



Good Foundations

British Olympic diver Leon Taylor talks about wellness as a foundation for all those in a high pressure environment.

In March 2019, Leon Taylor, a former British Olympic medallist presented at NextGen's second speaker event this time focussing on wellness. High performing workplaces invariably create high pressure environments. But how do you prevent that pressure from turning into chronic stress? Having spent 30 years in a high performance sport first as an athlete and now as a coach and mentor, Leon is no stranger to stress and its ability to help and hinder performance.

"The key to performing consistently at your best is to know that you simply cannot overlook your personal wellness and that you have to take responsibility for this," said Leon. "This doesn't mean coming to work all zen, it means focussing on the factors that you can control, making sure you are doing everything in your power to ensure that you have enough sleep, have had opportunities to switch off, are eating correctly and drinking enough water. It isn't rocket science and sounds obvious but statistically it has been proven that if we are not in a state of wellness then our ability to access the right state of mind to operate at a high level is completely compromised."

Achieving the right state of mind for high performance is not solely about how you look after your body but also the attitude you bring. Leon explained this means finding balance, giving yourself choices and focusing on the things that are in your control.

"The attitude you bring to your work and life in general is the bedrock to wellness and your ability to influence others," said Leon. "In high pressure jobs or situations you cannot waste your energy on external factors that are outside your control. Being present with an optimistic attitude is half the battle. Doing this day after day takes its toll, which is why the philosophy about wellness centres around balance. I think work life balance is a bit over-used and unachievable, as we spend more than half our lives at work. I view balance more like a scorecard, where you list all the things you enjoy doing, such as time with friends, family, travelling, reading etc. then it's about making sure you tick these off. It also involves choice and variety. If the only thing you can do to wind down is to have a glass of wine, this won't be beneficial. But if having a glass of wine is one option among the many things that you do to wind down, you are more likely to be able to switch off and to perform well the next day."