

**six minutes with**

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MANAGING PARTNER, SWAAB ATTORNEYS



**You have a deep interest in the wellbeing of the legal profession. Where does that come from?**

Growing up, my family had little focus on material possessions and more on being a good person and caring for the less fortunate. When I joined Swaab, the firm's core value, "generosity of spirit", resonated with me. We have built on this core value and developed our own philosophy around the employer/employee relationship. A significant part of this is caring for the whole person and investing in their welfare, both at work and outside of work. At Swaab, we set high expectations of appropriate behaviour and fostering wellbeing. We take it very seriously.

**You've decided to complete a course in counselling. What's the driver?**

I have a longstanding interest in human behaviour and psychology. I spend

a significant amount of time talking to people, trying to understand their challenges, and presenting tools to assist. As a director of Minds Count and a managing partner, it is my responsibility to ensure I am equipped to deal with the complexity of human relationships and interaction. There is no better way to achieve this than further study and professional training.

**The news is pretty grim when it comes to the mental health of the profession. Do you think this can change?**

Over the last 10 years, many in our profession have promoted the importance of mental health in firms and organisations. Increased awareness has propelled more conversation and openness, better resources and assistance, and an acceptance of responsibility for wellbeing as a profession. While the statistics suggest

high mental health conditions in law, I am not aware of any data which suggests mental health conditions are higher than 10 years ago. There is definitely more discussion and an appetite to understand and assist. Generally, people in law want to be better equipped to identify mental health conditions and ensure those who need help get it quickly.

**Do you think the way in which law is practised, and the traditional structure of law firms, has an impact on wellbeing?**

Yes. Billable hours and a personal budget – thrown into a pot with a desktop, laptop, ipad, smart phone and all the latest technology – has created an expectation from clients that we are available 24/7. This pot is a ticking time bomb. It is precisely why firms and organisations must take responsibility for mental health. Helping people create boundaries and develop tools to manage workload, timelines, personalities and expectations while maintaining integrity, service standards, excellence and client relationships, is integral to keeping people sustainable and happy. I am not suggesting it's easy – but it needs and can be done.

**What can law firms do better when it comes to caring for their employees?**

Walking the talk is a powerful message. We want to see law firm leaders talking about mental health to the firm, championing the issue, putting it on the firm's strategic agenda, and providing relevant and accessible resources and training. However, there's more to it – the real test of the firm's stance on caring for its employees is how the firm deals with its people when they have personal challenges in their life. The commitment to wellbeing needs to be woven through the culture of the firm. People want to see the commitment, not just hear about it.