

# Engaging senior leaders globally on workplace mental health

*A conversation with Phil Canale, International Business Planning Manager, BNY Mellon, and Global Co-Chair of BNY Mellon's Diverse Abilities Network*

## What is HEART at BNY Mellon?

“HEART is BNY Mellon’s Diverse Abilities Network. Our mission is to raise awareness and leverage the talent of employees with diverse abilities to help build an inclusive, accessible, safe and respectful environment, and to support those caring for others with diverse abilities.”

## How does BNY Mellon structure its engagement with senior business leaders?

“Globally we structure HEART both ‘horizontally’ and ‘vertically’. ‘Horizontally’ each of our five regions has an executive sponsor. Vertically, we have five pillars: mental health; neurodiversity; chronic and life health events, physical disability; and caring. Each of our pillars also has an executive sponsor.

“When we are looking for executive sponsors, we are clear about the expectations for the role. This includes being an advocate, demonstrating visible leadership, supporting with strategic thinking aligned to the global strategy and supporting on overcoming challenges so that we can deliver against our objectives.

“We don’t tell someone to take the job on, but rather look for individuals who are passionate about HEART and our strategic objectives.

“Once someone is in the role, we support them in a variety of ways. For example, we provide them with key messages and data that they can adapt to

suit their style for speaking engagements and social media.”

## Do you have to change your approach in different countries?

“We have consistency in terms of the expectations of the role. However, we are respectful of cultural differences and so there is nuance to the regions.”

## What are some examples of how leaders can demonstrate vulnerability?

“It’s important to recognise that you can’t just expect leaders to be vulnerable. You need to create the environment for them to feel safe which takes time. Leaders need to know that if they are vulnerable that there won’t be an adverse reaction.

“However, our expectation of the role they are taking on is that they will be visible and active, not invisible and passive. It’s not a figurehead position, it’s about being a participant in the journey.

“At BNY Mellon we talk about both planned and surprise vulnerability. One example of planned vulnerability was on a recent panel with four of our senior executives who had a discussion about psychological safety and vulnerability.

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One of the questions asked to the panelists was to disclose a time when they felt vulnerable. One of the panelists shared how when he first joined BNY Mellon, he sat in executive meetings and didn't understand everything people were saying. He had joined from a consultancy background and had never worked in a global bank before. He shared how having people on the executive team who he could speak to and learn from helped him. This was powerful – having one of the most senior people in the organisation, talk openly about what we might consider imposter thoughts and feeling like he was out of his depth.

“A less prepared example of vulnerability happened recently in Mental Health Awareness Month. We ran an event with a helicopter pilot from the RAF on decision making and focusing on one thing at a time. The opening remarks were presented by a senior Global Head of Investment Management. We provided him with brief speaker notes but told him to put his own spin on it. Without prompting, he spoke about being the parent of a child with ADHD.

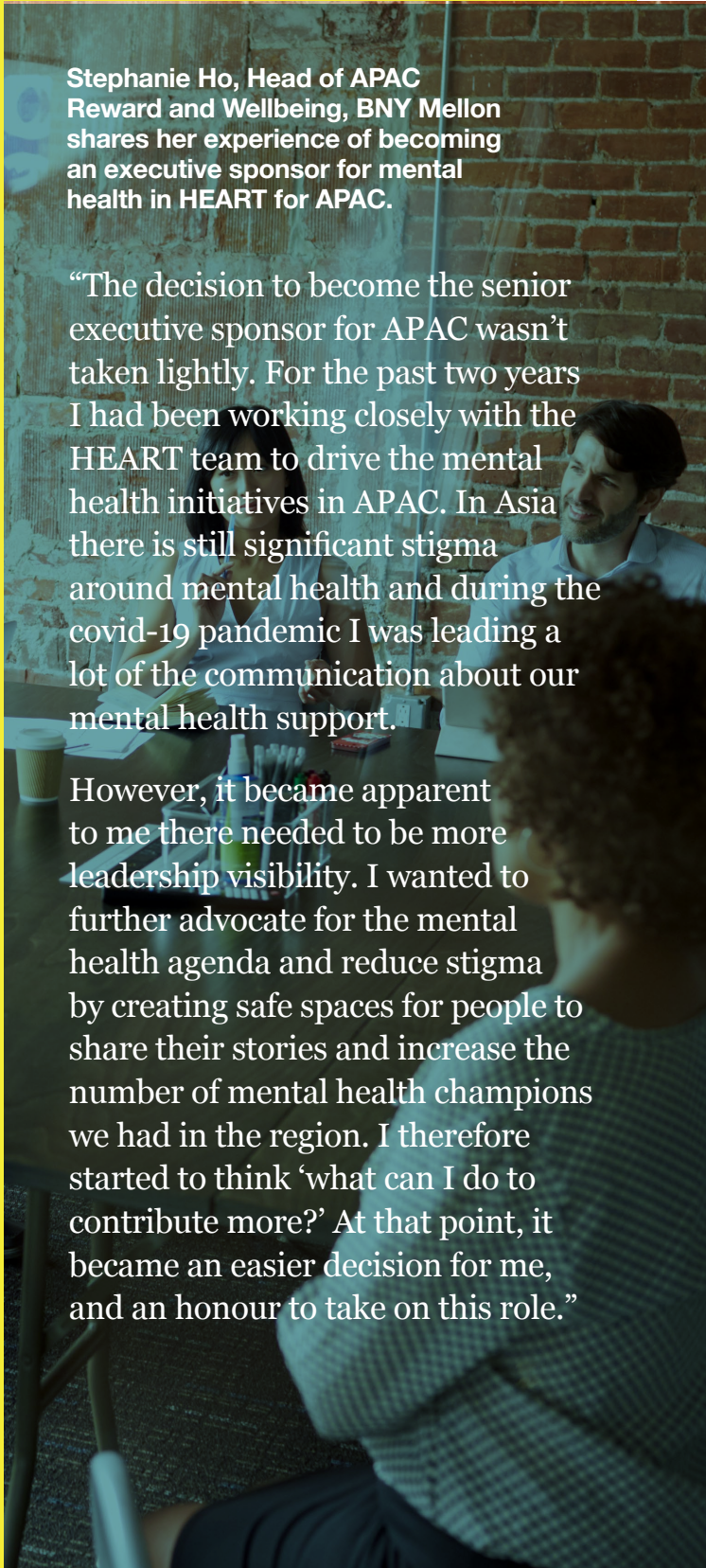
“The impact of these examples is really powerful. It helps break down stigma. Having leaders demonstrate vulnerability means other people will be encouraged to speak out more and to seek help if they need it.”

#### **How do you find your executive sponsors for mental health?**

“We work with our D&I and Wellbeing leaders in each region to determine how we will approach the search for an executive sponsor. This includes who we should approach and how we should position the opportunity. We share the benefits of the opportunity – i.e. what's in it for the individual and the organisation. On an individual level we explain why we want their voice to be part of this agenda, ways we can help raise their profile internally and externally and how we will support them in the role. From an organisation standpoint we share how this is a big commercial differentiator for us, playing into how we attract and retain talent.

“In addition, on an ongoing basis we keep an eye out for senior people who express an interest in our mental health activities. This is important for succession planning. At some point existing executive sponsors will step down from the role or leave the organisation and this is an opportunity to bring someone new in with a fresh approach. Part of this means considering throughout the year how to involve a variety of leaders in our

mental health and wellbeing activities. For example, we invite different people to make opening or closing remarks for our mental health and wellbeing panels. This light touch engagement gets different colleagues involved in our work and enables them to see the power of what we are doing. It helps build a pipeline of senior leaders who are actively engaged and might one day become executive sponsors”.



**Stephanie Ho, Head of APAC Reward and Wellbeing, BNY Mellon shares her experience of becoming an executive sponsor for mental health in HEART for APAC.**

“The decision to become the senior executive sponsor for APAC wasn't taken lightly. For the past two years I had been working closely with the HEART team to drive the mental health initiatives in APAC. In Asia there is still significant stigma around mental health and during the covid-19 pandemic I was leading a lot of the communication about our mental health support.

However, it became apparent to me there needed to be more leadership visibility. I wanted to further advocate for the mental health agenda and reduce stigma by creating safe spaces for people to share their stories and increase the number of mental health champions we had in the region. I therefore started to think ‘what can I do to contribute more?’ At that point, it became an easier decision for me, and an honour to take on this role.”