

Peter S's Journey to Prioritising Wellbeing as a Headteacher

'I needed to do something to help me otherwise I would be leaving Headship.'

Summary

Peter S. successfully completed the *Headteacher Heart Health Programme* in April 2023. Over the six weeks of the programme, he experienced significant improvements, including increased self-awareness, reduced reactivity to challenges, improved sleep and a positive impact on his personal life.

Key Outcomes:

1. Increased Self-Awareness:

- Peter developed the ability to recognise signs of stress quickly.
- He implemented timely, proactive measures to address stress.

2. Reduced Reactivity and Enhanced Resilience:

- He adopted a more thoughtful approach to challenges, developing a greater resilience.
- Peter successfully navigated high-pressure situations, such as Ofsted inspection, with composure.

3. Improved personal life:

- Work-related stresses had a diminished impact on Peter's personal life.
- He noticed improved relationships and better sleep quality.

"The only way you can be successful in this role is to think of yourself as well as others."

Struggling with the pressures of being a Headteacher

Peter is the headteacher of a small primary school who found himself struggling with the pressures that come with being a headteacher. He described it as a lonely position. *"People come to you with their problems, you help them, relieve their workload and their stresses. However you end up taking on all of these problems, and they build up."*

Further compounded by the enduring challenges of Headship, including the looming prospect of an Ofsted inspection, these pressures became increasingly overwhelming and were taking its toll on his mental and physical health, as well as affecting his personal life outside of school. He eventually went to his GP and was signed off with stress.

'You go home, you're emotionally drained, physically drained...and that isn't a life. The job shouldn't take so much out of you.'

Understanding how stress affects the body

Having been signed off work, Peter realised he needed to make some changes, or he would end up leaving Headship, so he attended a free webinar run by Maria Brosnan.

Following the webinar, Peter joined the *Heart Health for Headteachers Programme*, providing him with essential insights into the physiological effects of stress on the body.

Peter said that one of the key things he took from the programme was understanding how stress affects the body. It helped him understand that he was not a failure, but rather, his body was reacting normally to the extreme demands he faced.

Peter found that the practices using the *Inner Balance* technology, which is a key part of the training, helped him relax at the end of each day and set a positive tone in the mornings. Before facing stressful meetings, he learned to take a moment to engage in calming breathing exercises, significantly improving his ability to navigate challenging situations effectively.

'I couldn't help my school, and I can't help my staff if I haven't got myself sorted. I had done so much for other people, I had forgotten myself.'

Enhanced resilience to the Ofsted call

Peter was put to the test when he received the Ofsted inspection call the day he returned to work. Thanks to his new understanding and practices, he maintained his composure and didn't let it 'send him into a spiral'. By thinking clearly, staying coherent, and taking brief moments of reflection, he successfully navigated this high-pressure situation.

Peter sees one of the most significant developments in his journey being his newfound self-awareness. He can now recognise when stress is building up and knows when and how to take proactive steps to address it. He has developed the ability to pause and reflect before addressing any issues, ultimately allowing him to respond more effectively and positively.

Prioritising his wellbeing has had a significant impact on Peter's personal life too, as well as improving his sleep. Most notably, he is able to switch off and fall asleep much quicker.

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The importance of prioritising self-care

Peter's advice to other Heads in the same position is to prioritise self-care, and for him, this training fits the bill. Understanding that you are not alone in your struggles, and taking time for yourself is crucial to success in this demanding role. For Peter, prioritising his wellbeing has had a transformative impact.

'It is very surprising how much help it (the programme) can give you....every head teacher is going through this and it's just about strategies to help...don't think you are alone in how you are feeling.'

For more information on how you can take part in the Heart Health for Headteachers Programme, contact Maria Brosnan at:

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