



**Small business health insurance.
Better for business**

Power the performance of your business

**Make the connection between the
health and wellbeing of your team
and the success of your business.**

Introduction

Today's small businesses are juggling numerous priorities ranging from managing cash flow and operations, to boosting sales and nurturing a positive workplace culture. On top of this, there are also tricky factors to deal with, like unpredictable market forces, the cost-of-living-crisis, supply chain issues and employee absenteeism.

In response to these pressures, many companies are adopting new decision-making approaches. And recognising how each area of your business impacts on the others is vital. Equally important is pinpointing the factors that could hinder or drive the progress of your business.

Forward-thinking business leaders know that making investments in the health and wellbeing of employees will help make their business more resilient – and increase their business advantage.

Nurturing a culture of collaboration and innovation will also help them thrive. By creating a team fully committed to the same growth goals, they can improve recruitment and retention rates as well as improve productivity and business performance.

Contents

- 1. The challenges facing today's SMEs**
- 2. The high-performing connected business**
- 3. Create a connected culture**
- 4. Boost team connection**
- 5. Power your performance with Bupa**



The challenges facing today's SMEs

Modern small businesses are overwhelmed with the challenges that face them. These include:

Attracting and retaining talent

39% of workers are searching for a new job because they want better compensation or benefits. And what they feel about the nature of those benefits is evolving¹.

With 8 out of 10 SMEs providing access to one or more health and wellbeing employee benefits², this is now becoming expected rather than a 'nice-to-have' in an employment package. The same applies for those joining smaller companies.

In addition to seeking employers with strong, diverse and inclusive cultures, employee needs are evolving. When searching for a new job or deciding whether to stay with a current one, candidates work through a list of most desired benefits, of which the top three most requested are increased flexibility in working arrangements, paid wellness days, and more robust health insurance or physical wellness programmes³.

Meeting changing expectations

While looking inward is key, a truly connected business looks at their service offer through the lens of the customer. Are you fully meeting their expectations? Are there opportunities to improve processes? Do customers need to see themselves

reflected more in your workforce?

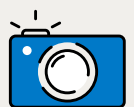
If so, does this potentially mean bringing in older employees, or individuals with wider-ranging personal needs?

SMEs also continue to face the impact of hybrid working patterns and the desire for flexible working conditions. Around 1.1 million employees say they have left a job in the last year due to a lack of flexible working available to them⁴.

Whether your team work on site or remotely, and whatever their role, there are basic requirements, values and a sense of belonging that people are looking for today.

By offering employees meaningful, practical benefits that improve quality of life and respond to diverse needs, businesses have an opportunity to stand apart from competitors and attract and retain the best people.

39% of workers are searching for a new job because they want better compensation or benefits.¹



¹Indeed: What Does Compensation for Work Actually Mean?

²Canada Life survey of 550 UK SME decision-makers

³YuLife: Workplace Wellbeing Trends 2025

⁴CIPD: Flexible and hybrid working practices in 2025

Addressing absenteeism and presenteeism

An estimated 148.9 million working days were lost because of sickness or injury in 2024; an average of 4.4 days per worker⁵. This has a big impact on businesses, potentially leading to decreased productivity and deadlines missed due to employee absences. Being able to meet and respond quickly to diverse healthcare needs could help reduce the business impact of both short- and long-term employee absence.

There is also the question of presenteeism to consider. This is when employees show up to work despite being unwell, either driven by a desire to push through their sickness or out of fear of potential consequences. Apart from the risk of spreading infections to the team, working when ill can worsen both physical and mental illnesses. But crucially, it can also drive down productivity⁶.

Presenteeism can have a negative influence on organisations and its increased prevalence since 2018 has cost UK businesses an estimated £25 billion⁶. This hits small businesses particularly hard as the impact of people not contributing in the workplace will be felt more in a leaner team with fewer resources. Implementing a workplace culture and policies that support people to look after their health and wellbeing is one way to reduce presenteeism.

A business that is openly empathetic and quick to recognise that people perform better when they are fit and healthy is setting itself up for success. Evidence shows there is a link between a positive culture of wellbeing in an organisation with productivity and sustainable organisational performance⁶. So seeking other ways to encourage and measure commitment are important.

Increasing market pressures

Staying strong and continuing to grow in the face of market pressures is tough⁷.

86% of companies believe the UK labour market is a less attractive place to invest and do business compared to five years ago, with 54% ranking it as 'much less' attractive⁷.

To combat market pressures, SME teams need to adopt a growth mindset and maintain the ability to innovate and rise above their competitors by being responsive to change. A fully engaged workforce is central to this.

Staying positive in the face of rising costs

High running costs are the single biggest challenge that small business owners face in 2025⁸.

But optimism is essential and business owners have an opportunity to create a good example for their employees to follow. Global research on leadership has shown that the one thing people seek from leaders above all else is hope, and the ability to feel positive about the future⁸.



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⁵ONS: Sickness absence in the UK labour market: 2023 and 2024

⁶Institute for Public Policy Research: 'Revealed: Hidden annual cost of employee sickness is up £30 billion since 2018'

⁷Confederation for British Industry (CBI): Businesses warn rising costs and ERB threaten jobs and growth

⁸Simply Business: Rising costs force small businesses to increase prices

The high-performing connected business

Creating a connected business, with a full-circle approach to management, is an excellent way to navigate challenges and unlock value in a small, growing business. By identifying how key elements impact other areas of a company, priorities can be dealt with promptly. Efficiencies and opportunities can also be realised to form a robust, cohesive and innovative business with a healthy advantage.

Performance and productivity

Businesses of all sizes and sectors have the potential to enhance customer and employee satisfaction. The same is true of profitability, by embracing more holistic approaches to their operation.

When every area of a business is aligned, it's easier to meet your business goals, by achieving revenue faster, and being more profitable⁹.

The health and wellbeing of your employees is a key factor in this. According to research from Deloitte, businesses can expect to return £4.70 for every £1 invested in employees' mental health and wellbeing. Early intervention & prevention produces the highest benefits¹⁰.

Improving employee engagement

Creating meaningful engagement involves establishing a connection on every level.

This begins with a greater focus on approaches that promote a strong and inclusive culture around wellbeing. It also involves creating opportunities across teams to contribute to business success.



There is a direct connection between company culture and business success¹¹.

⁹Forbes: Why Misalignment Is Costing Your Business (And What To Do About It)

¹⁰Deloitte: Mental Health and Employers Report

¹¹Great Place To Work: 8 Key Elements of Company Culture with Inspiring Examples

Companies are seeing the benefit of focusing on creating a healthy and happy working environment. Those with certification of a strong company culture have seen greater business returns than over the long term than those without¹¹.

Why? There is a direct connection between company culture and business success¹¹. Going beyond simple measures like providing a weekly fruit bowl, more effective actions include fostering openness and recognition, as well as promoting a shared responsibility toward shared objectives.

The recognition of diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) as a factor for success is also growing, with The World Economic Forum reporting a 16% rise in employers saying they have DEI initiatives in place in 2024 compared to 2023¹².

Why? Research from LSE found that organisations with DEI policies were positively associated with long-term market performance, without having any negative impact on short-term financial performance¹³.

More businesses are investing in a person-first approach, creating connections within their teams.

Why? Highly engaged teams were found to have significant performance advantages compared to less engaged teams. Notably, a 23% increase in profitability, an 18% increase in productivity, and a 78% decrease in absenteeism¹⁴.

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¹¹Great Place To Work: 8 Key Elements of Company Culture with Inspiring Examples

¹²World Economic Forum: Future of Jobs Report 2025

¹³TLSE: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is not bad for business: Evidence from employee review data for companies listed in the UK and the US

¹⁴Gallup: The Relationship Between Engagement at Work and Organizational Outcomes

¹⁵Totaljobs: New Year, New Career: Four Million Workers Looking for a New Job in January

The value of benefits in recruitment and retention

With 11% currently seeking a new job, and 31% considering switching jobs¹⁵, it can be a battle for SMEs to retain the talent they've spent time and money training up and investing in their development. Offering attractive benefits is an important tool in retaining talent and an advantage when candidates are weighing up their options.



Create a connected culture

Looking after the people who underpin every area of your business helps to create the shared values and growth mindsets that support businesses to thrive.

Culture, recruitment and retention

Onboarding staff, and retaining them, can come down to how respected and valued they feel. Equally important is their ability to establish a strong rapport with leadership, resonate with company values and appreciate the benefits provided.

66% of jobseekers would overlook a payrise to receive their most desired benefit, with good work-life balance (49%) and positive work culture (27%) two of the most common benefits they seek¹⁶. When it comes to recruitment and retention, more than a third (37%) of employees chose their current employers due to their benefits package and over two-fifths (44%) reported staying with their employers for the same reason¹⁷.

Good benefits come into their own when times are tough. Nearly 40% of UK workers experience sleepless nights due to financial concerns, meaning that access to benefits that help to cover fundamental needs are often vital¹⁸.

Often, it's not lavish bonuses or parties that make people feel valued and motivated. Small investments in improving work environments, modest and relevant perks, or just recognition from shout-outs can build resilience. Benefits such as

healthcare, mental health support and practical help show a commitment to employee wellbeing, even when budgets are constrained.

Building connections, loyalty and shared values

An organisation's culture directly impacts employees' level of satisfaction. From bonuses and other rewards in growth periods, to support during personal health or wellbeing crises, how a business behaves has a direct effect on how staff feel¹⁹.

When SMEs have strong values and a company mission that makes people feel their job is contributing to something bigger, employees can see tangible benefits.

Only 18% of employees feel their organisation's values fully align with their current culture. However, 85% agree that improving their organisation's culture would increase its value²⁰.

Fostering a growth mindset, creating opportunities for teams to collaborate or contribute to business innovation and overall success will also go a long way.

¹⁶Totaljobs: UK industry salary and benefit trends for 2025

¹⁷WTW: The grass isn't greener for U.K employees as majority prefer to stay in their current jobs

¹⁸HR News: Financial Stress Impacting 40% of UK Workers

¹⁹University of Delhi: Impact of dimensions of organisational culture on employee satisfaction and performance level in select organisations

²⁰Nottingham Trent University: UK Organisational Culture Revealed: A spotlight on workplace values and behaviours

Boost team connection

Smart hacks for a connected strategy on a budget

Start implementing a connected strategy by focusing on shared values, benefits and goals across your business. You don't need to have large budgets to show your people they're valued.

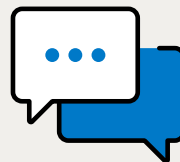
Here's a checklist of practical hacks that will benefit your team, and your business:



1. Build a great culture

A positive culture always pays off when it comes to productivity and retention. Social events and away days are great, but so are involving your staff in establishing the building blocks to your business's strategy. Culture should be collaborative, and not come from the top down.

What you can do now: Start by defining your business's shared purpose and values. Create a Culture Team to work on this together.



2. Be transparent

Create an inclusive environment, and establish positive ways of working with new and existing staff, so your people can see clearly where their efforts go, and buy-in to your common goals.

What you can do now: Create and share an employee handbook that communicates your policies, codes of conduct and shared purpose and company values.



3. Seek accreditations

Alongside your professional endorsements, showcasing accreditations such as Living Wage, BCorp or Disability Confident status demonstrates to potential talent that your commitment to people is substantial.

What you can do now: Investigate which accreditations you think might be achievable and which would add the most value to your business.



4. Let the team lead

Strong leadership is key, but creating an environment for contribution and letting the team run with it is more important – culture and business innovation can, and should, be owned by everyone. Bringing your team together to share ideas, and to have fun together will see the business feel it too.

What you can do now: Plan a team-building session, schedule in things like Learning Lunches where people talk about a personal passion, or Blue Sky Strategy Sessions to unlock a challenge the business is facing. Delegate other people to lead and take charge of these sessions.



5. Introduce rewards and recognition

Showing your employees that you appreciate them can boost morale, increase engagement and foster loyalty.

What you can do now: Introduce an Employee of the Month programme. Offer bonuses or days off for high-performance and outstanding work. Birthdays or anniversaries can also be highlighted.



6. Offer employee benefits

'Soft' benefits can sometimes make as big an impact as the paying of a competitive salary and additional bonuses.

What you can do now: Consider things such as subsidised gym memberships, yoga classes or bringing in a snack box scheme.



7. Support wellbeing and health

Provide your team with health insurance to keep them at their best, mentally and physically. Not only will you cut absenteeism, but your employees will be happier, more loyal and more productive.

What you can do now: Investigate the **Small Business Academy** which brings together insight from small businesses and entrepreneurs, alongside Bupa's own health experts. The Academy is packed with free tools, resources, and expert advice designed to support SME business owners and decision makers in building healthier, more resilient teams.



8. Put your own oxygen mask on first

The wellbeing of a business's founder can directly impact the company's overall Health. In 2024, over half of business leaders surveyed reported a mental health issue in the past year²¹.

What you can do now: Explore **Bupa Growth+** and the Business Owner Wellbeing Service, a dedicated initiative designed to offer small business leaders convenient access to healthcare professionals with just one phone number.



9. Strengthen HR policies

Make sure your team knows what's expected of them, with up-to-date, clear and well-defined HR policies.

What you can do now: Begin by drafting the most important HR policies such as Equal Opportunity and Non-Discrimination, Code of Conduct and Ethics, Workplace Health and Safety, Termination and Resignation. This can be supported by **Bupa Growth+**, and our partnership with Worknest, where you get access to resources and help you to establish a strong foundation for your business's HR needs.



10. Offer flexibility

If it aligns with your business model, consider providing and clearly communicating flexible and hybrid work options. This empowers your staff and allows them to choose what works best for them.

What you can do now: Speak to your team and see what works for them. Then use the fantastic resources that **Bupa Growth+** offers to craft a bespoke policy that suits you and your business. Don't forget to communicate the policy back to your team.

Power your performance with Bupa

Bupa can help you create the connections your business needs, from training and support for you, to practical benefits for your employees. Understanding that all areas of your business need to be able to work together is key. Just as vital is facilitating your employees' understanding of this connection, ensuring that everyone is pulling in the same direction.

Seeing the bigger picture

From meeting your customer needs all the way through to improving operational efficiencies, taking a top-down view can help you make the right choices for your business.

Learn what makes a business stronger and more efficient with training from the **Small Business Academy** for small businesses. Then make smarter changes to support your employees with:



Ways to improve your culture

A strong workplace culture is one that knows how to appreciate its employees and play to your business's strengths. Discover how to juggle priorities and where to best put your efforts.

From communicating your company values to staff, to making sure you're on top of paperwork. Get the knowledge you need to improve your culture, with deep dives into resilience, retention and recognition from the **Small Business Academy**.



End-to-end healthcare

Providing direct access to fast, end-to-end health and wellbeing care for your people has a direct impact on the motivation and commitment your business needs to operate efficiently and successfully.

At Bupa, we reduce inefficiencies, delays and waiting time, delivering fast, seamless healthcare. Employees are happier, healthier and back to their best more quickly.

It starts with 24/7 access to healthcare guidance through the My Bupa App and scheduling GP appointments within 24 hours.*

*Between May and Sep 2025, over 90% of members were offered digital appointments with a GP within 24 hours.

With our new mental health service, your people can get treatment started quickly. And by focusing on preventative care and tackling aches and pains earlier, our new MSK service cuts treatment costs by 20%.

At Bupa, we continue to develop the innovative ways we deliver healthcare to achieve better outcomes for your people and your business.



Real benefits for employees

Offer practical support for the challenges your employees face with **Bupa small business health insurance**.

Small business employees that have Bupa cover enjoy access to commonly needed support. This ranges from MSK support to manage muscle, bone and joint issues, to specialist support for mental health. A healthy workforce performs better and can be more resilient and happier in their work. Putting health at the top of the agenda can be a win for both employers and employees.



Ways to improve wellbeing and reduce stress

Access support for business-related stress with **Bupa Growth+**, free HR support and resources from WorkNest. Find out how to handle common HR processes as well as guidance for tricky situations. Perfect if you don't have a dedicated HR department.

With **Bupa small business health insurance**, you can also access mental health treatment for business owners and decision makers, to help you stay at your best and drive your business forward.

Business health is making the connection

Ready to hear how Bupa can help you power the performance of your business?

Ready to invest in your team's health and wellbeing?

Get in touch today or find out more at bupa.co.uk/small-business

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Registered in England and Wales with registration number 3956433.

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Arranged and administered by Bupa Insurance Services Limited,
which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.
Registered in England and Wales with registration number 3829851.

Registered office: 1 Angel Court, London, EC2R 7HJ.

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NOV25 BINS 13062

