

HOW TO IMPROVE FRONTLINE WORK

Frequently Asked Questions



WELCOME TO **FAQs** FOR THE **4 BOOSTS**



You asked, we answered...

1. This all sounds good, but it might be hard to put into practice given how busy things are now. Are other people doing it and if so - how?
2. Things are hard right now with the uncertainty and cost of living / energy crises. Can this help the business survive and thrive?
3. We are a big business, so we cannot get to know our workers like a small business can. How do we show we care about people and their lives? **OR** We are a small business, so we do not have the HR support and the resources of a large business. How do we show we care about people and their lives?
4. We are a rural business, so we find it hard to attract workers given the current petrol prices / lack of public transport at night. How does the 4 Boosts help us address that?
5. We are a seasonal business, so we find that we put effort into getting to know people / training them up and then they leave, and that effort has been wasted. How does the 4 Boosts help us address that?
6. The nature of our work is hard / busy / pressured / reactive / dirty / difficult, so how do we put the 4 boosts into action?
7. We still need the workers to do what we need them to do for the business, we can't just give them what they want, can we?
8. Can you give some examples of ways in which other businesses in hospitality / retail / care and charities are putting this into practice?
9. As managers we would love to do this, but we are not confident – what is our responsibility and what are the workers' responsibilities?

These FAQs were summarised and simplified from multiple interviews for the Good Jobs Project Norfolk 2022, carried out by researchers at UEA Norwich Business School, when interviewees were presented with the [4 Boosts for Frontline Workers infographic](#).

1 This all sounds good, but it might be hard to put into practice given how busy things are now. Are other people doing it and if so - how?

Yes, despite some very real challenges in areas of frontline work at the moment, there are other people doing this right now - in large and small organisations, in cities, towns and rural areas, across hospitality, retail, care, tourism, charities and other frontline work. We have heard roughly three different responses to the 4 boosts:

1. We are doing these already.... (seeing the 4 boosts as ‘the basics’)
2. Wow – this is helpful... (seeing the 4 boosts as useful to act upon)
3. Good, but.... (seeing the 4 boosts as somewhat challenging to act upon)

We can learn from those who saw the 4 Boosts as the “basics” or “bread and butter” of what they do. They act differently depending on sector, but in common:

- They believe that the workforce is the heart of what they can deliver as businesses and invest management time in paying attention to workforce needs. Their time priorities are strongly influenced by the belief that investing time now in managing, listening and training (formally and informally) will avoid workforce problems and worker loss that will take up more time / cost more later.
- They listen to the workforce either through surveys, committees, reps or just chatting with people at work - the ways depend on the size of the company / workforce. They consider that input alongside business concerns when taking decisions that affect worker lives.
- They role-model good behaviours they would like to see in workers, including helpfulness, friendliness and ‘mucking in’ when times are hard.

At Norwich Business School we have launched a network of people who are interested in improving their business’ workplace wellbeing (from whatever starting point – beginner or experienced). If you are interested in learning more from other practitioners and/or sharing your experiences, please join: [https://
evolveworkplacewellbeing.org/launch-of-the-evolve-workplace-wellbeing-network/](https://evolveworkplacewellbeing.org/launch-of-the-evolve-workplace-wellbeing-network/)

2 Things are hard right now with the uncertainty from the pandemic, the cost of living and energy crises. Can the 4 Boosts help the business survive and thrive in this environment?

Research suggests that actions like the ones shown in the 4 Boosts infographic and handbook can improve workplace wellbeing. Better workplace wellbeing has been associated with greater worker productivity and creativity and reduced absence and turnover costs ([see this factsheet](#)). In the current recruitment and retention crisis,



retention through good workplace relationships and earning a reputation as a good employer is to be encouraged to help the business survive and thrive. So, in general, boosting worker wellbeing can be a way to thrive as a business.

However, it is important to note that there are no guarantees as sometimes external forces or unexpected events will impact in ways that cannot be addressed by the 4 Boosts (just as the recommendation that you eat 5 fruit and veg a day is a good guide, but not a guarantee that you will never get ill or injured). But we do know that how the business is managed and organised is generally in the control of managers and so paying attention to the 4 Boosts is a way to invest in the future and make it as likely to succeed as possible. In some cases, it can even help mitigate the effects of external shocks and uncertainty, even if they cannot be completely avoided.

3 We are a big business, so we cannot get to know our workers like a small business can. How do we show we care about people and their lives? OR We are a small business, so we have not got the HR support and the resources of a large business. How do we show we care about people and their lives?

As with many other issues, there are both pros and cons of being either a large or small business. The saying “the grass is always greener” definitely applies to people in large / small businesses saying that the other has it easier than them.

These two questions about business size show you what managers in each type of business envies in the other – big business envies the close relationships that can be formed in small business and the speed with which workers can be consulted; small business envies the expertise and resources of large businesses which mean that surveys can be used to consult workers and programmes / policies can be introduced to standardise the support offered to workers. Maximising the benefits you have in your own size of organisation and then seeing if practices in different sizes of organisation can be adapted for your needs helps find the best of both worlds. For example, could large organisations ask team leaders to get to know workers in smaller units? Could small organisations review their work practices to check fairness and consistency across the employees?

4 We are a rural business, so we find it hard to attract workers given the current petrol prices / lack of public transport at night. How does the 4 Boosts help us address that?

This is a difficult situation and particularly important to some businesses. We have seen examples of businesses providing late night transport to workers as part of their benefits package, to attract and retain their staff. However, rather than necessarily replicating exactly what others are doing, the 4 Boosts approach offers insight into how to answer this question for your own business. The section on ‘Make Workers



Part of the Conversation' involves asking people what might help them (existing employees) and speaking with leavers helps to understand why they are leaving (exiting employees). One business we spoke with had put on a late-night transport service only to find it was not used. When they discussed the issue with their workers they found they would prefer a different type of support. Making the 4 Boosts your own involves taking the principles in combination with input from your workforce, according to your own judgement of the situation.

5 We are a seasonal business, so we find that we put effort into getting to know people / training them up and then they leave: a waste of effort. How does the 4 Boosts help us address that?

This is another difficult situation especially for hard hit tourism and hospitality businesses. We have seen examples of businesses changing their employment model (fewer seasonal workers and more workers retained over the winter) by extending their season and doing renovation / investment work in the winter (if summer season). However, having 4 boosts conversations can help you understand the different types of workers you may have with you.

For some – stability may be important so an over-winter job may be desired. Others would never stay more than a season due to what else they are doing in their life, so you need to know what would keep them or attract others to work for you and make them work best whilst they are with you (two examples from our research – one from tourism, one from care - suggested that keeping people busy but having fun with friendly relationships in their team was a key to this).

Also, in the long-term, it may be useful to not think of the effort as wasted. There are important moral and reputational benefits of taking care of workers. This long-standing hospitality manager has a particular mindset towards supporting his young staff which means they visit him even when they have moved on:

*“And what I try to do is just say, don't just treat this as a reason to earn money, treat it as a stepping stone to your career and try and learn all these little skills. So at least when you move to your role, the ideal scenario for me is when you move to your career, is to turn back in 10 years and say b****y hell I learned that at [his business]. And so I just want people to take a snippet of what they learned with me for their life, to their children maybe, or to their career.”*



6 The nature of our work is hard / busy / pressured / reactive / dirty / difficult, so how do I put the 4 boosts into action?

In researching businesses, we sometimes make a distinction between what we call 'operational' and 'organisational' stressors. There are many difficult jobs that have been made more difficult by the COVID pandemic, cost of living and energy crises, as well as pressures on charities and public services. Yet we also know that people can be happy and satisfied doing any type of work – the 'operational' tasks – if they are respected, listened to, get to use their skills and feel valued in making a contribution.

To make sure this happens, businesses can of course try to make the 'operational' elements less hard / busy / pressured / reactive / dirty or difficult if possible, by engaging more staff, employing different technologies or changing people's roles – however this may only be possible up to a point depending on the role. The rest is about paying attention to the 'organisational' stressors (poor management, poor team work, bullying, conditions that could easily be improved but haven't been, lack of flexibility, lack of opportunity to progress if desired) and lessening those stressors by following principles like the 4 Boosts.

7 We still need the workers to do what we need them to do for the business, we can't just give them what they want, can we?

There is a big difference between listening to worker views to incorporate them as one source of input into your business decision-making, and just giving workers anything they want. The 4 boosts is all about being equipped with the information you need to run a thriving business with an engaged workforce. Those businesses that engage in ongoing discussion and listening with their workers, so they can take early and effective action to avoid workforce problems and retain happy staff, are those that are repeatedly found in research to be fostering better workplace wellbeing, linked to better performance / productivity.

Drawing on a 7-year Norwich Business School wellbeing and productivity project, involving 240 interviews and review of the Britain's Healthiest Workplace Survey data, the Evolve Workplace Wellbeing Toolkit summarises research on how paying attention to wellbeing can benefit businesses. It includes a business case calculator, case studies and a guide. It is all available for free here: www.evolveworkplacewellbeing.org



8 Can you give some examples of how other businesses in hospitality / retail / care / charities are putting this into practice?

The [free online handbook](#) that accompanies our 4 Boosts infographic contains examples of how businesses are putting this into practice. In addition we will continue to publish case studies on our website www.evolve workplacewellbeing.org as they become available.

Some additional examples have also been given in answer to the questions above. Yet remember – tailoring the principles to your own situation with employee input may be the best example you could follow.

9 As managers we would love to do this, but we are not confident – what is our responsibility and what are workers' responsibilities?

One of our interviewees described good management as a bit like parenting – you are always trying to find a balance, adapting to new circumstances. However, we know that many managers are interested in what is fair, what is whose responsibility, what would be interfering and what is necessary, with regard to workplace wellbeing.

These are ethical questions and consensus on them changes over time (150 years ago, people thought it was ok to put children to work down mines or up chimneys) and can vary from person to person. Therefore, we cannot give any hard and fast answers but two things may be of interest if you have faced these dilemmas.

Firstly:

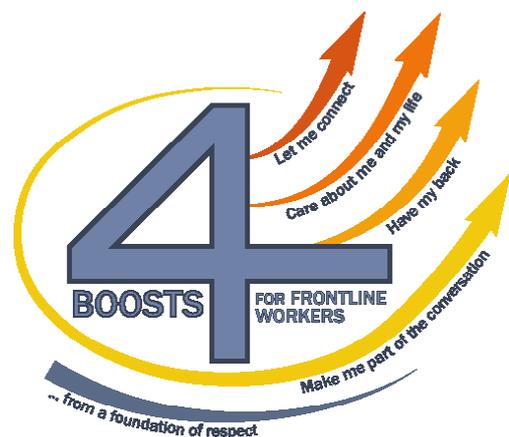
a) could you include some of these ethical questions in your discussions with workers as part of Caring About their Life and Making them part of the Conversation?

b) would you be interested in taking part in a study of these ethical questions that we are currently undertaking? We would love to hear your voice on this so that we can create new resources like the current one to share with you.

Please take part by [clicking here](#).

For more, please visit the [4 Boosts for Frontline Workers infographic, video, handbook and evidence supplement](#)

Our team can be contacted via:
workplace.wellbeing@uea.ac.uk
or the contact form on
www.evolve workplacewellbeing.org



MORE RESOURCES

- View the 4 boosts video, download our infographic and / or our handbook from propelhub.org (search '4 Boosts')
- Visit www.evolveworkplacewellbeing.org for more evidence-based workplace wellbeing insight, including:
 - ✓ a cost-effectiveness business case calculator
 - ✓ short videos on good practice
 - ✓ case studies
 - ✓ diagnostic questions
 - ✓ a free course
 - ✓ a monthly newsletter on the latest research insight
 - ✓ a PDF guide to embedding good workplace wellbeing practices in your organisation.

THE GOOD JOBS PROJECT

The Good Jobs Project was funded by the Norwich Good Economy Commission and the University of East Anglia.

FAQ v1 Oct 2022