



Build your mental fitness to avoid mental ill-health and burnout

It's certainly been a testing time in financial services with mental health unfortunately being so challenged for so many.

It's now common knowledge that we are able to avoid many physical illnesses such as cardio-vascular disease, diabetes and even cancer by promoting physical fitness.

The even better news (but not widely understood or accepted) is that it's possible to train our brains mentally to avoid mental ill-health and burnout.

The mental health and ill-health spectrum

Let's first talk about mental health and ill-health spectrum. Mental health is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as "a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community".

Burnout, anxiety and depression are at the other end of the mental fitness spectrum. And you don't go from mental health one day to mental ill-health the next. So based on this, and the statistics showing that 50% of people will suffer a mental health problem (higher in financial services), it's fair to say that far more than 50% of people are either suffering mental ill-health or on the spectrum away from enjoying mental health.

Your brain is like a muscle

The brain is like a muscle and it's wired for survival. Great if we are trying to run away from danger, but not so useful when our survival neural pathways become so strong that they become maladaptive. In this case our brain becomes more and more wired to look out for obstacles rather than opportunities.

So most of the time people are actually training their brains towards suffering a mental health problem rather than to avoid one.

Many advisers are running a mental marathon they never wanted to run

Marathon day is not the day you start your training. You need to train for it. It's the same for mental fitness – it's best to start training before having to deal with a difficult situation. Mentally, many advisers have found themselves in a marathon they never wanted to run, and that they certainly didn't train for.

Thanks to the intersection of psychology and neuroscience we now know that we can train our brains to form neural pathways which make us more resilient and less likely to suffer mental ill-health. We just need to focus on training neural pathways that are helpful (positive), rather than unhelpful (negative)...

Mental training depends on your level of mental fitness

People of varying fitness levels can all train to run a marathon – but their training plans will be different. The same can be said for mental fitness. Here are few easy exercises to help people who are currently further away from enjoying mental health.

It's impossible for the brain to have an unhelpful thought at the same time as a helpful thought. So every helpful thought you have is building that muscle instead of the unhelpful muscle, so the following tools work on that principle.

1. #crushinglife – your brain can't distinguish between something that is absolutely amazing like winning a \$20m lottery, and something which you make a massive deal out of like getting the last sandwich you wanted at lunch. So every time something great happens, no matter how small, make it seem big. At Next Evolution Performance we call these #crushinglife moments.
2. Gratitude – When you notice you are having a negative thought, try to think about something you are incredibly grateful for.
3. What went well – At the end of each day make a note of five things that went really well for you that day.

Stay off the spectrum

These are just a few tools to get you started, but please know that there is a lot of great science to help us to prevent mental ill-health and it's time we stopped waiting until we have a problem to take action, let's learn to stay off the spectrum in the first place.