

GLWS ... it's not opening a can of worms is it?

The Issue

One in five employees is likely to be affected by depression or anxiety at some point in their lives i.e. there is mental ill health in our workplaces, **it's a fact.**

Whilst there has been a lot of positive noise and symbolism in recent times about the desire to destigmatize depression and anxiety at work, some organisations seem 'scared' to act on these positive intentions lest they open the proverbial 'can of worms'. At an individual level, some coaches and specialists in personal and leadership development can feel unsure of themselves at the prospect of surfacing conversations about mental health or difficult emotions. This nervousness on behalf of organisations and individuals is understandable and to be respected but it is not helpful in progressing the wellbeing agenda or concept of sustainable high performance.

In this short article we identify some of the reasons why there may be a reluctance to 'go there' and how we can respond appropriately to these concerns in the context of using GLWS.

Why the nervousness?

Many of the questions in GLWS are quite personal or potentially sensitive in nature for some respondents, and we pondered long and hard as to whether we should really be asking them, if they are too clinical in nature, or too invasive from a legal/privacy perspective. For example,

- *I feel lonely or isolated*
- *I experience damaging relationships in my personal life*
- *I give and receive, love, warmth and affection*
- *I feel depressed at work/home*
- *I feel worried or anxious at work/home*

Why the questions must be asked

1. Whilst fully acknowledging the potential for sensitivity surrounding such questions, we nonetheless feel there is a compelling ethical and professional obligation to support their inclusion in GLWS – on the grounds that any measure of wellbeing omitting an examination of these factors would be startlingly inadequate.
2. The scientific community is emphatic that our social, emotional and mental health are key determinants of our wellbeing. Therefore, we feel the inclusion and rigorous exploration of these influences is the only way to ensure GLWS offers a comprehensive and true profile of wellbeing. Their omission would be obstructive to the cause (i.e. helping individuals to develop their wellbeing) and any glossing over of issues or misleading of respondents would, in our view, be professionally irresponsible and ethically wrong.
3. Our challenge was to find ways of sampling the potentially sensitive areas in as safe, respectful and caring a way as possible. This is what we think we have achieved through the carefully chosen language of the items in question, and through the design and usage principles underpinning the way we position and invite respondents to complete the survey and the way we feel the de-briefs should be run. These points are expanded upon below.

How the GLWS can be a catalyst for change

1. Think of GLWS as a ‘first port of call’, an initial tool to encourage constructive and gentle self-screening. Our aim is to help provide senior leaders in need with an outlet to open up, voice their concerns, drop the mask, and access some useful advice, resources and support either during the GLWS de-brief or from subsequent referrals; helping executives do this should not be feared or thwarted – it is probably our most effective strategy for truly making inroads into improving wellbeing.
2. During a GLWS de-brief, respondents are never confronted with anything they haven’t already considered. In the GLWS reports, there are no wild leaps of faith or interpretative challenges to address; the questions are transparent and this means that the de-briefs hold no nasty surprises; the reports simply integrate (how the respondent has already rated) each of the individual questions aligned to the GLWS Framework. Whilst this doesn’t mean every de-brief session will be easy, it does **guarantee that only issues that have already been acknowledged and willingly shared will be discussed**, and this provides a solid, safe foundation upon which to have a meaningful and constructive conversation.

Ensuring 'safety' in the GLWS experience

We are committed to GLWS being used with high levels of professional standards where the dual principles of 'do no harm' and 'duty of care' are stringently upheld. We demonstrate this commitment through the following actions:

1. GLWS is only open for accreditation to carefully pre-selected experienced psychologists, coaches and OD/L&D practitioners who have high levels of existing relational, feedback and coaching skills at senior levels in the context of personal development.
2. GLWS must only be interpreted and de-briefed after completion of the GLWS accreditation processes, which includes training in the use of a comprehensive GLWS Debrief Guide and Coaching Guide. These give clear guidance in relation to the potential sensitivities for each question in GLWS.
3. As part of the accreditation process, all GLWS users are provided with a list of suggested professional contacts (such as clinical psychologists, sleep specialists and so on). This is to facilitate referrals for GLWS respondents in the event that their needs go beyond the capabilities and expertise of their accredited GLWS coach.

Purpose, privacy and confidentiality

From a legal and risk management perspective, the following points are designed to help build comfort, assurance and confidence in GLWS as an appropriate tool:

1. GLWS is to be used solely for developmental purposes; it must not be used as part of any selection or talent/capability evaluation process.
2. Completion of GLWS is always to be on a voluntary basis; potential respondents should not be put under pressure or any obligation to complete GLWS (or receive feedback) if this is unwanted.
3. Respondents do not have to confront aspects of their lives they would prefer to leave unexamined. There is a 'Not Answered' option for all questions – which can be selected where respondents do not feel comfortable sharing information. This is explained in the instructions along with the terms of confidentiality and respondents are required to confirm they have read and understood this prior to commencing the survey. Given these protections, we believe GLWS cannot be deemed to be invasive or in breach of privacy requirements.

4. GLWS is a confidential experience. Upon completion of the survey, a respondent's results must not be viewed or shared beyond the individual and their accredited GLWS coach. GLWS sits on a platform with world-class privacy and security policies. Our Privacy Policy can be found here <https://www.glswellbeing.com/privacy-policy/>
5. A verbal debrief in support of the Personal Report must be offered to every respondent, and this must be conducted by a suitably qualified and experienced individual who has been accredited in the use of GLWS and has agreed to the Terms & Conditions of Use.
6. And finally, we are clear that GLWS is not to be used or relied upon or treated as a substitute for specific professional advice and we recommend obtaining independent professional psychological or medical advice before making any decisions or taking any action in relation health, wellbeing and/or lifestyle choices, requirements or circumstances; there is a clear disclaimer regarding this position in the introduction of every report received by a respondent.

In conclusion

GLWS is most certainly not a test to evaluate or make a clinical diagnosis of depression, anxiety or any other mental/emotional/social health issue. That can only be done via a GP, psychiatrist or clinical psychologist and as a person accredited to debrief GLWS, there is zero requirement or expectation for you to have either this clinical expertise or the therapeutic counselling skills to address such issues.

As an accredited GLWS coach, what is expected is simply that you have the knowledge of how to interpret and feedback GLWS and strong relational skills. With these tools, you will be able to provide a confidential opportunity for anyone struggling with difficult experience and emotions to safely and privately reflect on these with you (to the extent they are comfortable doing so) and (to the extent of your own comfort and expertise) enable them to benefit from a supportive, clear debrief conversation.

In our experience, whilst some of the questions may be difficult for some respondents to face into and may well require referral to specialists in the areas of concern, the predominant emotion on their part is usually one of relief in being able to raise the issues and begin the process of getting some help in formulating a plan. Research on 100+ respondents' experience and views of completing GLWS showed that NONE of them found the experience anything other than constructive and valuable, even where significant wellbeing issues were identified.

As the accredited GLWS coach who is providing the de-brief service, some feelings of disquiet arising at the prospect of 'going there' in addressing potentially sensitive issues should generally be regarded as a natural and healthy sign of respect, and as an indication of appropriate concern for not over-stepping professional boundaries. We would be far more concerned at a blasé approach.

The only absolute hard and fast rule about when to refer a respondent to another more specialist professional is to **maintain and develop self-insight regarding the limits of your expertise and to stay well within the boundaries of your competence.**

Where GLWS is deployed as above, the process **will not** result in a slew of subsequent problems or dilemmas for individuals or their organisation; it **will** result in being a step closer to achieving the vision of a corporate world where leaders' wellbeing is addressed as central to the strategy for sustainable high performance.