

Most Inspiring Senior Leader of the Year

Winner

**Emma Flaxman,
Head of Wellbeing, PHD Media**

This category recognises C-Suite / senior executives / directors who have led from the front to banish stigma and who went beyond their day job to advance the mental health workplace agenda

Emma is PHD's Marketing & New Business Director and has worked with the agency for over a decade. After saving her sister from suicide 11 years ago, Emma trained as a Mental Health First Aider (MHFA) in 2019 and has since made a huge impact on the agency. She's helped to create a team of dedicated colleagues who have supported her to conceive and share a host of wellbeing initiatives and support materials. On top of her day-to-day role of Marketing Director, Emma is the Co-Chair of the agency's mental health team in the agency and group and also supports on all comms for the other Diversity & Inclusion teams across the agency.

Emma formed MINDS, PHD's mental health and wellbeing team, at the end of 2019. In 2020, she handled a large number of confidential mental health calls during lockdown, supporting people to find resources, helping them to recover and in most instances, lending them an empathic ear when they needed it most. On top of this, she encouraged more members of the agency to join MINDS and empowered all 11 of them to take mental health awareness training. She then met with them monthly to share ideas on educating the rest of the agency on mental health.

Based on the mental health calls, Emma conceived and delivered a suite of documents including a guide to good



Emma's "Rules of Engagement" protect staff from burnout

mental health, a guide on supporting teams and an A-Z directory of mental health resources. Not only were these documents well received within PHD UK, they were also then taken and used at an Omnicom Media Group level as well as at PHD Global Network level.

Emma asked the MINDS team for feedback on the struggles of agency life. She worked beyond her hours to create a series of initiatives in the hope of minimising pressure on her colleagues. After learning that days during lockdown

seemed to be extending, Emma created a “Rules of Engagement” piece that was shared agency-wide on when and how to communicate internally. This included not sending emails before 8am or after 6pm and not adding meetings during lunch, enabling her peers to take their full hour.

The comms also encouraged staff to use video calls only when necessary, to ensure people could have regular breaks from their screens. From feedback that clients were not supporting the engagement rules, Emma worked on a client “Charter for Engagement”, telling clients not to call personal mobiles of junior members out of hours and to contact people outside working hours only in emergencies.

Reclaiming lunch hour

Clients were asked to ensure they didn’t book meetings between noon and 2pm to ensure people could be at their best. Emma wrote the comms in such a way that clients actively supported this and it resulted in fewer mental health calls overall. Emma actively reclaimed the lunch breaks of all PHDs by regularly booking out an hour in their diaries to stop other meetings filling the space.

She also started an Open Letters initiative, writing about and sharing agency-wide her own experience of working from home with two children under five. During Mental Health Awareness Week in 2021, she encouraged five employees in the agency to share their own stories covering bereavement, burnout, stress, and working with ADHD. More open letters have been written since and the initiative now part of the overall D&I strategy to help educate the agency on the experiences of her peers across under-represented groups.

Emma is now working on initiatives to proactively support people with the hopes that anyone suffering is supported and poor wellbeing doesn’t stem from work. This includes rebranding pitches to be about stepping into the spotlight rather than taking on additional workloads and putting more supportive processes and resources in place. She has also increased the number of MHFAs from two in 2019 to six in 2020 and 12 in 2022. ■



✦ Emma has broken through so many barriers in a very short space of time and during a particularly challenging period for so many employees. She’s provided a safe space for those who are in mental distress and through all her activities, is actively breaking down stigma and creating meaningful change for a workplace that was lacking in mental health support and awareness.

✦ Emma’s tenacity and drive to develop a programme of support through a pandemic is inspiring. Evidence of reduced mental health calls is a clear measure of the positive impact this has had. Emma’s commitment whilst juggling home working pressures is incredible.

Highly Commended

→ Jed Khan
Director &
DiversAbility
Co-Chair
AVANADE



Shortlisted

→ David Davenport-
Firth
OGILVY

→ Kris Hall
**THE BURNT CHEF
PROJECT**

