# Gerry Farrell exposes enduring stigma and burnout in advertising despite growing mental health awareness



In a candid reflection on mental health struggles within the advertising industry, Gerry Farrell, writing for The Drum, opens up about his own experience with depression and burnout. He recalls a particularly low moment: sitting on the edge of his bed, feeling like a "concrete statue," and grappling with the realization that mental health challenges can affect anyone, irrespective of familial history. Farrell, who initially believed that he was immune to these issues due to his mother's bipolarity and his sisters' similar battles, was struck by the harsh reality that mental illness can be unpredictable and indiscriminate.

Despite growing awareness around mental health in the workplace, there remains a profound stigma surrounding open discussions about psychological well-being. Many employees, including Farrell, have observed that while physical ailments—illustrated through a theatrical cast or injury—invite empathy and concern, mental health crises often lead to isolation and judgement. According to a survey conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, while 74% of employees feel it is acceptable to discuss mental health issues, only about 58% are comfortable discussing their own due to fears of stigma and judgement. This disconnect indicates a significant gap between the discourse around mental health and the reality faced by individuals struggling with it.

Farrell’s experience at an agency that boasted mental health support proved to be emblematic of a broader issue within many workplaces. Despite the existence of policies purportedly aimed at supporting those with mental health challenges, like the one he encountered at SeeMe, a Scottish charity, he found the actual environment disheartening. His line manager's preference for a facade of normalcy translated into a lack of genuine support, further exacerbating his struggles. It is reflective of findings from the Global Business Collaboration for Better Workplace Mental Health, which suggest that nearly a third of employees would not disclose mental health issues to their supervisors, fearing discrimination and a lack of effective support.

This issue of burnout is particularly poignant in advertising—a field notorious for its high-pressure environment where deadlines and expectations can be overwhelming. Farrell's assertion that "advertising causes burnout" resonates with a broader narrative surrounding workplace culture; as the post-pandemic landscape continues to evolve, employers are increasingly recognising mental health as a critical concern in retaining talent. Employers have begun to offer initiatives such as mental health days and teletherapy, yet the stigma associated with mental health, especially amid a competitive job market, continues to serve as a barrier for many.

Efforts to normalise mental health discussions are gaining traction, thanks in part to initiatives like the All Inclusive: Mental Health event organised by the Scottish government. Such gatherings allow professionals from varying backgrounds to share their stories of struggle and recovery, thereby fostering a culture of openness. Reflecting on a serendipitous encounter with a former colleague, Farrell highlights a poignant moment of connection that underscores the importance of shared experiences in destigmatising mental health conversations. The colleague’s unvoiced struggles for two decades serve as a timely reminder that even amidst growing awareness, many still suffer in silence, desperate for validation and support.

However, for meaningful change to occur within workplaces, a collective effort to dismantle the stigma surrounding mental health is essential. As highlighted by experts, superficial measures fall short; organisations must foster an environment where conversations about mental health become standard practice. This requires not just policies, but training for managers and a shift towards genuine empathy and understanding. Research indicates that well-trained leaders who can navigate difficult discussions are crucial to creating a supportive workplace culture.

Through his journey, Farrell has discovered effective coping strategies and readily available resources, such as mindfulness apps and mental health hotlines, which have played a significant role in his recovery. He urges that an awareness of mental health support options and a willingness to engage with them can empower individuals experiencing similar struggles to take proactive steps towards their well-being. The way forward lies in open dialogue and comprehensive support systems, ultimately enabling a transformative shift in how mental health is perceived and addressed in the workplace.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/opinion/2025/05/29/break-arm-they-sign-the-stookie-get-depressed-they-send-you-home), [[4]](https://www.axios.com/2021/08/16/mental-health-is-the-next-big-workplace-issue)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://time.com/6694472/mental-health-in-the-workplace/), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/9dd296c8-0214-407a-a10d-7bd024508d28)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/opinion/2025/05/29/break-arm-they-sign-the-stookie-get-depressed-they-send-you-home), [[2]](https://time.com/6694472/mental-health-in-the-workplace/), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/9dd296c8-0214-407a-a10d-7bd024508d28), [[4]](https://www.axios.com/2021/08/16/mental-health-is-the-next-big-workplace-issue)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://time.com/6189818/workplace-mental-health-policies/), [[6]](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/08/overcoming-stigma-three-strategies-toward-better-mental-health-in-the-workplace/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/opinion/2025/05/29/break-arm-they-sign-the-stookie-get-depressed-they-send-you-home), [[4]](https://www.axios.com/2021/08/16/mental-health-is-the-next-big-workplace-issue)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thedrum.com/opinion/2025/05/29/break-arm-they-sign-the-stookie-get-depressed-they-send-you-home> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://time.com/6694472/mental-health-in-the-workplace/> - A recent survey by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) indicates that while employees and managers are more comfortable discussing mental health in the workplace, significant gaps remain in creating a supportive environment. Among over 2,000 respondents from companies with at least 100 employees, 74% felt it was acceptable to discuss mental health issues, but only 58% were comfortable discussing their own mental health due to concerns like stigma and judgment. Despite many employees feeling supported emotionally at work, around half experienced burnout, and 27% considered quitting due to mental health issues. While executive leadership plays a crucial role in normalizing mental health discussions, 70% of managers lack training to address these issues. Solish emphasizes the importance of organizations investing in mental health resources and transparent communication about available support, noting that unaddressed mental health concerns can negatively impact overall organizational success.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/9dd296c8-0214-407a-a10d-7bd024508d28> - Despite numerous campaigns and initiatives surrounding mental health awareness at work, a report by the Global Business Collaboration for Better Workplace Mental Health indicates that these efforts may not be enough. Nearly one-third of the surveyed employees would not disclose mental health issues to their bosses, and half of those who did faced discrimination. Only 22 percent noticed a decrease in workplace stigma since the pandemic, and less than half found their workplace support effective. Experts suggest that superficial efforts are insufficient. Real changes, such as addressing pay disparities, reducing workloads, and empowering employees, are more crucial. Effective support requires more than external interventions or CEO pledges; it hinges on skilled line managers who can handle difficult conversations and foster a supportive environment. Transforming workplace culture and environment is key to genuinely assisting employees with mental health challenges, ensuring actions are meaningful rather than merely promotional.
4. <https://www.axios.com/2021/08/16/mental-health-is-the-next-big-workplace-issue> - Mental health has emerged as a critical workplace issue, with companies recognizing the importance of addressing it to retain employees amid the pandemic. The prolonged pandemic has exacerbated issues like isolation and America's opioid crisis, leading to increased burnout and addiction among workers. Employers are responding by offering resources such as mental health days and online therapy sessions. However, the persistence of stigmas associated with mental health and addiction remains a barrier, with 72% of U.S. employers identifying it as an obstacle to workers seeking help. Middle managers are highlighted as key players in supporting employees' mental health. As workplaces shift to remote or hybrid models, regular check-ins on mental well-being by managers will become increasingly important. Addressing mental health effectively could help companies in the competitive battle for talent.
5. <https://time.com/6189818/workplace-mental-health-policies/> - Kamini Cormier experienced unexpected stress-induced pains during the pandemic, leading her to seek mental health support from her employer, Accenture. Mental health conversations at work have become more acceptable, with employees increasingly seeking employer-provided mental health resources. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of mental health, with companies like Bank of America and Accenture expanding mental health programs and promoting open discussions to break the stigma. Despite these efforts, mental health is not yet a top concern for all businesses, with many pulling back on mental health initiatives as workers return to the office. Digital mental health tools have seen significant adoption, supporting employees with resources like therapy apps. Caitlin Tregler, who faced increased anxiety during the pandemic, benefitted from her employer's mental health programs, demonstrating the critical need for support and open environments in the workplace.
6. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/08/overcoming-stigma-three-strategies-toward-better-mental-health-in-the-workplace/> - To effectively address mental health stigma in the workplace, organizations should implement targeted programs that educate employees and promote supportive teams. Key strategies include providing mental-health-literacy training to all employees, training leaders and managers to recognize signs of distress, and using contact-based education strategies where individuals with lived experiences share their stories. These approaches aim to mitigate harmful sentiments and create a culture of psychological safety, enabling employees to seek help without fear of discrimination.