

# Street Wise

Bankers are 44% more likely to suffer stress-related illness compared to the average person. Founder of social enterprise Street Wisdom, **DAVID PEARL**, explains why mindfulness can be the way forward

**M**ENTAL ILLNESS is on the rise, with one in four of us suffering at some point in our lives. This costs UK employers a staggering £26bn a year through sick days, lower productivity and recruitment costs.

Banking roles, in particular, are 44% more likely to result in stress-related illness compared to the average UK job.

There are a number of techniques available to help us manage our mental health and stress better. Many of these techniques require us to be still in order to build a quiet mind or to visit retreats or exotic locations. Street Wisdom was created by author, speaker and business innovator David Pearl. Pearl designed the technology to help people get moving and find clarity and inspiration on their doorstep.

Street Wisdom is a social enterprise with a mission to bring inspiration to every street on earth. It gives individuals and organisations the skills to see the urban environment in a new way, ask a question and use the answers they discover to unlock fresh thinking.

It is, in a nutshell, 'walking-based problem solving' using a mix of cognitive science, psychology and mindfulness. The global venture, which brings Street Wisdom free to consumers, is funded entirely through bespoke work with businesses such as Lush, Google, Samsung and Ogily & Mather.

It has delivered profound results, helping companies not only boost their wellbeing but bringing creativity to all that they do.

From 14-20 May, Street Wisdom will be running a special session in Canary Wharf to support Mental Health Awareness Week.

Here we ask David Pearl about the project and its impact on mental health.

## Why has it become so important to address mental health in business?

It's an issue that has been smouldering away for some time: not only knocking valuable cash off the bottom line but debilitating lives, too. Our frenetic technology-focused 24/7



lives have added fuel to the fire. Thankfully, the media, government and charities are finally bringing the problem out in the open. For so long, the stigma around mental health was preventing people from sharing and addressing any of their problems. That stigma hasn't fallen away entirely, but we are definitely heading in the right direction.

## What actually is mindfulness?

To me, mindfulness is really another way of saying 'noticing what's happening now' – not just outside you, but inside your mind. It's a powerful set of techniques that help manage your mind so it's not distracted and stressed



**For so long, the stigma around mental health has prevented people from sharing problems**

but can focus on the present moment and generally calm down. That's one of the reasons it has become so popular with businesses. It's seen as a way to help people cope with the stress and complexity of daily work; a way of improving performance by maintaining focus amid all the competing claims for attention.

## How do you incorporate mindfulness into your work with business?

My background is in creativity and how to help businesses come up with new answers to old questions. So, I am quite a fan of the wandering mind. When your mind isn't being too rational it often trips over new ideas. That's why Street Wisdom can really help. It allows busy people to break the routine and see things with fresh eyes. When you do that, great things happen. Executives get new insights. Teams get re-energised. People get a renewed sense of direction.

## How does Street Wisdom work?

It's deliberately really simple. It's a street-based workshop in three parts, each part taking one hour. Part one helps people tune up their senses so they see, hear and feel much more than they would normally. This is useful for part two – The Quest – where people think of a question they want answered and instead of 'thinking hard' about it, they go for a wander and let the sights, sounds and strangers around them inspire their thinking. The heightened awareness from part one really helps them pick up details we normally miss when we hurry through the streets, plugged into our iPhones, lost in thought. The final phase is where participants share with each other what happened on their street adventure.

During #MHAW, people should expect a fascinating experience but also to pick up techniques they can use afterwards - in the street or office - which can make each working day more manageable and satisfying. ■

For more info, see [STREETWISDOM.ORG](http://STREETWISDOM.ORG)