitive-mind/>

13. <https://www.alexismaida.com/dimensions/intellectual-wellness-focused-curiosity>

Emotional energy

Emotional energy encompasses positivity, resilience in the face of adversity and a focus on personal growth. It is vital for young people – many of whom are struggling with feelings of despair – to invest in strengthening these mental muscles. Our recent report¹⁴ highlighted a growing youth-wellbeing crisis, with over half (59%) of those surveyed reporting periods of poor mental health – “sometimes,” “often,” or “all of the time”. This underscores a clear and urgent need for action.

We must do more to equip young people with the tools they need to navigate life’s challenges. Indeed, 69% of young people feel they have received insufficient education on mental health and well-being in school. This guide aims to address that gap, offering practical strategies to cultivate a growth mindset grounded in optimism.

People energy

People energy – which includes social connections, empathy, and support – is a cornerstone of well-being. Research¹⁵ consistently shows that strong social relationships are linked to better mental and physical health. However, there is a social health crisis among young people today. Our research¹⁶ reveals that nearly one in three young people (29%) feel lonely “often” or “all of the time.” This epidemic of loneliness is being worsened by social media, which often prevents meaningful interactions and fuels feelings of dissatisfaction. Ultimately, to thrive in one’s personal and professional life, people energy is crucial. Strong social skills and connections are essential both for our wellbeing and for success.

14. <https://globalfuturefoundation.com/reports/nothing-about-us-without-us/>

15. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3150158/>

16. <https://globalfuturefoundation.com/reports/nothing-about-us-without-us/>

Purpose Energy

For employers to maximize productivity and boost wellbeing, they should make sure employees feel aligned to the company's purpose. Employees perform best when they feel like there is a meaning to their work, when they feel like their goals are aligned with that of the organization.

1. Mission and Purpose

A clear company purpose that resonates with employees enhances motivation and engagement, leading to increased productivity and wellbeing. A recent MetLife study¹⁷ found that 74% of employees want to work in a workplace where they share the company's values. Further research¹⁸ shows that purpose is a strong predictor of whether employees will stay or quit their jobs- this is particularly relevant when talking about young employees- because Gen Z show an 8-percentage-point drop¹⁹ from other generations when it comes to finding meaning at work.



Action

Encourage front line managers to connect young employees to the company purpose – consider, how employees can feel like they are contributing to a wider mission in their day-to-day.

(For more on this, see our report: [Filling the void](#)²⁰).

17. [https://www.metlife.co.uk/intermediary/training/metlife-academy/adding-value/navigating-purpose/#:~:text=The%20research%20also%20shows%20that,than%20job%20title%20\(31%25\)](https://www.metlife.co.uk/intermediary/training/metlife-academy/adding-value/navigating-purpose/#:~:text=The%20research%20also%20shows%20that,than%20job%20title%20(31%25))

18. <https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/purpose-at-work-predicts-if-employees-will-stay-or-quit-their-jobs>

19. <https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/what-we-know-about-gen-z-in-the-workplace>

20. <https://globalfuturefoundation.com/reports/filling-the-void-purpose/>

2. Facilitate Purposeful Activities

Businesses must understand that people are multifaceted and need to find a sense of purpose in all areas of life. Indeed, to allow employees to establish meaningful lives it is important to give them the space and flexibility to engage with fulfilling projects alongside their regular daily tasks. Further, flexibility is important because it facilitates an important element of agency- allowing employees to discover and establish their own sense of purpose.

3. Clear Responsibilities and Expectations

When you begin your career, things are naturally uncertain. Everything is new, and it is impossible to know what exactly is expected of you. This uncertainty can be paralysing for new starters. Research shows²¹ that where expectations and accountabilities are ambiguous, employees experience lower wellbeing due to emotional exhaustion, reduced engagement and conflict with their colleagues. Clear responsibilities and targets will help you harness the full potential of young employees.

Action

At work, create opportunities for employees to contribute to projects or campaigns they feel passionately about beyond their regular tasks. Additionally, allow a select time each week for employees to do something that gives them purpose outside of work- be it voluntary work, a new hobby or building a skill.

Action

Begin by outlining what a 'good' new starter looks like. This will give young employees a clear picture to measure themselves up-against. Additionally, with each young starter, managers should work to identify a clear set of goals that will both motivate and stretch them.

21. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9603406/#:~:text=2.7.&text=Employees%20who%20lack%20information%20regarding,a%20critical%20predictor%20%5B32%5D>.

PURPOSE ENERGY

Case Study: Airbnb

Airbnb's purpose, 'to create a world where anyone can belong anywhere,' extends beyond its product. The company strives to foster a sense of belonging within its own workforce. Their true commitment to purpose became clear during the pandemic. When their revenue was forecasted to halve and layoffs became necessary, Airbnb prioritized purpose and employee wellbeing. Instead of simply terminating contracts, they made a conscious effort to help laid off 'teammates' find new job opportunities²², providing resources, support, and career guidance. This included creating an alumni talent directory and placement team. This commitment to their employees, even during a crisis, demonstrated a deep-seated belief in their purpose mission.

By prioritizing the wellbeing of their former employees, Airbnb cultivated a strong sense of community and loyalty within the company, inspiring trust and confidence among remaining employees while encouraging laid-off alumni to return in better times.

Young people value meaningful work and want employers who prioritise wellbeing. Indeed, where young people have become cynical about purpose - having seen companies abandon their values during times of crisis- we can learn from Airbnb the importance of authenticity. To bring success, purpose cannot be a superficial slogan, it must be deeply engrained, it should ring-true for employees and be woven into the fabric of the business.

22. <https://news.airbnb.com/a-message-from-co-founder-and-ceo-brian-chesky/>



Intellectual Energy

Businesses should encourage young employees to learn, to think creatively and build their incisiveness.

1. Give Voice and Responsibility

While many large companies spend significant resources selecting the brightest people to join their graduate programs – once hired it can take a long time to be given any real responsibility. This saps the creative energy of young hires. Where young people are given more ownership over their work, businesses are likely to build innovation, incisiveness and creativity. Further, in a rapidly changing world, to resonate with the next generation and be prepared for the challenges of modernity – it is essential that businesses do not overlook young people's insight.

2. Create a Culture of Learning

Cultivate creative thinking and build incisiveness by providing a range of training and learning opportunities. By offering employees upskilling opportunities, you will equip employees with the knowledge and confidence to perform better and feel like they are progressing. These practices also help broaden employee's perspectives and boosts confidence in their intellectual abilities

Action

Encourage young employees to share their ideas; At the beginning of a meeting, make a conscious effort to ask young employees to contribute. (Tip: Do this before more senior members share ideas and sway autonomous thinking). Additionally, try building-up the responsibilities of young employees, giving them ownership, and allowing them to drive smaller project-tasks.

Action

To make sure the opportunities feel relevant and exciting- begin by asking employees what they want to learn. Then, allocate time for employees to explore new areas of interest, offer access to courses and workshops that will build their knowledge, skills or qualifications. Within your business, you can also encourage curiosity through cross-department collaboration and mentorship programs.

3. Constructive and Reciprocal Feedback

Some of the biggest barriers to learning are perfectionism and a fear of failure. Businesses should work to create safe learning environments; where feedback is not punitive or seen as a sign of failure but is harnessed as an opportunity for growth and learning. Effective feedback systems help to stimulate intellectual growth and help refine the team's capacity for critical thinking.

Action

Practice reciprocal feedback where young employees get feedback from their managers, but senior members also receive feedback from young hires. This builds trust and creates a developmental culture, importantly allowing senior managers to lead by example in the way they take on feedback and use it for growth.

INTELLECTUAL ENERGY

Case Study: Whitbread

A while back, Whitbread – the parent company of familiar brands like Premier Inn, undertook a program to transform their performance. To foster intellectual energy and cultivate a culture of innovation, they implemented a unique feedback program intended to unlock the untapped potential of their young employees. In this initiative, senior leaders invited a group of high-potential young employees to observe and provide feedback on a critical strategic debate on the company's performance. Overcoming initial tensions, the leadership team ultimately recognised the value of these fresh perspectives, listening to young people's concerns about communication and collaborative decision making.

This experience had a profound impact on both parties. The senior team listened to young employees and implemented changes based on

their feedback. As a result, they saw improved performance and greater team unity. For young employees, this experience was empowering – they felt heard, valued and became more invested in the company's success. Seeing their recommendations being implemented firsthand provided a significant boost to young employee's sense of agency and motivation, fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration. This case study exemplifies how empowering young voices can enhance intellectual energy within an organisation.



Emotional Energy

Businesses must work to create a supportive environment that promotes employee wellbeing. To do this, businesses should help employees build resilience, by encouraging optimism and offering them the tools they need to grow.

1. Deep Resilience Building

To ensure emotional wellbeing in the workplace, employers must take a proactive approach: building the resilience of young people and establishing their baseline wellbeing. Additionally, while it is important to give young employees the tools to cope with poor mental health, businesses can also implement preventative measures, understanding and (where possible) minimising the main causes of stress in the workplace.

2. Flexibility

Flexible working options can significantly improve employee wellbeing and hybrid working has become the expected norm for young workers who've begun their careers with the Pandemic. Employers can accommodate for this, giving employees agency by focusing on their expected outputs, while giving them autonomy over the time and space of their inputs. With this approach, businesses can enhance efficiency and wellbeing without slipping on productivity.

Action

Offer young employees access to activities that support their mental clarity and focus, this might include yoga and exercise classes, healthy eating guides, sleeping aids, mindfulness and meditation practices, professional or online therapy. (See: Better Space²³ who are leading a mission to give people agency over their resilience building)

Action

Offer employees the option to work from home, offer flexible working hours and provide more generous leave options. Also, think carefully about when it is most valuable for employees to be together in the office- and think about how you can make coming into the office enjoyable and appealing.

23. <https://www.betterspace.uk/about-us/>

3. *Make Wellbeing a Boardroom Agenda*

Leaders should be setting the culture from the top. We know burnout is being experienced across all levels – from the CEO to the new hire. A culture shift on mental health will have far-reaching implications – improving the mental health literacy of the workforce, reducing stigma and helping graduate hires feel understood.

Action

Senior leaders should talk about mental health – by sharing stories of times they have struggled or discussing how they maintain their wellbeing. This will set the tone, creating space for young employees to share their own experiences and feel heard.

EMOTIONAL ENERGY

Case Study: Intertek

Intertek, a leading Total Quality Assurance provider, recognises the importance of emotional wellbeing for its employees. To foster resilience and create a supportive environment, they have integrated unique practices into their daily routines.

One such initiative is the “Sustainability Moment,” a brief segment at the beginning of every meeting. During these moments, employees share personal or professional sustainability stories, which may include successful attempts at reducing their carbon footprint or improving their wellbeing. These stories, ranging from humorous anecdotes about chair yoga sessions to inspiring tales of overcoming personal challenges, create a positive, uplifting atmosphere. Further by giving employees a space to share sensitive stories with their colleagues, these moments foster an important sense of community. Being led by executives and board leaders- this effectively sets the tone of openness from the top, demonstrating genuine care for one another’s emotional wellbeing.



People Energy

People want to feel connected to others – it is a fundamental human need – and now, across the board young people are struggling with loneliness. With this in mind, workplaces can provide an important space for people to build inter-personal skills and establish fulfilling relationships.

1. Create Space for Engagement

We all crave social connection, and young people are experiencing an epidemic of loneliness. Our report found that almost a third of those surveyed feel lonely “often” or “all the time”. The workplace has always been an important place to build relationships, and it is important we keep this function alive.



Action

Create physical space for colleagues to engage and make time for employees to bond. To bring these spaces to life- organise focused activities that will bring people together. Lead by example and try hosting informal meetings in communal areas. This will increase collegiality, encourage idea-exchange, and enhance productivity.

2. Empathetic Management

People's experiences at work are significantly influenced by the relationships they have with their managers and their teams. To build confidence and reduce negative-self talk, it is important for managers to give young employees recognition and praise for their contributions at work. Finally, it is crucial for young employees to feel that they have an accessible point of contact- to ask questions and raise concerns.

3. Inclusive and Diverse Teams

Diversity encourages creativity and imagination - it can be a strong asset. While there has been an important focus on diversity according to race, gender, and ethnicity – age is often overlooked. Indeed, it is important that businesses incorporate a generational diversity of thought. Further, to harness the benefits of diversity, businesses must build psychological safety- making young people feel comfortable to share their insights without feeling they will be punished or embarrassed for asking questions or making mistakes.

Action

Elevate the importance of emotional wellbeing when training managers. This might include trying out reverse-mentoring – which allows young employees to have their voices heard and helps managers build empathy. (Tip: it is important for managers to set the tone right from the start. While empathy and communication are important always, a warm welcome in the onboarding process will go a long way).

Action

Include young people in meetings with senior members and invite them to speak- this will contribute to rich discussions and a diversity of thought. (For more on this see our report: [Rewiring Meritocracy²⁴](#))

24. <https://globalfuturefoundation.com/reports/rewiring-meritocracy/>

Case Study: Spotify

Spotify understands the vitality of company culture and community to employee performance, satisfaction and retention²⁵. Indeed, they describe their employees as 'bandmates' and build this mentality into the fabric of the company.

While Spotify has implemented a 'working from anywhere' policy acknowledging the importance of individual flexibility, they also appreciate the paradoxical need²⁶ for collective belonging. Here, to build inclusivity, Spotify encourages the formation of belonging groups – employee-led communities centred around shared interests or identities. By leveraging 'cultural moment' initiatives, Spotify uses these groups to ensure all employees feel seen, valued and celebrated.

Further, they prioritise investment in the 'CommunityX' team, who are tasked with bringing people together, providing activities including regional "festivals" which challenge departmental silos and connect employees across global geographies.

Moreover, while they give 'bandmates' the option to work from anywhere, Spotify appreciate that many people still want to come into the office for the social element. With this, Spotify has used data-driven insights to inform the re-design of the workplace – with less desk space for individual work and more meeting rooms their workplaces are built to inspire community, prioritising engagement and being together.

25. <https://hrblog.spotify.com/2022/04/20/the-great-retention-culture-community-experience>

26. <https://hrblog.spotify.com/2022/09/14/creating-connectivity-in-a-distributed-workforce>

27. <https://hrblog.spotify.com/2023/11/15/improving-workplace-experience-through-space-optimisations>

