



SUPPORTING WORKING CARERS

Being a working carer brings a unique set of pressures that often go unrecognised at work. However, with statistics such as only 56% of carers in Australia feeling able to combine work with caring, it is clear that there's a real need to ensure support is in place to help carers integrate their careers with managing their responsibilities at home.

Known for our support programmes for working parents and their managers, we have recently added a module for working carers to our portfolio of group coaching programmes. Based upon first-hand experience of the challenges involved, our practical workshop is tailored specifically to the needs of carers within the workplace, placing emphasis on strategies to help carers focus upon their own well-being and tips to help prioritisation and the management of time, resources and energy.

Here we talk to our CEO and founder **Virginia Herlihy** about the new programme and why she saw it as an important addition for How Do You Do It.

44%
of Australian carers feel unable to combine work with caring

Why have you developed a programme specifically for working carers?

Bluntly, because not enough is currently done to support working carers to succeed at work. [Figures for workplace isolation](#) amongst carers are alarming but in an ageing population where working lives are continuing for longer, more and more of us will at some stage in our career find ourselves juggling a career and caring responsibilities. Compounding this is the trend towards people becoming parents later in life, meaning many are caught in the 'sandwich generation' with responsibility for children and older relatives right at the height of their career. This brings a unique set of challenges for both employees and employers.

Our philosophy is very much about helping organisations to support the 'whole person' and enable working families to find a path through their career and home responsibilities that works for them. Working carers form a sizeable and important part of any organisation – there are over 3 million in the UK alone, and the unique demands that caring brings have traditionally been played down in the context of work place support and certainly in comparison to support given to parents. It therefore felt like a really important area for us to address.

Over **3 million** working carers in the UK

How is your programme for carers different to your programmes for parents? Don't they face many of the same challenges?

Parents and carers both face challenges in terms of managing significant responsibilities in addition to their career, but the nature of those responsibilities can be very different. Carers are often managing care needs that become more intense over time or are highly unpredictable in nature, whilst also dealing with the emotional complexity of caring for a dependent adult who may have clear opinions about how they would like to be helped.

Added to this, becoming a parent is an event that is celebrated and brings the expectation of dependency on the part of the child, being a carer isn't and this can increase the sense of isolation many carers feel. Our course content reflects this and supports carers develop strategies for managing their unique circumstances.

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From the outset we wanted the course to be written from the perspective of someone with caring responsibilities. Therefore, I worked very closely with one of our associates, Carolyn Ley who has significant experience as a working carer and who drove the design of the course to create a bespoke workshop that addresses the reality of being a working carer. Like our programmes for working parents, our carers workshop is run as a group coaching session, to maximise the opportunity for sharing ideas and strategies and meeting other people in a similar situation. In that sense it adopts the same format as our other programmes but with content that is tailored to the unique needs of carers.

Our experience has shown that the most effective way of creating meaningful lasting change is if people can develop informal support networks. This helps maintain the impact of what they have learnt through the coaching session, and of particular importance to carers, reduces their sense of being alone in the challenges they face.

Do you think there is demand from organisations for this type of support programme?

Yes absolutely, it is something that we've already been actively discussing with several clients. As organisations increasingly recognise the economic benefits of a diverse workforce and the real cost of not retaining often highly skilled employees, many see support for carers as an important missing link in their overall employee support programme.

Working carers are overwhelmingly female (although not exclusively) and the current barriers to career progression for carers entrench the gender pay gap further and reduces the pipeline of female talent in an organisation. Therefore, many organisations are very receptive to supporting carers manage their career in the context of their other responsibilities and encouragingly some like Aviva UK are introducing [carers leave](#) to provide rights to take paid leave for carers as well as for parents.

Caring responsibilities often coincide with when people are towards the peak of their career, with years of experience, expertise and contacts. It therefore makes very sound business sense for organisations to support these individuals to avoid losing talent and ensure maximum employee wellbeing.



CARERS SPOTLIGHT

Carolyn Ley

EMEA ASSOCIATE, HOW DO YOU DO IT

I was already a busy working mother to three young children when I committed to helping care for an elderly relative, joining the sandwich generation. All of our How Do You Do It strategies and approaches were invaluable in helping me integrate my new caring role with my career and my family commitments.

Nonetheless, it was a learning curve and there were new challenges to navigate – both practical and emotional. Such as diary management and unpredictability on anything medically-related. Or ensuring I still prioritised quality time with my loved one, as well helping them with (often time-consuming) support on practical matters such as finances or property.

For me, taking on caring responsibilities was not carefully planned, scoped and researched, whereas I had more sense of the road ahead when I became a parent. The parenthood road is well-trodden and I had the benefit of How Do You Do It's programmes and coaching as a client before I joined the team. So it's important to me to now help pave the way for working carers.

Our carers' programme will provide much-needed support and validation for working carers, with the opportunity to share and swap experiences and tips. The headspace and framework we provide will enable carers to reflect on their priorities and the choices they make on how they can best use their time, energy and resources at work and at home, based on their particular circumstances. As per all our workshops, our focus will be on developing practical strategies and greater confidence to make it work for individuals, along with deepening their support network in their organisation.

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