



The elephant in the cab



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Some topics are hard to think about, let alone talk. We all have those things that make us squirm a bit. For some of us, it's the sight of blood and for others it's talking about our feelings or admit that we're struggling. I understand that for some people discussing mental health issues is not easy, but the consequences of keeping them to yourself can be damaging, so I guess it's all about managing your needs as best you can.

In many ways, I liken mental health to a battery with a charge indicator on it. Sometimes, your tank is full and you can handle anything that life throws at you. However, when it's half full, you may get annoyed at people, be forgetful, and suffer from low energy, and when you're really empty and unwell, you may become easily angered, aggressive, suffer from constant fatigue, and be unable to sleep.

A healthy mental state is where you have normal mood changes, you take things in your stride, go through life with a good sense of humour, enjoy consistent performance, normal sleep patterns, behave ethically and morally, and enjoy alcohol in moderation. You eat normally, are physically and socially aware, and enjoy a balanced diet. If there are small variations for a short period of time, that's ok, it's called life.

St John uses the example of a bucket filling with water, which represents our tolerance levels and it

only takes so much before it overflows. We have to drill a few holes around the bottom to let the water out every now and then and relieve the pressure.

Everyone has things they enjoy, be it visiting family, going to the movies, being active, driving your vintage car, or going for a walk with the dog, but it is also good to stop and smell the roses. Stay in the moment and recognise the good things and count your blessings. Take up a new interest or a hobby. One of the most satisfying things is to practice the underrated art of giving—it doesn't have to be a grand

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expensive gesture; something small can put a smile on someone's face, which, in turn, will give you a lift.

A driver I work with regularly gives me a muffin or a chocolate, which is not great for the waistline but it's a little treat that reminds me to enjoy myself. I appreciate the gesture and I know he enjoys it, too.

When we become reactive that can be an indicator of the start of

psychological distress. Ongoing sadness and a sense of being overwhelmed are common feelings. Sarcasm, procrastination, forgetfulness, difficulty sleeping, low energy, headaches, decreased social activity and increased alcohol, gambling or overspending are also good indicators that something is wrong.

It's important to recognise these issues as early as possible and talk with someone before you reach the red zone of your rev counter. We all get our gear cogs worn down from time to time, so there's no disgrace in asking for help and throttling back on the aspects of your life that cause you stress.

As mental health ambassadors such as John Kirwan constantly remind us: be kind to yourself and apply the simple recipe of more rest, healthy food, and exercise. Go grab that really good memory and find a reason to smile at something, and whatever you do, make sure you talk to your partner or significant other.

Finally, I recommend to anyone struggling to call the number 1737 that will put you through to the National Telehealth Service. You can talk to a trained counsellor anytime of the day and night, who will be there to listen and discuss the problems you are facing.

Whatever you do, do not suffer through mental illness on your own. Seeking help is the most important step to wellness. ■

