

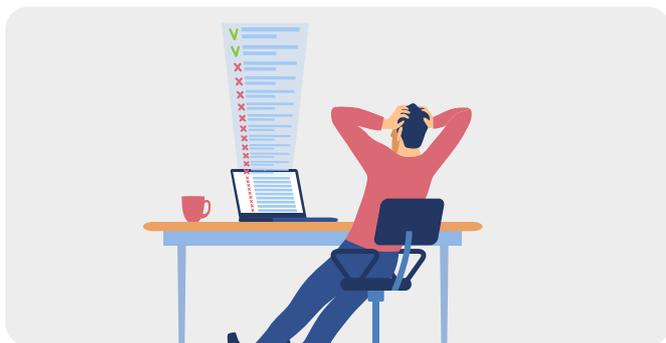
Octopus Real Estate with Dr Rob Archer

Octopus Real Estate and renowned career psychologist Dr Rob Archer join forces to better support brokers' health and wellbeing

Last month Octopus Real Estate hosted a broker breakfast and roundtable led by career psychologist Dr Rob Archer. The session, entitled *Resilience: Performing Under Pressure*, gave brokers the opportunity to reflect on the biggest challenges they have faced over the past two years and to identify their "stress triggers" to help improve mental wellbeing and performance.

Attended by 18 specialist finance brokers from firms across the UK, those present all agreed that their jobs involves dealing with highly emotive transactions on a day-to-day basis. One broker stated that *it can often feel like the hopes and dreams of clients rest on their shoulders*, which can become overwhelming.

This led to group discussions about how best to manage challenges to mental health and wellbeing. We are delighted to share the outcomes of these discussions here, to encourage conversations and provide tips surrounding what can often be a difficult subject.



The top three challenges to mental health and wellbeing according to brokers, according to the group:

1. Isolation and lack of support
2. Poor work-life balance
3. Emotional attachments to deals



Dr Rob Archer

Dr Archer went on to explain the difference between "good" and "bad" stress. In general, humans are well-evolved to deal with acute stress; when stress comes in short bursts, our attention is heightened, our focus is narrowed and we have increased energy and adrenaline. However, we are less equipped to deal with chronic stress. As Dr Archer puts it, "Chronic stress can damage our health and wellbeing, and also has serious implications for performance."

At times of high stress, fatigue, exhaustion and ill health dominate, negatively impacting both our personal and professional lives.

Stress signatures

Dr Archer encourages people to identify and discuss their "stress signatures"; the early signs and symptoms that indicate "good" stress is becoming "bad stress". Symptoms can be physical (exhaustion, headaches, weight loss or gain, insomnia, panic attacks), psychological (low morale, frustration, worry, apathy, boredom, depression) or behavioural (lower performance, decreased communication, lack of focus, defensiveness, negative attitude).

It is clear there are distinct pressures and stresses that are unique to working as a broker.

Top three pressures distinct to working as a broker, according to the group:

1. Time pressures
2. Pressure to deliver
3. Managing expectations of different parties

Dr Archer stresses the importance of having “non-negotiables” baked into our days or weeks – those moments for ourselves that they will carve out time for regardless of how busy their work life is. This could be as simple as keeping Sundays as an “offline” day, or taking the time to go for a walk on your lunchbreak.

Elite athletes

Elite athletes have incredibly high-performance routines, but always take the time to rest and recuperate, lest they injure themselves or burn out. The same principles can be applied to working in financial services; many brokers can admit to getting drawn into working patterns that are not optimised and which don't serve us.

Rob explains, “When tired, humans tend to make more mistakes, communicate less effectively and become much less productive. This ‘flat line’ way of working – where we flatten out the natural breaks and constraints of a normal working day - leads to increased distractibility, lower motivation and the feeling that we need to work longer hours to make up

for lost productivity. High-performance routines offer an alternative. They are a way of working in balance with our own human biology, by finding a working rhythm that keeps us at our best.”



High-performance routines can benefit us all, as they help us to:

1. Identify our true priorities
2. Work in a more focused way
3. Clearly delineate work and life, so that we can
4. Work more sustainably

Dr Archer encourages people to consider the concept of ‘marginal gains’ and making small, iterative changes to one’s routine.

Multitasking and task focus

The session ended with a word on multitasking; “A lot of us multitask to try and get through all the things we have to get done. Multitasking feels busy, but it can be inefficient for two reasons. Firstly, some of our attention remains with the task we’ve switched from, meaning we can’t devote all of our attention to the next task – this is the problem of attention residue. Secondly, the brain gets used to attention switching, which means we can become increasingly distractable.”

The participants then identified ways they could apply marginal gains to the subject of reducing multitasking and enhancing task focus.



Preparation
Build clarity of purpose, set goals and intentions



Warm down
Transition away from work and being recovery phase



Perform with focus
Work on highest priorities with maximum focus



Recovery
Replenish energy and gain perspective

Examples of applying marginal gains to improve task focus:

- Limit exposure to interruptions
- Block out strategic thinking time in the diary
- Create daily to-do lists to free up mental capacity
- Think about comparative advantage; what tasks can you delegate if possible?
- Distinguish between 'urgent' and 'important' tasks
- Offer increments of your time as opposed to 30 mins or an hour
- Reduce your time horizon; focus on one thing for just 10 mins if necessary
- Use focus apps to help limit the amount of time you spend procrastinating

With time management and various job stresses ranking highly as challenges identified by brokers, attendees were left to consider their own resilience plan to help them to better perform under pressure.

The session was well received, with brokers highly engaged throughout and emphatic in their promises to put Rob's advice into action.

Kim McGinley, Vibe Specialist

Finance: "It was so nice to have conversations with other business owners who 'get it' — the highs and lows and those with similar challenges to my own. Learning my triggers for stress is key for me; the intention to book time in my diary for ME is there, but everything else gets prioritised above me. Today I'm kick starting the week with my non-negotiables which I have re arranged in my diary and, starting today, I'm sticking to them! It was a great eye-opening session."



Nicholas Christofi, Sirius Property

Finance: "I found the event very helpful; the comparison between elite sports people and business people with regards to structure, process and mindset made it very easy to relate to. I took away a great deal in which I could personally integrate into to my business for marginal gains to optimise performance and leadership. We will be passing these insights to our team to give them the very best tools to succeed. Thank you to Octopus for a great morning."



Steve Matthews, Head of Residential Lending at Octopus Real Estate, who organised the event, concluded:



"There's no doubt hosting this event was a bit of a gamble; brokers are busy and they are used to attending events focused on products or processes, but we wanted to offer brokers some of the support that we have been lucky enough to enjoy as employees at Octopus.

"Our industry is fast-paced and stressful. Brokers and lenders rely on each other to provide the best outcomes for clients, so taking some time out to consider how important understanding our motivations and looking after ourselves is to improving performance and the customer journey was invaluable.

"The interaction from the brokers that attended far surpassed expectations and I've since heard from many that they have changed both personal and business practices as a result. I hope the take-outs in this short summary offers readers some ideas that they can adopt in their business and that it results in improvements in both performance and wellbeing."

Notes

Rob is Cognacity's UK Director. He is a Chartered Psychologist specialising in helping organisations and individuals build resilience, improve mental health and sustain high performance.

Having trained at the University of London and Ashridge Business School, Rob now provides training, coaching and consultancy for a wide range of clients including within financial and professional services and elite sporting teams.

Rob lives with his young family on the Olympic Park in London. He is also a former Schools and University cricket international, and fast deteriorating runner.

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