

Futuremakers: Brain and Mental Health

Episode 4: Building resilient mental health in the workplace

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Welcome to this season of Futuremakers: Brain and Mental Health. I'm Professor Belinda Lennox, I'm a psychiatrist and a researcher here in Oxford, and this season you'll be joining me as we demystify the science behind the most complex object in the known universe, our brains, and look at the wide-reaching impacts of mental illness on individuals and society. I'll be introducing you to some of Oxford's best academic minds, working to solve the greatest challenges in brain and mental health, and I'll also be speaking to guests from beyond the university to bring their perspectives and lived experience and get a sense of the impact of what we're doing. Join us as we discover how Oxford is shaping the future of brain and mental health research.

Okay, welcome to this episode of Futuremakers where we're going to be talking about mental health in the workplace with the legend that is Sir John Kirwan, who has said I'm allowed to call him JK.

Sir John Kirwan was New Zealand rugby player, winner of the World Cup, complete legend in the world of rugby, but perhaps even more so since he has left rugby, and is one of the first people with a really prominent public platform to speak openly about his own history of mental illness and be an advocate for mental health. And he's now founded Groove focusing on workplace well-being and he was knighted in 2012 for services to mental health and rugby, and it's a complete pleasure to have you with us, JK.

Sir John Kirwan:

Absolutely lovely to be here. Thank you for inviting me. I'm in this part of the world too, which is really good, so I'm sitting in my Italian home.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Well, it's a complete pleasure to have you with us. And of course, you're a seasoned professional when it comes to podcast making as well. So, we're in safe hands, I suppose. I'd be really interested to hear how you ended up in this world of mental health advocacy, I guess.

Sir John Kirwan:

Yeah, look.

I wanted to jump out of a window one night pretty much. You know, I was hiding my anxiety, so I was an anxiety-based depressant. As you know they are two different illnesses, you can have anxiety or not without them falling into depression. But what I did was I started getting anxiety attacks. I mean, retrospectively looking at, I probably started having them when I was 13 or 14, maybe, ignored them, I'd go back to relatively normal and then, you know I made the Auckland team at 18 and the All Blacks at 19. I mean, and they just kept accelerating and I just kept ignoring them because I didn't know what they were.

You know, I just thought because my reference back then and, you know, if you've got a young audience, they might not remember this movie. But my reference to mental health was One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest. So, I thought that if I spoke about my mental health, I was going to get locked up with Jack Nicholson and The Chief, the big American Indian guy.

So, I didn't know, had no awareness of mental health, didn't know what was going on, hid my anxiety. And then one day, the best way I explained it is your anxiety just doesn't go away. So, you go from anxiety attacks, I was having probably on my worst days about 5 or 10 a day and then they just didn't go away. And that was depression. But I didn't know what it was. I also had suicidal ruminations. I never planned my own suicide, and for that I'm eternally grateful to whoever you believe God, Allah or whoever you believe. So, I'm eternally grateful for that, I never planned my own suicide, but I certainly had suicidal ruminations. I was on an All Black tour in Argentina, and the way I explain it is, you know, when you're in this hell, and it is hell, a minute feels like an hour, an hour feels like a day, and a day feels like a week.

So, by the time I got to every single day because I was faking sh*t as well and, you know, I was just faking stuff. So, no one externally knew I was unwell. So I've got all this internal turmoil and I'm trying to hide it. I'm trying to be a high-performance athlete, a public figure. And I was just sick of fighting. You know, at the end of your day, I'm just so tired. I was just so tired of fighting this thing. I remember, you know, looking to my left, I was on the 10th floor of the Hilton Hotel in Buenos Aires and I just decided to, I was sick of fighting this, I'm going to run and jump out.

And basically, the guy in line next to me, said 'JK. You've got a good heart.' I don't know why he said it. He doesn't know why I said it. We've discussed it since and we can talk about that later, but he saved my life. I played a test match for the country the next day, so that phrase, JK, you've got a good heart, I said that to myself every 10 seconds for the four days. You know, I played a Test match the next day. It was like looking at myself in a dream. I scored two tries, totally irrelevant, but I think what that moment made me do was reach out and get out. So, I flew home back to New Zealand with the All Blacks, still faking sh*t, you know the aeroplane flights were terrible 'cause I was having anxiety, and as anyone who studied anxiety, one of the things that anxious people like is the ability to leave. So, aeroplanes were pretty tough because you can't leave.

But I got home, and I went and saw my doctor. The interesting thing was that my doctor was the All Black doctor. I hadn't spoken to him. We went away for, you know, four or five weeks together. And what he said changed my life, he said, JK It's an illness, not a weakness. I went wow, cause as you'll probably know with all the brains you have at Oxford, you know, one of the things that depression does takes away self-esteem, takes away self-confidence and takes away enjoyment in life. And that's part of the illness. I just didn't know that at the time.

So, if you, if you think about that, I had no self-worth, I sort of, I thought I was just lucky to be an All Black. You know, the second thing is I had no confidence in myself. I just thought, what is going on here? And I didn't enjoy anything. So, you're just in this, in this sort of horrible place.

The second thing that happened really was I started to accept my illness because I've been fighting it and I say this to people now, never give up. But stopped fighting it and the moment I stopped fighting, and it just accepted it, was the minute that I started to get some space in my brain to actually realise what was going on. Step back a bit and understand it, and then I went on this amazing journey. For many years it's, you know, I decided a few years later that I would become the face of this in New Zealand, so I became the sort of spokesperson, we did TV ads around anti stigma. Then we did a Hope campaign about 12 years ago. We created together with the government a

programme called depression.org.nz, which was basically CBT, cognitive behavioural therapy, but in the safety of your own home. That one awards all around the world. It's first time ever it's happened and that was really, really cool.

But the reason why I'm sitting in front of you today is that five years ago, I woke up and I've done all this work, and our suicide rate was going the wrong way. You know, 750,000 people committed suicide last year, and our beautiful little country, New Zealand, you know, by the end of today a New Zealand male will be dead, by tomorrow night 2 males and 1 female, in Australia, you know, 8 suicides a day, 120 attempts.

And so, if you've been the face of this and your goal was to change stuff, I'd failed, right? So, I sit there and think, sh*t I've failed, what do I need to do? Now, pre my depression, failure was probably something, I was so scared of I kept running from it. What my depression taught me to do was sit with failure. Give it a cuddle, learn from it and then move on.

So very quickly I thought, OK, what do I need to do? And I don't know what your thoughts are, Belinda, what Oxford's thoughts are, but this is a bit like smoking and heart disease in the 80s. You know, the government goes well, if everyone's gonna keep doing this, we're gonna have this massive hole. And I just think anxiety and depression is on the increase and the governments can't afford to keep up with it.

In New Zealand, you know, I think we need 15,000 psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors. I think we've got 4700. You know I read about the NHS and people going there and there's just not the numbers of psychiatrists or psychologists to help deal with the problem. Right. So, I thought, what can I do differently? So, two things we did, two things. I felt that if we're going to change the world then, my reference was One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest. So how do we educate kids? So I started a foundation. We looked all around the world to see if there's any programmes that actually teach our kids mental health as a curriculum in the school. So, we realised there wasn't, so we raised about \$250,000 and we asked the University of Auckland to create a curriculum. And they've created a curriculum called Mitey that's now in 120 schools, I want to have it primary schools by the way, so that's another interesting thing.

And then I felt that, what about people, sort of, you know, at work age. So that's where we created Groov, we're a SaaS product. We're a product that helps individuals look after their mental health, so, preventative mental health. We lift the leaders to talk about this, change the dialogue, make it acceptable to talk about at workplace. And the third thing is, we try and optimise the environment in the workplace and we believe that if we can prove that a well workplace mentally can increase productivity and profitability, then businesses will get involved in and will share some of the load of this and you know, stop pushing people off the cliff, so to speak.

So that's a hell of a long answer for your first question, but like I said, I've got a bit of a monkey brain, and it takes off, but that's sort of the, that's why I'm sitting in front of you and pretty passionate about this.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Well, it's a wonderful story. I mean, what an amazing story. And I suppose it's the thing about prevention is that you know you can't measure the lives that you've saved so easily, but I'm sure you have saved lives. I'm sure you've saved many lives, actually. Just the shining the light on the stigma associated with mental illness, even just amongst professional sports people. I know that you've

fundamentally changed the way that it's recognised, and there will be young people who are alive today because of you. So, you know, thank you. It's an, it's an amazing story.

And I suppose I was also thinking as you were talking, you know thank goodness we're in a different place to 20 years ago, the acceptance of mental health and well-being, it's part of the language, particularly for young people I would say, you know, so it's, it is a bit of a paradox, isn't it, how the suicide rate is so stubbornly stuck despite everybody being so much more aware and it's difficult to get into, you know, into the reason.

I mean it's complicated, isn't it? But yeah, it's kind of, what next, I guess it's that the awareness might be there, but it's actually the interventions and how to actually truly prevent or support people in the workplace effectively. I suppose that's what I'm trying to understand is, you know, what's the evidence base actually is, as to how we can do it well.

Sir John Kirwan:

Yeah, look, and I think, I spoke to a politician once, right? And he said we never get re-voted in or voted out on preventative. You know, it's always the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff around any issue. And if you think about the issues that are facing the world at the moment, you know, environment, we've probably known about the environment for a long, long time, but I think one of the biggest pandemics is actually the mental health of our people.

I believe that technology is a beautiful thing. You and I are, you know, we're online at the moment and we're chatting. You know, I often leave overseas. I can see my kids when they're overseas. And so, there's lots of beautiful things about technology. But it's also, I believe, increased the anxiety, and really, the load in our brains, right? So, I don't think any of us really have too much capacity left. So, we need to learn these basic mental health tools just to free them up, you know. And I think an understanding of your own brain, right. So, I don't make any judgement.

All I'm saying is that if you have what we call at Groove the six pillars so, the six pillars are move, chill, enjoy, connect, celebrate and do. Now you'll know that based in science, if you do those things in your day, then you will have more capacity and feel better. So, for example, let me explain to you the first time I go to my psychiatrist, right. I didn't want to go right, so I'm your classic male, you know, stupid in retrospect. But back then I go to my doctor. My doctor says to me, you know, JK it's an illness, not a weakness. Here's two things you should do. You should take antidepressants, 'cause you got suicidal ruminations, and you should go see a psychiatrist. So, this is the same guy that's spending 4 hours in the gym trying to be the best athlete you can, got a bit of a sore knee? I'd be the first one in the physio room. But then when the doctor says to me, go and see someone about your head, I'm going. Ah, get out. I'm not going, you know, absolutely ridiculous in retrospect.

But then I just didn't get better. And so, 3 weeks later, I go back and go. Well, Doc, I'm still not getting better. I'm a little bit more aware and I got some automatic relief from realising that it's an illness and not a weakness, blah blah blah. He said, well, take the bloody pills JK. You know. And so, I started taking the antidepressants. Interesting thing I had to try 3 before I got the one that suited me and the stupid thing back then was, I thought if I take the antidepressant, JK's gonna be back, you know, it's gonna be like an aspirin. It's gonna get rid of your headache. That didn't happen. And this is through lack of knowledge. So, it took me a while to do that and then the second thing he said to me was JK, do you want to be the greatest athlete ever? I said, yeah, yeah, that's why I play football for, you know, and he says, well, you go to the physio, you go to the doctor, you go to the gym, right now you're the best athlete. And I said no, and he said, well, you should go to the psychiatrist.

And I went. Now, this is another really interesting thing that I try to explain to people. Sometimes you don't connect straight away, right? And so, I didn't connect with the first person, but it wasn't his fault. I'm sure he helped a whole lot of people, right? But I just didn't connect. But the second person I went to was an amazing woman. You know, and it took me another three weeks to go back, but I sat down and she said oh, rugby player. I said yeah, I'm a rugby player. She said, what would you do if you had a tight hamstring? I said I'd stop and stretch it, OK? You stop and stretch, you get up, you keep running and it gets really, really tight. I said alright I'd stop, stretch it and then I'd go sit and then go and see the physio. She said, your brain's no different. And that helped me accept that I had a hamstring in the head. What's the ice and who's the physio? I knew alcohol wasn't the ice because I went to that often. I get absolutely hammered, and that was a bit of a cultural thing as well, which didn't help, but get hammered. And the sad thing is it would give me a little bit of relief for a few hours, but then I go back at 100 miles an hour the next day, would be 10 times worse, so I knew that wasn't the ice. So, what I had to work out was some of the things that I could do in my day to give me some capacity? To give me some relief to help me, you know, feel better. And that's when I started building my six pillars.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Hello, I hope you're enjoying this episode of Future Makers, Brain and Mental Health. If you'd like to learn more about our work here in Oxford, head to ox.ac.uk/brain, or let us know what you think on social media using the hashtag OxfordBrain.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

So you're talking about the influence of technology and why perhaps sort of young people today have particular pressures and difficulties, and I suppose, so, I want to come on to thinking about workplace and what organisations can do to support the well-being of their employees.

Because I mean absolutely, at an individual level, we need to recognise mental illness when it's there and we need to treat it properly with our evidence-based treatments. But you know, people spend a lot of their life in the workplace and there's no doubt that it can enhance or, you know, diminish your well-being by the sort of the organisational culture and you know the practises that are that are in place. I mean, what's your, what have you learned? What's your sort of understanding as to what I suppose a good workplace well-being strategy looks like?

Sir John Kirwan:

Well, I think that it needs to go on the agenda, right? And well-being, with no disrespect, is actually a really broad thing, you know, so I talk about preventative mental health. You know, is your inbox, Belinda, ever empty? No, you know.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Of course it isn't, no.

Sir John Kirwan:

No, no one's is anymore. So there's this blur between work and home. Right. There's, it's now joined. There is no work life balance. There's just life, and I think, you add COVID, you add remote working, you add a whole lot of different things, technology, all these things. So, the capacity in our brains I think are full and we've got to free it up, back in the old days you know, like my dad used to drive home from work, nothing to follow him.

You know, now people have still got an inbox, they're doing work after dinner, they're working on Sundays and that's OK. But what you need to be able to do is to start freeing up some space in your mind, and it's your mind, you need to reboot, you know. I talk about, you know, the computer when it, or your phone, when it stops, you know, what do we do? You know, we turn it off and turn it on again. And it normally works right, 95% and we need to do that with our brains. So, my philosophy is, we need to empower the individual to have a preventative daily mental health plan around how their mind works and the stuff they like.

But then we've got to lift the leaders so that they are putting it on the agenda. And it's not like, oh, how's your mental health? You know, it's just what we do every single day. And so, you know, I talk about, and you'll hear a lot about, and I'm sure you work a lot in the space, a psychological safety bridge. So, what is a psychological safety bridge? For me a psychological safety bridge, there's trust and care, right? So, we've really left mental health at the doorstep of our workplaces, probably for 150 years, and now very quickly, we need to accelerate it in the doors. So, what we talk about is empowering individuals to just start, and we often talk about just do one thing, do one thing today for your mental health, right.

And for me, for example, when I when I first went to the psychiatrist who said okay JK, now that you've accepted your own mess and you're starting to get a balance of your brain, how would you like to get good at it? I said, yeah, I'd love to be the All Blacks of depression you know? And she said, well, would you like to try meditation? And I went, oh, hey, you gotta remember, but then this is in the 80s, right? If you did yoga, you're a dope smoking surfy freak back then, you know, there's no Lululemon back then, you know, it was, I went to meditation, and it was an absolute disaster for me. And we all know that if you can meditate, you should do it. It's amazing for your mental health, but there's a percentage of people that shouldn't meditate and I was one of those. So, o I came out feeling like a complete failure.

And so, I go back to her, and she said, how's that? And I said that's probably the worst thing I've ever experienced. It brought my anxiety back, blah, blah blah. She said, well, you've probably got a ruminating mind JK and. You know, it's very, very active. So, and then she asked me a few questions. Like, you know, if the movie doesn't attract your attention within 5 minutes, is your mind going in different directions? And I'm going. Yes. So what? You got a ruminating mind. And I can't even spell that. So, I just called it Bob the Monkey. Right. So my meditation, and you know this is part of my six pillars is I read, you know, I'm a little bit on the dyslexic scale but I taught myself to read when I was 18 and reading, you know, what happens when I read, Bob the Monkey goes into his cage and has a banana. So, you know, before I go to sleep at night, if I read, I fall asleep. If I don't, Bob the Monkey goes hey, let's think about all this dumb sh*t and keep you awake.

Another thing I do is I absolutely love cooking, so you know, nowadays with everyone so busy, you gotta do two birds with one stone, with your mental health as well. So, I love cooking. You know, I really think about it during the day and I think about what I'm gonna cook that night and then when I'm cooking, Bob the Monkey goes into his cage and has a banana, so two birds with one stone. Cooking, two birds, one stone, but also is going for a walk with my wife, cause you know, move. But I also connect, I reconnect with her. So, you know, I started learning these things. I also learned that it's OK if you can't meditate. But as long as you understand your mind, so every single day. And I talk about a daily mental health plan I read, I move, or go for a walk or I cook, and during COVID I took up the guitar. You know, it sounds like I'm killing a cat in the lounge. But Bob the Monkey goes into his cage and has a banana.

So, all of a sudden, I started putting these things in my day and I was getting relief and feeling better. And I'd go back to her, and she'd say, well, you know, you need to just keep putting those things in your day, you know, and that's what I do. Breathing, for example, you know, basic breathing. I walked into her office one day and she said, JK, how would you like to learn how to breathe? I just started laughing, I said I'm standing in front of you, I'm alive, what do you mean? And she said nah JK you're so tense, I can see it in your shoulders. And she just taught me some simple box breathing and I do that six times a day. And when I started doing it, I started getting relief and feeling better.

So. You know, we've got to change the dialogue. We've got to make it simple for people. So, if we can go into businesses and just to do one thing, just do one of those things a day, start putting it in your day. Habitual change, as you will know, Belinda is one of the hardest things, you know to change. But if you put these little things in your day and they're easy to achieve, then we do them.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Yeah, it makes a lot of sense and I I'm sure resonates with a lot of people. I suppose what you're saying, you know, I suppose what I'm picking up on is what I could do as a leader in my organisation, as an employer, because a lot well in academia, I think the UK probably in many places around the world, it's a pretty tough place to work, you know. So, there was a survey by the Wellcome Trust recently that reported that 70% of researchers report feeling stressed on an average working day. You know, so mental health issues like anxiety and depression are 7 times more prevalent in academia than the broader population, it's a pretty unhealthy place to be working and there's all sorts of reasons for that. But you know, we've really got to look after, you know, our brilliant staff that we're completely reliant on for the, for the, you know, for the work that we do at every level and we're not doing a great job at the moment.

Sir John Kirwan:

Yeah, look, and I think, and this is, that's not uncommon in most workplaces at the moment and that's why you know, changing the dialogue, having a DOT. So, one of the things I encouraged leaders to do is go into work and talk about their DOT. We've got to encourage leaders to start looking after themselves because then when the leaders start talking about it, then it's OK for the workers, you'll know this, you'll know this 100,000,000 times. You know, if the boss is sending emails at 5:00 in the morning, then you know, people are going to respond. They're going to feel stressed.

So there's just some simple things that we can do. But then also if you start creating a work DOT right, we're gonna do a breathing exercise before we start our research, or we're gonna go for a walk in between our research, or we're going to journal. Whatever. If you start building those things in it just becomes normal. And those things are fundamental because you can't keep, you know, you can't keep the rhythm up that the world is pushing at us nowadays because there's less people and more work to do. So yeah, that that's what I think the leaders are fundamental in the workplace. So, you're right.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Yeah. Do you think there are some industries that are sort of particularly problematic? I mean, you know, some that still have a sort of old-fashioned view that you know, the harder you, you gotta sort of prove your worth. You know you're expected to be there for extended hours, and you know, give up the rest of your life to show your dedication to the cause kind of thing. Is there a top target from your point of view of a world that you'd like to change?

Sir John Kirwan:

Yeah. Look, it's a great question, right? And what's happened? I talk a lot about performance care. So, what's happened is you know, you've got performance and you've got care, you got to bring those together. But also working is incredibly good for your mental health. I love working. I love achieving my goals. I love doing what I'm doing. If you're ambitious and you wanna work 12 hours a day because you want to be a partner, I'm OK with that, but every single day you've got to look after your mental health cause it's cumulative right. If you're stressed today and you don't get rid of it, you're gonna have it tomorrow and next day.

We have to identify how people can look after themselves on a daily basis. And then have some sort of management of your imbalance, right? Because people talk about balance, balance is not a reality for me, managing my imbalance is, you know? And so, if we can manage your imbalances by having a daily mental health plan, and you go to work and you can take time out to go to the gym, you can take time out to go for a walk. You can breathe, you can take your time. You can do things, work out what it's worth to you around productivity. So, I think the future of workplace preventative mental health is actually understanding, by having these daily mental health plans, how much more productive you can be. And so, I think most industries are the same, there are other industries that I think need to be accelerated to the 20th century around some of the some of the reasons why they were successful in the past. Possibly lawyers being one, and I think, I know it's changing in New Zealand, but young doctors, how we treat young doctors, and obviously today you've told me that academia is pretty stressful as well, so.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Yeah. Well, I think there are, there are many that are that are difficult. I suppose as I was thinking as you were speaking, I think there has been a growth in acceptance. I think most people will recognise that well-being is important for you know, having happy staff that stay that you know, feel connected, that recognise the, you know, feel valued are gonna be more productive and your company is gonna thrive as a result. I mean it seems, would you agree with that? Do you think most companies would see that this is something that's worth paying attention to?

Sir John Kirwan:

Yeah. No, no, I think I, I think you mentioned it earlier as well, and and you're dead, right. I think the awareness is there. I think people understand. And because amazing organisations like yours are coming out with the stats, you know one in five people burnt out, you know, productivity, tanking, all sorts of percentages out there. So the knowledge is out there. It's just that well-being has been a little bit fluffy for my liking, you know. What is it? Is it the free yoga? Is it a free gym? Is it this, is it that you know? And I'm saying, yeah, it's all those things. But I've gotta make that decision.

So, I am convinced, and I am absolutely convinced about this, that it's really about giving the individual a daily mental health plan, because if you can give me meditation, yyou know what I'm gonna say to you, you know, it's not good for my brain. So, if we can teach everyone to understand what their daily mental health plan is around the six pillars, then they can choose. Right. You talk to businesses, and they'll spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on this one thing, and it's had no take up, you know, they've spent \$2.00 on the other thing, it's got a big take up.

So, we just need to get down to encouraging the individual to understand what keeps them well every day. And that means if it's for you it's reading, you know, a book under a tree for 15 minutes, then when I see you reading your book under the tree at 11:00 I know that you're looking after yourself because you're going to go back to work and be productive. So, the more we share the stuff,

the more we understand it. The more we change the dialogue, then we'll go, oh, that's just Belinda. That's what she does. Yeah, that's her daily mental health plan.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Yeah, I think you're completely right. It is the perception of fluffiness, isn't it? It's the sort of intangible nature and maybe it's not measurable in a very hard way. If we said that this company had a well-being index of 0 and you know it actually it had some kind of implications or you know. that they couldn't retain their staff or had more difficulty recruiting then maybe people would pay more attention to it, perhaps.

Sir John Kirwan:

I talk about whether you're on the bus or off the bus. I think there's some leaders out there that really, really get this and understand it. You know, I often talk about Bill Gates coming across the Canadian border with, you know, Microsoft in his pocket, was that 40 odd years ago now? And he's saying, you know, I'm going to put, I'm going to put a laptop on everyone's lap. He did pretty bloody well at that, you know. And then Steve Jobs comes along with the iPhone and says I'm going to put one of these in everyone's hands, right. And I go. Yep. Yep. Yep. That's probably. Yeah, that's really good.

I remember talking to Luciano Benetton once, I played for Benetton here in Italy. And I spent some time with him. And I'm intrigued with people like that and I said to him, you know, how did you get so rich, mate. And he goes, I invented colour. You know, before me there was black, white and grey and I thought it was quite an amazing response, right? But what is the future? I mean, do you need any more sh*t in your life? The future is actually genuine well-being of your people and preventative mental health, and I think the empathy bosses are gonna survive. You know, if you look at sport, you know, sport now, the coaches that are surviving are those that have the biggest empathy for their players, those that can combine that performance and that care piece together. You know the technical side of it is probably irrelevant because you can employ it, right? But it's that performance care that's really, really important. I think workplaces, in the next 5 years if you're not an empathy lead boss and you're genuine about it, then you're going to be really struggling to retain and motivate people and get them form at the highest level.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Well, I think that's I don't need to say anything else. I think that's just a wonderful summary completely. Have you come across a company or a leader that really does it well, that could really give us a sort of example of how they've transformed their workplace?

Sir John Kirwan:

Yeah, there's a there's a boss in New Zealand called Steve Jurkovich. He runs Kiwi Bank. He believes this is the future and he's implemented Groov, and he's driven it through the business. He's led by example. I did a podcast with him a little while ago. His vulnerability was inspiring and he's seeing the results and so I think there's a there's a lot, there's a lot of people out there that get this space and those that are driving it through the business are getting the results. I think it's the, you know the most important thing that we can all learn, so there's plenty of research out there as you would know.

Our goal at Grove is to reach 100 million people and save 100,000 lives. And we think that businesses can do that. On the other side, you know, I think if then we can create Mitey, which is a

curriculum for our primary schools, then you know hopefully in a generation or so our stats start coming back and we don't have as many sad cases as we're having now.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Completely. Thank you. Well, hopefully I'll be speaking to the academics from the University of Oxford's Well-being Research Centre, because they've just published a very interesting study where they crowd sourced the data from Indeed, the recruitment company, the website. And they looked at over 1600 public listed companies where people that had worked for those companies had reported their well-being score, so they responded on how happy they were to work there, whether they had job satisfaction and whether they had a sense of purpose working there. And then they plotted those data against the sort of the effectiveness of the companies, and I suppose it won't surprise you to realise that you know, those companies with the highest level of well-being had the highest level of productivity, you know quite substantially so you know, I mean sort of direct evidence I guess that you support your employees and you have a more successful company.

Sir John Kirwan:

Yeah, look, and I love when academia gets together with storytelling, so we can take the science, you know, we can take the facts and mould them into a story and change the dialogue so that it just becomes normal for people, and I think the negative around mental health as it has been caught in a, it's really dark place sometimes you know, and I don't want to take anything away from people who are unwell. I want to free up free up space so that we can get the people the help that they need and to do that I think we've got to get rid of the mild to moderate and start really trying to help those that you know, we're pushing off the cliff.

So if we can turn some of those stats from 1 in 5 in the workplace being mild to moderate to 1 in 10 to 1 in 20. Then we're going to free up, you know, for the people who really need the care who might be in those percentages that are born with some sort of mental health issues. So, there's still plenty to do Belinda. And I'm really happy to come up and talk about the stats and the facts.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Ohh well, there's an invitation. Well I mean, I think that's a wonderful place to stop, actually, because absolutely the focus on mental well-being and the preventative measures in, in the workplace and for everybody, I mean, this is relevant for absolutely the entire population.

But if we could then refocus our efforts, and particularly the psychiatric workforce on the more severe mental illness, which really, I would say has been languishing for desperate need for more research and better treatments and really haven't advanced for many decades then that would be wonderful.

Sir John Kirwan:

You know there's so much to be done. You know, there is so much pressure on the workforce in this space that we need to start, and that's why I think business is one of the solutions. If we can free up some space so that the people can work as they need to work then you know, we'll make strides way quicker, which should be all of our goals.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

Yeah. Well, thank you for taking time out of your daughters wedding celebrations to join us. I've really enjoyed our talk.

Sir John Kirwan:

It's been my absolute pleasure.

Professor Belinda Lennox:

I hope you enjoyed this episode of Future Makers, Brain and Mental Health. You can find more episodes of future makers wherever you get your podcasts and more on Oxford's research at ox.ac.uk/brain. Thanks for listening.