

# Deciding whether to speak up

## JOURNAL

*Have there been times in your career where you have felt like your mental health has or will impede on your ability to fulfill your dreams, goals and aspirations?*

# Deciding whether to speak up

## Reasons for and against speaking up at work

### TAKE NOTES

List some of the reasons that resonate most with you about why it's a good idea to speak up at work, about our mental health.

List some of the reasons that you wouldn't feel comfortable, or deem it not useful, to let the workplace know how your mental health is.

If you think that speaking up at work is the right thing to do for you, what are some important considerations when planning this process?

# **Deciding whether to speak up**

## **Should you take time off?**

Note down some of the things you'd consider before making a choice to take time off of work to take care of your mental health.

## **Reasons to stay at work**

## **Reasons to take some time off**

# Script to role play 'Healthy Workplace Interactions'

Manager and team member

Topic – Family illness

## INTRODUCTION

In this scenario, over the last few weeks, GRETCHEN, a manager has noticed that something is a bit off with one of her team members (PATRICK), and she wants to give the situation some attention. She has scheduled an extra half hour with him during their weekly 1:1, so that they can have a more in-depth talk.

The check in, in this situation, is reactive. The manager is responding to behaviour she has observed.

**GRETCHEN:** Hi Patrick. *(She welcomes him into her office)*

**PATRICK:** Hey. *(He sits down with a sigh)*

**GRETCHEN:** How's your day going so far?

**PATRICK:** Pretty good, pretty busy...

**GRETCHEN:** I know things are a bit chaotic in the office, so I appreciate you taking the time with me to check in this week. \*I scheduled an extra half an hour today so that we could slow down and chat a bit more. Is that still ok?

\*Brace.

**PATRICK:** Yep, that's fine.

**GRETCHEN:** \*So, the reason I wanted a little more time, is because in the team meeting last week, I noticed that you were more quiet than usual and I was also surprised that you didn't volunteer to work on the logo design project, which is something you are so great at, and so you're normally the first one to put your hand up for any of the design jobs. I've also noticed you've been sending email quite late at night, at irregular times. So I wanted to check if everything is ok?

\*Bringing in context

*(Silence)*

**PATRICK:** Ummm, I think I just want to be careful of my workload at the moment, make sure I am not extending myself too far.

**GRETCHEN:** Mmmmm. *(Pause)*

## Script to role play 'Healthy Workplace Interactions'

<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	How have you been feeling in general lately, if we had to put a number on it where 1 is feeling utterly depressed and 10 is completely thriving. <u>*Where do you think you'd be sitting most days?</u>	*Wellbeing scale.
<b>PATRICK:</b>	About a 6, I guess.	
<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	Ok <i>(Pause)</i> . <u>*Is there anything going on for you at the moment that you'd like to talk about?</u>	*Gentle curiosity.
<b>PATRICK:</b>	Kind of. I've just got some stuff going on with my family.	
<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	<u>*Ok, that sounds hard. If you feel comfortable, I'm here to listen.</u> <i>(Pause)</i>	* Reflecting. Willingness to sit in the mud.
<b>PATRICK:</b>	It's just a couple weeks ago, we found out that my mum has Stage 3 lung cancer.	
<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	<u>*<i>(Pause and take a deep breath)</i>.</u> <u>*Oh Patrick, I am so sorry to hear that.</u>	*Let it land. *Compassion.
<b>PATRICK:</b>	Thank you, it's just been a bit of a shock, so we're all not really sure what to do at the moment.	
<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	I bet. That must have been really confronting to hear.	
<b>PATRICK:</b>	Yeah, it was.	
<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	<u>And you've only recently found out, so you're still feeling quite shocked.</u>	*Summarising.
<b>PATRICK:</b>	Yeah, it's very strange, because I feel like my life has just changed really significantly, but nothing is really different yet.	
<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	<u>*Yes, that makes a lot of sense. So, I imagine that's making you feel pretty tense?</u>	*Reflecting and checking for impact.
<b>PATRICK:</b>	Yeah. It's just a lot to take in, and we're all feeling pretty helpless at the moment.	
<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	<u>*When you say, 'we're all', who do you mean? I know you're married, and you have a young daughter, but I wonder if you're referring to your family of origin?</u>	*Clarifying.

## Script to role play 'Healthy Workplace Interactions'

<b>PATRICK:</b>	Yes, Sophia, my wife, has been wonderfully supportive, but I am really most worried about my dad, and my sisters. They've all taken it really hard, especially dad, and I feel a sort of responsibility to step up and be the strong one who keeps it together and sorts everything out.	
<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	So that sounds like you're feeling a bit of pressure. <u>*Do you see yourself as the person who needs to be strong for the family during this time?</u>	*Questioning for story.
<b>PATRICK:</b>	Yes, but not because of what anyone has said or done, it's just what I consider my role in the family to be.	
<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	<u>*I understand. But you said, you're also feeling a bit helpless.</u>	*Empathy and clarifying impact (feelings).
<b>PATRICK:</b>	Yeah, for lots of reasons. Mostly because I can't take the disease away from mum, and I know what kind of pain and suffering she might be in for.	
<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	<u>*(Nods, silence)</u>	*Acknowledgement. Sit in the mud.
<b>PATRICK:</b>	(Continues) ... but also, I don't really know what to do first, and what things need to be arranged and which treatment options will be best. It's a pretty steep learning curve.	
<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	That does sound pretty overwhelming. <i>(Pause)</i> <u>*Several years back I had a similar experience when my father had a health scare, he's doing well at the moment, but I found it pretty worrying. So I have some sense of what you may be going through.</u>	* Personal sharing.
<b>PATRICK:</b>	Like you were worried you were going to lose him?	
<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	<u>*I was. Has that fear been coming up for you at all?</u>	
<b>PATRICK:</b>	Yes, constantly. But among the family we haven't talked about it, we want to remain positive, especially around mum.	* Sharing and then redirecting back to the help seeker.
<b>GRETCHEN:</b>	<u>*That makes a lot of sense. And I think it's important to be able to talk about everything that's coming up</u>	* Reflecting and showing compassion.

## Script to role play 'Healthy Workplace Interactions'

for you, but as you said, at the right time and with the right people. Your whole family is going through a difficult time, and you have some challenges ahead.

**PATRICK:** Yeah, we do.

**GRETCHEN:** \*From what you've described, your mum's diagnosis has had a pretty big and sudden impact on your whole family, leaving you feeling a range of things from shock, to fear and helplessness, all of which I would consider to be very understandable responses. Beneath all that, you're assuming the responsibility to step into a care taking role, both physically and emotionally. And what you really want is for your Mum to be ok, and for you to feel like you're doing everything you can to help keep everyone as safe and protected as possible. Have I got that right?

\* Summarise and clarify.

**PATRICK:** Yeah, that's right.

**GRETCHEN:** I can only imagine how hard this would be to leave at the door when you're coming to work. It's only natural that this would be on your mind. How is work contributing – either helping or hindering? \*Is there anything I as your manager and we as a company can do to support you?

\* Crossing the bridge into action planning.

**PATRICK:** It's been a bit hard to concentrate on work lately, because I always have mum in the back of my mind.  
*(Gretchen nods with understanding)*

**PATRICK:** *(Continued)* So, I guess that's why I may seem a little disengaged at times. And I think taking a few days off would be really helpful.

**GRETCHEN:** Absolutely, of course. I'm really glad you told me. I know that sometimes the normality of work tasks can be a welcome distraction, but I'm more than happy to look at lightening your schedule a little, so that you can prioritise your family matters. \*When you say, "a few days off", when would be the optimum time to take those? Is it something you need right now, or on an ongoing basis?

\*Working collaboratively with the employee on reasonable adjustments.

## Script to role play 'Healthy Workplace Interactions'

**PATRICK:** *(Pauses to think for a second)* I think, both would help.

**GRETCHEN:** \*Of course. What we can do is take a look at the personal leave and annual leave you have accrued, and I am willing to approve some time off now. Then perhaps on a regular basis, you can let me know when you need to take some days, or even half days off as required. How does that sound?

\*Reasonable adjustments: Workdays.

**PATRICK:** That sounds (he pauses) like a huge relief. Being at home as much as I can, would be very comforting.

**GRETCHEN:** \*Ok, well we *might be able* to make some arrangements for you to work at home more often as well. If we altered the type of projects you were on, reduced your client load and perhaps supplemented it with tasks you can complete alone or by video conference; Is that something you'd be interested in?

\*Reasonable adjustments: Work type and work location.

**PATRICK:** I'd appreciate that, yes.

**GRETCHEN:** And I'm not sure if you've ever used the EAP or accessed any of the other resources on our Wellbeing page, but I want to make sure you know you have access to \*free and confidential counseling from a range of qualified professionals who can help you through this process. \*You don't have to go through it alone.

\*Direct to professional support.

\*Reassure him he's not alone.

**PATRICK:** I actually did have a look on the Wellbeing page last week and I found some other useful resources.

**GRETCHEN:** That's great, Patrick. At times like this, when someone you love is going through something so difficult, you're naturally going to take a lot of that on. It sounds like you have wonderful support from Sophia at home, and I want you to know that if we can help you in any way, we will.

\*Let's monitor how you're going over the next few weeks, we'll apply some of those support measures, and if you're feeling like you can't cope and it's not getting any easier,

\*Reasonable adjustments: increased check ins.



# Script to role play 'Healthy Workplace Interactions'

## POINTS TO NOTE

The manager, Gretchen brought in some context for the check-in; the observed behaviours that prompted her to extend their regular meeting. She then used gentle curiosity and questioning to create a comfortable and trustworthy space for her staff member Patrick to open up about what's been occupying his mind.

She maintained an incredibly compassionate tone, validated his feelings, and kept appropriate boundaries. She also shared a little of her own personal experience to see if Patrick could relate to what she had felt in the past, this was a moment of vulnerability that builds trust and shows empathy and compassion.

She did not bring in a safety check, as Patrick did not show any indicators that his life was at risk. He displayed a fairly culturally universal response to receiving very difficult news, and did not express severe psychological distress.

Gretchen took a considerable time to listen to Patrick, to ensure that he felt seen, heard and understood before crossing the bridge to action and starting to ask about ways that she as a manager and they as a company could support him. She suggested several options for reasonable adjustments, but the emphasis was on letting Patrick lead on what he thought would work well for him at this time. It's important to note that she worked collaboratively with him, in a professional and human way with healthy involvement.

In this short conversation, here's what we learned:

## TRIGGER

Mum has a cancer diagnosis.

## IMPACT

- Shock, because it has only happened recently
- Tense, because the future is so uncertain
- Helpless, because he can't save his mum, also doesn't really know what the next steps and best choices are
- Fear, because he is afraid of losing his mum

# Script to role play '**Healthy Workplace Interactions**'

## **STORY**

He believes he has to be responsible for the wellbeing of his family, which is causing a sense of pressure, because he's decided he needs to step up and be the one keeping it together.

## **NEED**

To ensure the health of his mother, and feel he is contributing enough to support his family.

## **EVALUATION**

If the goal of the conversation was for Patrick to feel understood, Gretchen did a good job. She didn't refer to resources too quickly and didn't immediately make it about work. She held space for his story. When it was appropriate, she gave a list of possible options, offered to support him in managing his schedule and workload, and let him know that the company will assist him with the resources and support networks available to him.

Coming out of this conversation, we may expect that Patrick would feel some relief at being able to give his manager some context. He may also take some comfort from having his feelings received in a compassionate way. Finally, we hope that Patrick would now take up the offer of ongoing support offered by both his manager and HR.

Things that she could have done to build an even deeper supportive connection may have been to challenge the mindset that Patrick has, which was that he is responsible for his family's wellbeing. She could have also discussed some general coping strategies with him.