GTC

THE GUILD OF TELEVISION CAMERA PROFESSIONALS

Mental Health Supplement

#BeKind

Issue 2

When you need some support

Contact the GTC Welfare Officer, Chris Yacoubian: welfare@gtc.tv

Backup
https://www.backuptech.uk

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)
Helpline: 5pm to midnight daily
0800 585858
www.thecalmzone.net

Film + TV Charity
filmtvcharity.org.uk
0800 054 00 00
email: support@filmtvcharity.org.uk

Inspire (Northern Ireland)
028 9032 8474
www.inspirewellbeing.org

MIND
0300 123 3393
www.mind.org.uk

Rethink
www.rethink.org/about-us/our-mental-health-advice
0300 5000 927

Rory Peck Trust
0203 219 7860
www.rorypecktrust.org

Samaritans
24 hours daily
116 123
www.samaritans.org

SAMH (Scotland)
0141 530 1000 (Mon–Fri 9–5)
www.samh.org.uk

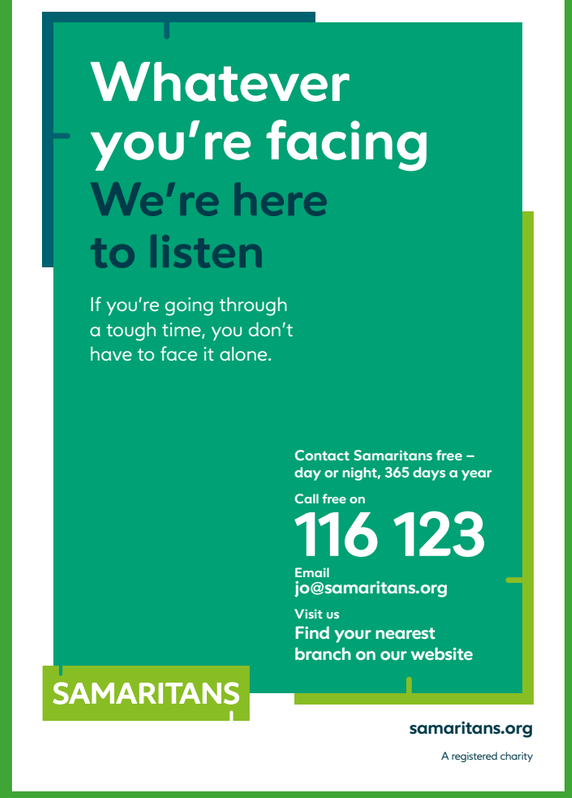
SANE
www.sane.org.uk
SANEline: 0300 304 7000

SHOUT
24/7 text service
Text: 85258
www.giveusashout.org

Time to Change
www.time-to-change.org.uk

Urgent medical advice
Call NHS 111 or
NHS Direct (Wales) 0845 46 47

For more information on types of therapy, see the inside back cover.



The Mental Health Supplement team comprised Alison Chapman (editor), Simon Edwards (advertising), Rob Emmanuel, Sally Garrett, Kate Harvest, Graham Maunder, Hazel Palmer, Chris Yacoubian; design by Toast Design, Banbury; print by Holywell Press, Oxford.

GTC Mental Health resources can be found online at: www.gtc.tv/about-the-gtc/mental-health-and-other-helplines.aspx

The GTC Mental Health Supplement, Issue 2 is published by the Guild of Television Camera Professionals (GTC). © GTC 2020.
Contact: administration@gtc.tv

Why this GTC Mental Health Supplement?

Sally Garrett, editor of Issue 1, introduces the second issue, with the help of **Ali Chapman**, who has largely looked after this edition (due in part to the demands of a gorgeous 1-year-old called Iris – more on that over the page!).

"The funny thing is nobody ever really knows how much someone is hurting; we could be standing next to someone who is completely broken and we wouldn't even know."

That was the quote that launched the first issue of the GTC Mental Health Supplement – and those words still ring very true. In fact, since publishing that supplement and telling my own mental health story (*see the update over the page*), I've been contacted by quite a few colleagues and GTC members privately to thank me for showing them they weren't the only ones experiencing certain thoughts and feelings, and saying they hadn't realised how common mental health issues are. Sam's story in this issue (*pp.10–12*) is a particularly powerful reminder of just how effectively a colleague working right next to you could be hiding such a struggle.

The last issue came out over two years ago, so at the start of the year, the GTC decided it was time to update the help resources and to look at some further issues of concern around the mental health impact of working in our industry. As the previous issue focused heavily on depression, this time we opted to look more broadly at other stress and anxiety factors resulting from working in the industry. If you need support in coping with depression though, we urge you to look back at the first edition in the 'Mental Health and Other Helplines' section of www.gtc.tv.

Be kind

Then, as we were starting work on this issue, the shocking news came that presenter Caroline Flack had taken her own life. One of her final posts on Instagram read:
"In a world where you can be anything, be kind."

That was to be our main message for this issue – and our plan was to focus on the stresses the industry places on its workers through unpredictable work amounts and patterns, uncertain rates and payment periods, long hours and travel, feelings of isolation or loneliness, strains on family and social life, and lack of mental health support in the workplace – all factors that led to some alarming statistics revealed in The Film and TV Charity's *Looking Glass* research (*see pp.16–18*).

There were already very many known pressures created by the culture and conditions of the industry – and then COVID-19 struck.

Suddenly, hardly anyone in the industry was working, obviously bringing a whole new raft of unexpected stresses (although actually some few benefits too). None of this can or should be ignored here, but, as we hope this publication will continue to be relevant and helpful for as long as the previous issue, we didn't want it to become all about the COVID-19 effect. The view we have therefore taken is that, as people start to get back to work, all the old strains will no doubt still be there, just more so, due to even higher levels of uncertainty, the pressure to make up for lost earnings, likely fewer shoots and events, and smaller crews employed as productions attempt to find ways to shoot within social distancing rules. Hence, this issue isn't specifically about lockdown, but as it's being produced during the pandemic crisis, we can't ignore it altogether.

Not so diverse

Rather disappointingly we didn't achieve one of our initial aims for this issue. We wanted to look at the experiences of a wide and diverse range of GTC members: from the youngest members starting out in the industry to those facing retirement; female, male and other genders; different ethnicities. Frankly, this was a fail. The gender split of respondents in our survey was 90.7% male, 8.9% female and 0.4% other. The ethnicity results were even less diverse, with 94.5% of respondents selecting 'White British/Irish/Welsh/Scottish/Gypsy or Irish Traveller'. While this represents the proportions of those who chose to answer the survey, not the makeup of the GTC membership, in fact the percentage of females here is slightly higher than within the total membership. So far, we don't have conclusive figures on the ethnicity mix of the membership (although watch out for a GTC survey soon to establish our true demographic and find out what services our members most value).

As regards our goal to cover issues affecting differing age groups, people simply didn't come forward with stories they wanted to share. However, Rachel Richards has looked from a therapist's viewpoint at the range of factors that may be relevant at different stages in a camera professional's career (*pp.7–9*). Also, in telling his own story of finding support through the ManKind Project (*pp.22–23*), Dan Kidner writes about the pressures young operators experience when starting out in the camera department.

Psychotherapist Alex Golabek examines the strains that long hours and extended periods away from home can exert – but also, conversely, what a break in this pattern through a period at home not working for whatever reason can mean (*pp.13–15*). For those who don't exactly consider they have a 'mental health problem' but just the sense that things could be better if they were more organised, or had time to think issues through more clearly, then we look at the value of a life coach (*pp.24–26*).

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

"I think what you're doing with talking about mental health is a great thing and I'm really delighted that the GTC is bringing this to the fore. It shows a real progressive attitude in relation to our industry and to the issues surrounding our work and home life.

Sally's update: Becoming a working mum

Just to update you on what's been going on in my own life and mental health over the past two years: the biggest thing by far is that I became a mum to a beautiful little girl, Iris. My partner James and I couldn't be happier… but, my goodness, it's the hardest thing I've ever done! I'll never complain about a 16-hour day in a dark studio with an unannounced overrun and shortened meal breaks again – well actually, I probably will complain very loudly about that as (pre-COVID-19 lockdown at least) this seemed to be a more regular occurrence, taking a major toll on our mental and physical health generally.

Since becoming pregnant and having the baby, on top of all the usual new mum pressures, I not surprisingly stressed about work. I was also concerned whether my history of mental illness might make me prone to postnatal depression. During my pregnancy though, I was lucky enough to work with great productions and camera teams, all of whom made sure I had a chair when not on camera, while runners and camera assistants kept me supplied with regular food and water.

After Iris was born, I had to decide when to go back to work. The Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) for freelancers didn't even cover my half of the rent and bills, let alone all the new baby stuff – plus, in reality, I was itching to get back to work. I think being an older mum, used to my independence, I really struggled with not even being able to go to the loo without thinking about the baby. Thankfully I didn't end up with postnatal depression, but nevertheless I still have days when I feel stuck in a monotonous loop. If I hadn't had the opportunity to work at least some days then I might be telling a very different story.

I started to do my 'Keep In Touch' work days (allowed while claiming SMP) when Iris was 4 months old, mainly because we needed the money, but also importantly because I just needed to 'feel like me' and I missed my job and work friends. At the end of the day, I love being a camera operator.

Then COVID-19 happened and everything changed again. Along with most of the rest of the media, James (who's a photographer) and I lost all our work for the unforeseeable future. All our savings had been used for maternity leave. Like so many in our industry, we turned to the government for help, signed up for Universal Credit and awaited a help package.

At the time of writing we are in Day 83 of lockdown, during which time Iris has learned to walk during her daily excursions to the park (but there are no shoe shops open to buy her first shoes!). We've had to tighten our purse-strings severely but on the other hand you can't buy back those early months of watching your daughter change almost daily.

If all of this had happened a few years ago, I think I would have been a lot worse at coping and it could quite easily have broken me. Maybe it's the mother's instinct kicking in or perhaps I now have better coping strategies – but, so far, I seem to be doing OK. I tell this story to offer a beacon of hope for those who might not be so far down the road of coming through a difficult mental health challenge. I hope that my being open and honest allows you to feel that you can share and talk about your own problems because, believe me, you won't be the only person thinking those thoughts or having those feelings.

Our key messages for this supplement

Unlike the previous issue, which focused mainly on one potentially devastating end of the mental health spectrum, this issue is much broader in its reach – making it harder to summarise. Our survey *(see pp.5–6)* confirmed what we already expected – that, despite the obvious attractions of the job when it's going well, which mostly remain strong enough to keep people wanting to enter the profession and stay in it if they can, there are nearly as many factors that make this a difficult and potentially damaging industry in which to work. To empower you to counter this, we suggest these key messages:

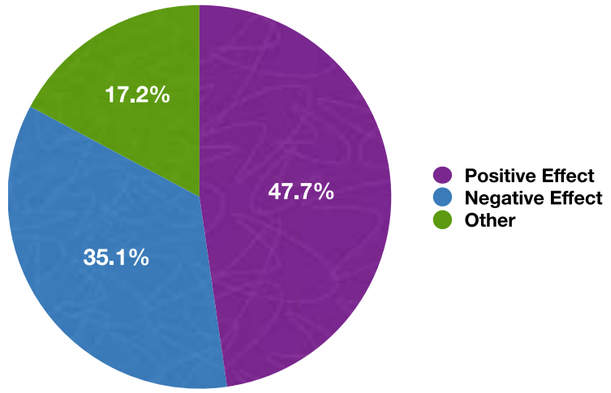
- **Remember, you are not alone** – mental health issues at some level affect most people at some time, particularly in our industry.
- **Be kind** – a colleague working right next to you may be suffering in silence; try to be receptive to signs and encourage them to talk either to you or to someone else if you can.
- **Your employer (however short-term) has a responsibility towards your mental health support**; if this is not evident, then lobby them to make sure this improves.

We hope that the selection of member stories and advice from therapists included in this second issue will reassure you that, whatever emotions and anxieties you are experiencing, you can be sure that you are not alone. Recognising the problem is the first stage and it almost always helps to then talk about those emotions, as hard as this can seem, whether it be to a friend, family member, mental health professional at work or other therapist.

The GTC Mental Health Survey 2020

In the GTC Mental Health Survey 2020, we asked respondents to base their answers as far as possible on their 'normal' experience of working in the industry rather than current feelings during lockdown (apart from one COVID-19 specific question). We were heartened that 225 respondents took the time to answer the survey and particularly by the large number of detailed text answers, which together provide a fascinating snapshot of how camera professionals feel about their working lives, as well as the support (or lack of it) available to them when they have a mental health issue.

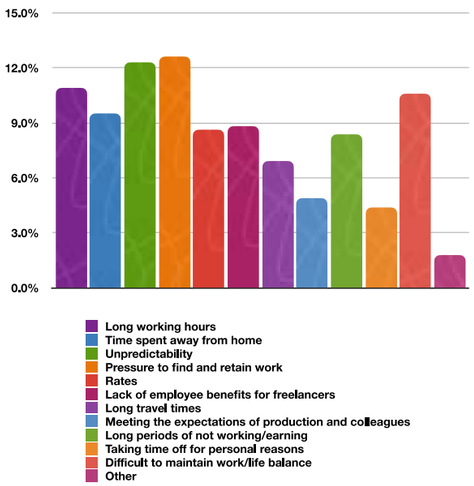
It is obviously not possible to present all the answers here, which in any case were given in confidence, but we will summarise the findings as best we can. The full numerical answers will be available on the GTC website in the Mental Health section and you will spot some of the text answers peppered throughout this issue in boxes with the header 'GTC Survey Response'.



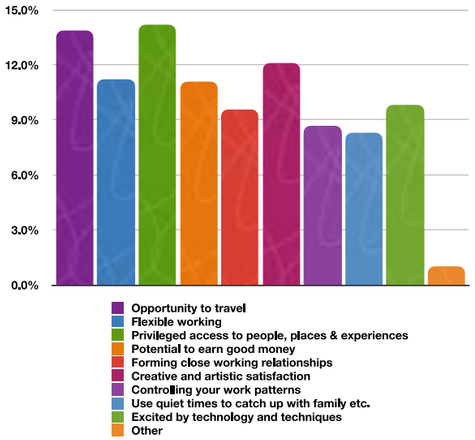
Question 1: In general, do you think working in our industry has a positive or negative effect on your mental health and wellbeing?

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

"It's an industry that gives dopamine hits… it gives you highs but also leaves you with low lows. Whether that's from working on live TV, adventure, travel, meeting famous people and pulling off the impossible, to simply getting a new job every few days or months, working on ever 'bigger' productions or risking being broke to wait it out for your next 'dream' job – it's an industry which breeds risk and reward, and both ends of the mental health spectrum that leads to.



Question 2: Here are some of the negatives associated with our work. Which of these affect or have affected you?

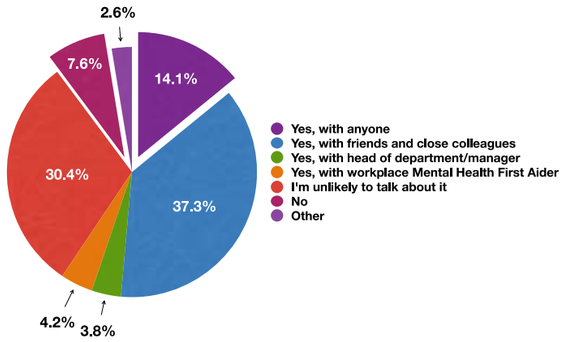


Question 3: Here are some of the positives associated with our work. Which of these affect or have affected you?

Positive or negative?

Asked whether the industry has a positive or negative effect on their mental health, just under half (47.7%) replied 'positive', with the positive options we had suggested very evenly spread. Each option (opportunity to travel; flexible working; privileged access to people, places and unrivalled experiences; potential to earn good money; close working relationships; creative and artistic satisfaction; control over own work; quiet time for family, social life and hobbies etc; excited by camera technology and techniques) gained between 8.3% and 14.2% – in other words, no runaway choices but instead a range of factors that attract people to the job. Overwhelmingly, the text answers backed up this finding of a roughly 50–50 split between positive and negative.

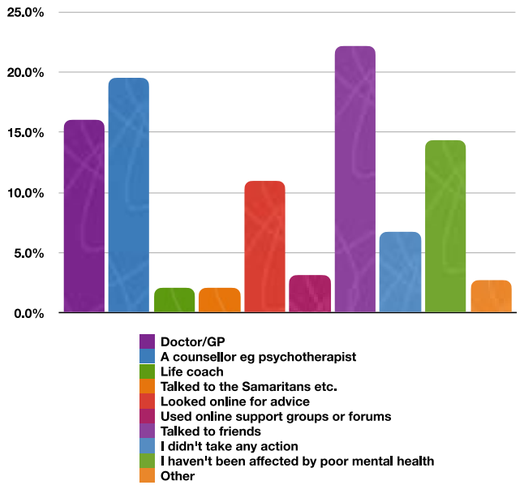
Similarly, there was no one 'negative' option that streaked ahead of the others, but 'pressure to find and retain work' and 'unpredictability' were the most selected options from the list, at 12.6% and 12.3%, respectively. Other aspects frequently mentioned included bullying, ageism, falling rates, lack of industry provision of mental health support, effect on family life and processing traumatic content.



Question 4: In the recent Film and TV Charity *Looking Glass* survey, almost 90% of people in our industry said that they have experienced a mental health problem. Given that this is so, do you feel comfortable talking about your own mental health at work?

Talking about mental health issues

When it came to the questions around whether respondents would feel comfortable talking about mental health to colleagues or at work, 59.4% selected one of the positive answers but this was mainly to 'Friends and close colleagues' (37.3%) with just 22.1% answering yes to 'Anyone', 'Head of department or manager' or a 'Workplace mental health first aider'; 38% were unlikely to or would not talk to anyone, and the text answers strongly veered towards people having big reservations about opening up about mental health issues at work. A word that came up a lot was 'stigma' and predominantly the reasons given for not talking about problems related to fear of losing work, being perceived to be 'weak' or 'having a problem', not wanting to burden other team members, the desire to be viewed as a good 'team player', lack of trust and lack of suitable times/opportunities to talk. That said, 76.1% had sought some kind of help at one time or another, ranging from talking to friends (22.2%) to contacting the Samaritans (2.1%).



Question 6: Have you ever sought help for a mental health issue? If so, where from?

Sources of help

Pleasingly for us, in response to the question 'Are you aware of any sources of help relating to stress factors in our industry?', the two most listed sources (by a long way) were the GTC Welfare Officer and Film and TV Charity: admittedly a self-selecting group of respondents, but still good that our efforts in this area have been recognised! Overall, the lack of cohesive provision of mental health support for freelancers in the industry was reflected though.

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

> "I'm aware of the GTC Welfare Officer and the Film & TV Charity... what the freelance community really needs is an HR department!

The COVID-19 effect

Relating to the COVID-19 lockdown, obviously there have been many downsides, such as increased uncertainty, financial loss, difficulties understanding and accessing the various support packages, isolation, and missing colleagues and teamwork, but there were also some positives noted, most common of which were 'positive effect on the environment' (15.4%), 'slowing down of pace' and 'a simpler life with fewer demands' (12.2%). Other popular responses related to more time with the family, being able to get jobs done around the house and – perhaps a surprise – several positive references to having 'taken a job as a delivery driver'.

Thank you to all those who took the time to complete the survey – and do visit the GTC website to see the full results: www.gtc.org.uk/about-the-gtc/mental-health-and-other-helplines.aspx

Why work matters

The GTC survey showed that most camera professionals feel their work contributes to their lives in positive and negative ways in almost equal measures. At its best, the job gives creative satisfaction, camaraderie and teamwork, opportunities to travel and privileged access to events and experiences; at its worst, there can be stress-inducing uncertainty, fear of rejection, isolation and even bullying. Not only that, the extent and balance of how this affects can change through different age and experience phases of our working lives. Registered counsellor **Rachel Richards** explains how it is not surprising – given the conditions – how this commonly affects so many working in TV and film.

We spend on average a third of our lives at work, and work satisfaction is generally acknowledged as one of the five key predictors of wellbeing within the human experience along with social relationships, physical health, financial stability and sense of community. These are interdependent; we need all factors to be reasonably present and well balanced to give us a sense that we are thriving – living a life that matters. Paying attention to all five is a good strategy for maximising our mental health, but for many of us work is the central factor. We need work to feel OK and to complement all the other areas of our lives. With so much at stake, it is not surprising that our work and career occupy so much of our thought process.

Aside from the obvious financial benefits of work, the profession we choose is usually one of the main conduits for channelling our interests and values, structuring our time and signalling the essence of who we are. It speaks of our abilities, experience, knowledge and skills, and therefore significantly shapes the way we assess ourselves. In the creative industries particularly, it is a means of expressing ourselves. So, a sense of contentment and agency in our professional lives is key to emotional wellbeing and self-worth.

How and where we find professional contentment will shift throughout our lives, our personal needs continually adapting with each progression through the different psycho-social stages. Each stage brings with it a new set of uncertainties and 'mini-crises' that we strive to navigate and then integrate into our professional experience.

Uncertainty, isolation, rejection

If freedom is one of the great characteristics of the creative industries, uncertainty is its flipside and the film and TV industry has that in abundance – extremes of work availability; unstable work hours, patterns and schedules; extensive travel; changing environments; and long periods away from home. The result can be erratic availability for nurturing intimate and family relationships, participating in milestone events and paying consistent attention to personal interests.

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

> "I consider myself extremely lucky to be part of a small, close knit crew. We've all suffered from a loss of work in the past but have remained close and work well together when the opportunity arises. These people have supported me through some really tough personal battles: divorce, bereavement, loss and have helped to build my confidence professionally.

There can be lack of choice and consistency too around sleep and rest breaks, diet, nutrition and hydration. All of this can have a deeply compromising impact on health and personal circumstances.

The culture of the industry can provide few opportunities for reflection or 'headspace'. Creative environments are intense and immersive, and we all fall somewhere on the 'incident hunger' spectrum – the level of predictability we need to feel sufficiently settled vs the level of spontaneity and excitement we need to keep life interesting. Extroverts may thrive in the creative industries, while introverts may need more recovery time. Creativity and technical skill may be the 'hook' into a career in this field but with little guidance on how to prepare for the lifestyle.

Work-related trigger points

Lifestyle, including the working environment, is a risk factor for anxiety and depression. Work-related stress can trigger a mental health problem or aggravate an existing one, and the HSE reports that stress, depression and anxiety in the workplace are on the increase. Employers have a duty of care, a legal responsibility to take reasonable steps to protect employees. In 2017, a Government-commissioned review set out core recommended standards for employers, to support and improve mental health at work and enable staff with mental health conditions to thrive. The recommendations outline an approach that includes having a clear mental health at work plan and encouraging open communication and awareness to reduce stigma.

Childhood experiences

Adverse childhood experiences and early life 'scripting' are also known contributors. Childhood scripting instils in us predictable patterns of behaving and responding to our environment and those around us, often outside our awareness *(see Dan Kidner's article, pp.23–23)*. For example, we may be driven to perfectionism or to please others, qualities which serve us well if moderated but which become disruptive if we over-adapt and persistently overdo them to the extent that we are unable to meet our own needs.

Looking forwards and backwards

Anxiety is often a future-driven emotion; we predict, 'fortune tell' and catastrophise about what we think may be around the corner or how we are going to cope, or perhaps we look back and overthink our performance or how we came across in a particular situation. It is an appropriate, universal reaction to stressors and a useful emotion that keeps us safe by alerting us to potential danger. However, when prolonged, it becomes problematic, a disorder of extreme distress or dysfunction. Uncertainty feeds anxiety, stripping away control and removing any sense of structure and calm so that the future becomes a source of threat.

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

"Starting out in the industry as a young female is very daunting. Although things are changing in a positive direction, it can still feel like a man's world, and it is very hard to form relationships with the more senior members of the team, which can make it hard to progress in an industry where contacts really matter. I am constantly questioning whether the reason I didn't get accepted for something was because of my gender or age, and whether my level of experience is even being taken into account.

Depression and negative thoughts

Anxiety often goes hand in hand with depression, a complex disorder of emotion dysregulation leading to prolonged negative emotion (*dysphoria*) with a corresponding deficit in positive emotion (*anhedonia*). Depression has many contributing, interacting factors and its onset, presentation and recovery will differ for every sufferer. Depression is not an indicator of intelligence or competence, nor is it a matter of choice; it cannot simply be 'snapped out of'. It can be event-driven or develop by stealth, progressing gradually until the sufferer reaches the point of breakdown.

Depression and anxiety are characterised by rumination and biased interpretation of information or events in ways that support negative emotions, so that there is a repeated focus on distressing symptoms and their causes and consequences. This leads to feelings of hopelessness and futility, which impair problem-solving and maintain self-criticism, and the sufferer becomes increasingly passive.

Common depressive beliefs are focused on the self ('I am weak/stupid/useless/not good enough'); on others ('nobody understands me/people are inconsiderate/untrustworthy/aggressive/better than me') and on the world ('life is unfair/I will be rejected/abandoned/unloved/unsuccessful/I will always feel this way').

Starting out and standing out

As we start out in our careers, one of the first things we seek is a sense of belonging and acceptance – basic needs throughout our lives, but particularly when we enter unfamiliar territory. We look to test our abilities, develop our sense of identity and seek social intimacy – a sense that we are part of the tribe – in order to fully integrate into our chosen world of work. We may have a leaning towards 'conscious competence', aware of still having much to learn, a need for application and persistence, and a desire to be inquisitive and keep learning.

There may be great anxiety at this stage and a particular fragility for rejection and disappointment, leading to lack of confidence and low self-worth. In the context of our careers, these feelings are normal and even desirable if they prompt reflection, learning and mastery leading to self-awareness, development and increased confidence. If we have a healthy internal evaluation and are skilled at emotion regulation, we tend to respond with resilience, learn from disappointments or mistakes, and bounce back with minimal impact on our wellbeing. Sometimes, however, we will have a more negative response – doubt, self-criticism, despondency and comparison with peers.

Comparison is the nemesis of self-esteem, but readily available through social media. We have probably all spent a quiet evening lounging on the sofa with a glass of wine and a bad takeaway, whilst a glance at Instagram 'confirms' that the rest of the world is currently partying on a beach in Ibiza (insert your own favoured scenario!). Comparison taps into our deep-seated need to belong and tells us we are missing out – and perhaps we are the only one missing out. And so it goes with work; whether it's about competence, opportunity or likeability, social media will happily track down any kernel of self-doubt, 'confirm' and magnify it, leaving us ruminating and feeling isolated.

How work affects mental health

Finding a way through

As we progress to the middle years of work, there is often an increased sense of confidence, resourcefulness, reputation and professional mastery. There may be increased opportunities and productivity, although even positive career progression and promotion can be challenging. A hoped-for career transition may be unfulfilled or turn out to be disappointing. There may be a return to the 'conscious competence' stage and with it a renewed sense of vulnerability. This can be a time of feeling in the prime of your career with all the benefits of experience and still high energy levels, but nevertheless plenty of challenges and uncertainties to navigate.

There can be the intensity of being thrown together with colleagues in the bubble of a shoot, working and living exclusively like a mini family. Deep bonds develop and there is a shared collective endeavour. It can feel catastrophic when those ties are severed, bringing feelings of loss in terms of relationships but also sometimes in that a part of yourself must be left behind, sealed off from life back at home. After a significant time away, there may be a burden of expectation to quickly pivot back into home life with little time for reflection, processing or celebrating achievement. This takes emotional and physical agility and may result in a period of loss in reconciling different identities and withdrawing from peers who have really seen and experienced your professional capabilities.

Winding down

As we enter a different stage and edge towards the end of a working life, we start to look back and begin a final assessment of our professional experiences and achievements.

Opportunities may start to reduce and we move towards retirement with a sense that much of what is familiar to us is slipping into uncharted territory. We review our impact, contribution and success. We consider how satisfied we feel with the career that is now drawing to a close and what it has given to us. There may be regrets about missed opportunities or unfulfilled goals, and a tendency to wonder about purpose and meaning. Uncertainty is now focused on what lies beyond the world of work and what new opportunities will arise.

There may be a period of bargaining, seeking new ways of retaining creativity and remaining active in the world. Perhaps there's a desire to continue to influence and guide a younger generation by lending experience and expertise through mentoring or training.

We may experience lower energy levels and more health problems at this stage and, if there has been long-term stress and anxiety, or a lack of attention to health in earlier years, this can be a difficult time. There may be an experience of altered status and a loss of the intense relationships and sense of community that work brings. On a practical level, reduced earnings and the resulting impact on lifestyle may be a concern, as well as how to structure the time now available.

The COVID-19 effect

At the time of writing, COVID-19 has arrived uninvited and brought with it a whole new set of uncertainties and an abrupt loss of many familiar aspects of life. It has given rise to increased challenges for us in maintaining our mental health as we try to make meaning of a global pandemic and adjust to new ways of living and relating. We may paradoxically yearn to return to all the previous uncertainties, because at least they were familiar. This sudden shift, even if positive, can increase levels of anxiety and depression, simply because it was so unexpected.

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

"Sometimes it can be elating and very rewarding. Other times soul destroying and undermines my confidence a lot, especially in the last five years roughly. This coincides with a greater belief that ageism is very prevalent now.

Whatever stage you are at in your life and career, some of the mental health challenges described here may resonate with you, whether through personal experience or recognition of a colleague's struggles. These are normal, common responses to the industry's flaws and their associated uncertainties and insecurities. A collective willingness to acknowledge them, openly discuss them and advocate for improved support and conditions can only bring benefit. At different times some external help may be needed to get through a certain stage and deciding what kind of help will be best can be confusing – see the inside back cover for a breakdown of some of the kinds of support available.

Rachel Richards

Rachel is a registered counsellor in North Wales
PGD (Counselling) MBACP
Get in touch:
www.counselling-directory.org.uk/counsellors/rachel-richards

The Rory Peck Trust is proud to celebrate 25 years of supporting freelance journalists and their families worldwide.

- Assistance grants
- Safety training bursaries
- Free online resources
- Rory Peck Awards

Find out more at
www.rorypecktrust.org

RORY PECK TRUST

Sam's story

In response to our call to GTC members for any personal stories relating to mental health issues they would be prepared to share, we were deeply appreciative that this member (who wishes to remain completely anonymous, so we have used a false name), was courageous and generous enough to tell their own story – which is made all the more powerful by the accompanying view from their partner.

I was working as regular freelancer on a very popular TV show. Stresses were piled on us at work – very low pay, short meal breaks, late shifts with no transport home, no appreciation. Directors would sometimes give positive feedback but it wouldn't get through to the facilities company as regards pay grades and shifts. Often 'friends' would be brought in above those trying to work up. Meanwhile, my family life was breaking down, I was juggling caring responsibilities, plus I suffered an assault, with ensuing health issues, police interviews, investigations and an impending court case.

The final straw of shifts being cancelled at the last minute resulted in my sending an angry email stating that perhaps next time I was offered a better-paid job I would dump them at the last minute. They spoke to me about it, I apologised, explained I'd been stressed, and thought it was all sorted. However, I was never offered any further work with them. Or with anyone else involved with them. Everyone I spoke to claimed this was nothing to do with them and they really wanted me there – but apparently I was 'trouble'. The court case fell apart because of my mental health, I messed up another job because I couldn't concentrate, I stopped work altogether –and then I tried to kill myself.

The attempt was unsuccessful, but there was no moment of revelation or renewed desire to start living; just a feeling of still being trapped in my skin, with no escape. I've come across a few people who see suicide as a selfish act. Other than the daft idea that trying to put an end to your life is an act of self-preservation, really deep depression changes your way of thinking so completely that there is no rationale. I was utterly convinced that everyone would be much better off without me, that I was nothing more than a burden. Others tried to help by saying I should think of my loved ones and what it would do to them, but that just added to the guilt and trauma in my mind. I couldn't care for anyone else, I was in a constant unrelenting agony of mental pain that made mere existence seem like an inescapable hell every minute of every day. I'm almost grateful these days when I experience 'normal' depression and low mood. It's unpleasant, but it's nothing like the crippling agony of before.

> The most difficult thing about work was not being able to tell anyone. Instead of talking to someone, I would freeze up, unable to concentrate properly.

I did get help from NHS mental health services, but unfortunately, limitations of the service at the time plus my moving to different regions meant this often caused more trauma than relief. I went from one waiting list to another, enduring painful interviews with different practitioners as I tried to explain something I couldn't put into words. At various times I was diagnosed with PTSD, depression, anxiety and then Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). One psychiatrist was quite rude and made me feel really uncomfortable, so I asked if it might be possible to see a different doctor. This resulted in a letter informing me I'd been removed from their system (after over a year on the waiting list) because I had refused treatment. Things like that would destroy me all over again. The only thing that's been constant is the medication. I've tried coming off it in the past, but with dire consequences. Timing is everything. Medication does help to relieve the symptoms but doesn't provide a cure.

Trying to work through it

The most difficult thing about work was not being able to tell anyone. Instead of talking to someone, I would freeze up, unable to concentrate properly. My work got worse because I wasn't reacting to instructions from the director and couldn't remember what I was supposed to be doing or how to do it. I've always had a natural talent for my job, which was noted and appreciated by others, but now, in new surroundings, I became distant and appeared stupid. To be honest, I have no idea how I was behaving or how I came across. Nobody ever said anything. After the breakdown I couldn't explain why I'd disappeared for over a year, or why I was finding it even more difficult to remember how to do my job. I had to come back and pretend nothing had happened while still proving my worth.

My concentration, memory, reactions and energy are still affected at times – either by the medication or the condition; I don't know any more. It's impossible to explain that I actually know what I'm doing but have temporarily forgotten and lost all ability to communicate properly. I probably come across as inept and then fall into the trap of reinforcing that to others, believing that I am useless and unworthy. The more I work, the more the confidence, satisfaction and joy of the job comes back, but getting over that initial hurdle under the general pressures of freelance work and the expectations of people who you don't work with regularly is a very difficult thing.

It's been a case of three step forwards, two steps backwards. Sometimes it still seems like I've got nowhere, but when I compare myself to the time I couldn't speak, dress or feed myself, or venture out of the house for two months in the pits of despair, I'm doing pretty darned well.

Living with Sam

When I first met my partner it was probably on about the fourth or fifth date that they hinted they had a 'funny brain'. I wasn't at all sure what they were talking about – they seemed fine to me! They were of course not wanting to explain too fully the depth of their condition in case I, like others before, ran away in frightened ignorance. The illness history is long and complicated, starting in the teens, persisting over years of treatment and various interventions, to an eventual diagnosis of BPD. It's a 'hidden' illness with symptoms that others find hard to accept as real. My partner cannot talk on the phone to strangers; sometimes can't leave the house; cannot ride in most lifts; and sometimes needs rescuing from a shopping aisle. They jump violently at the slightest noise – and a really loud one can send them to bed crying.

Over the years (we met in 2006 and have been together since 2012), I have had the privilege to gain a deeper understanding and insight into how their mind can be OK one minute and totally debilitated and disabling the next.

I've learnt to watch out for certain triggers and, probably most importantly, the importance of communication at all times.

I have nothing but massive respect for the way Sam manages to keep going each day, maintaining a professional and social life, despite sometimes facing huge difficulties. As I do not suffer similarly, it's impossible for me even to begin to comprehend what it is *actually* like for Sam, but I feel I am more aware now thanks to our continued efforts to work together on ways to find peace and happiness.

Take, for example, the simple act of getting up in the morning. I don't think twice about jumping out of bed and launching into my day. In fact, I LOVE early mornings – clear, focused time, free from interruption. For Sam, sometimes getting upright and out of bed feels impossible, unable to speak or move. Other days you wouldn't know there was any problem at all.

This has taken me a long time to understand and accept. I have seen Sam in an almost catatonic state on the couch. The doorbell rings, Mum drops in unexpectedly and Sam snaps out of the fug, suddenly seemingly fine. I used to question this: What's going on here? How come you're like that when I'm around, yet you're fine when your mum shows up? I now know that it takes a superhuman effort to hide the pain and anxiety. Sam doesn't need to hide anything from me. I now fully understand and accept this.

Sam is a freelance camera operator, doing many varied jobs – perhaps gathering news, sometimes multicamera on a stadium event, often running around for 12 hours with a handheld camera, the list goes on. Most days are fine – but anxiety levels before a job can sometimes reach dangerous levels. In all our time together, I have never seen Sam miss a day's work – despite some days only wanting to stay on the couch in a foetal position.

> I am amazed that Sam carries off so many varied jobs in such a professional manner – and 99.8% of colleagues are completely unaware of any kind of problem.

Fear of flying

Sam is terrified of flying – but work is often a plane ride away. The seat *must* be a window seat with a view of the exit door; if this is not absolutely certain, then panic might prevent leaving the house for the airport. To their credit, many airlines are now much more understanding of these hidden disabilities and have dedicated teams to assist. Others are still utterly hopeless, insisting on a premium payment to choose a seat. Sam doesn't use those airlines if possible.

I am amazed that Sam carries off so many varied jobs in such a professional manner – and 99.8% of colleagues are completely unaware of any kind of problem. The smallest things that I don't even think about can be *so* difficult for Sam, who soldiers on tackling a big variety of jobs, never really knowing what the kit will be like, how friendly, unfriendly or even downright dismissive the other crew might be, or whether some incident might unexpectedly trigger a panic attack, which will need to be hidden while attempting to finish the job.

Times are changing and there is a better public conversation now about living with mental illness. Sam and I have found talking the most effective way of managing things. It is when communication is cut that larger meltdowns happen. Sam is, I think, confident to share things with me that would never be shared at work. It would be wonderful if there was someone at the workplace who was available to speak to in emergencies – someone who understands, supports and maintains confidentiality.

> As I do not suffer similarly, it's impossible for me even to begin to comprehend what it is *actually* like for Sam, but I feel as though I am more aware now thanks to our continued efforts to work together to find peace and happiness.

Alex's commentary

What this reveals for the person and partner

Sam's story shows how a prolonged period of uncertainty can impact on mental health. In this case, it included unpredictable and ever-changing employment on top of stresses at home and a trauma. One of the emerging themes for me is the sense of loneliness and invalidation, which has produced a lot of concern and anxiety for both Sam and their partner, who individually put high expectations on themselves in coping with this challenging situation. Sam's desire to remain strong and capable, both at work and through the court case, as well as the feeling of inability to communicate distress, has led to feeling abandoned and alone. The partner's need to solve and fix things, while not entirely sure how, has led to stress and overwhelm. What they have in common is feelings of incapability and failure – with the world and, to a degree, each other, despite the unquestionable care and devotion within their relationship.

Both stories highlight the global need for a much deeper understanding of mental health and the impact that stressful situations can have on us. Opening up a dialogue about how we feel, as well as an acceptance of the role of our emotions, are crucial to alleviating painful effects of stress and trauma. Understanding the differences between mental health, mental illness and mental health conditions can help prevent the use of labels that may make an individual feel worse.

How work contributed to the problem

It sounds as if Sam faced continued uncertainty at work, with inconsistent income and unpredictable, irregular schedules. This manifested in the email that ultimately led to no longer working with the company. Sam also witnessed nepotism, evoking frustration. With no mental health support from the employer, Sam's wellbeing was ignored, leading to feeling misunderstood and alone, added to which the label 'trouble' increased Sam's resistance to opening up. It would also explain the problems in concentrating and being present during the working day, leading to a feeling of being 'stupid'.

Recommended routes for therapy/ treatment/ self-practice

So far, Sam has had to rely on underfunded NHS services, which were unhelpful due to lengthy waiting lists and, it appears, a lack of appropriate therapeutic approaches. Moreover, Sam's request to engage with a different professional having been denied, and then removal from the waiting list altogether, may have further added to the feelings of uncertainty, anger and anxiety. Both partners' perspectives reveal issues with Sam's original diagnoses. From the symptoms presented, Sam is likely to be experiencing prolonged and intense stress, anxiety and depression (rather than BPD), resulting from lack of control over life and choices, as well as a seriously traumatic event. I would strongly recommend that Sam finds the right holistic therapist. Often engaging with treatment based on a singular modality (for example, just CBT) is not helpful because people are complex; reducing their experience to one approach can be damaging in the long run. Additionally, a shared understanding of Sam's condition, including the use of appropriate language, will not only help both partners, but also friends and family, and result in Sam feeling accepted and, ultimately, help develop their self-esteem.

The process of discovering the right therapist *(see the inside back cover)* can initially seem daunting, however some practitioners offer free phone consultations, which can alleviate any concerns and build confidence in engaging with the process. It is important that Sam attends regular sessions. Considering the nature of their employment, online therapy (e.g. Skype or Facetime) could be most useful. Research shows that face-to face communication can be invaluable in maintaining relationships, whether in person or virtually.

Sam's suicide attempt is a whole area to be explored in itself, but it only goes to highlight the accumulative impact of the pressures faced at the time, not only in work life but also the court case after what appears to have been a seriously traumatic assault.

Sam's partner is also experiencing stress and overwhelm, suggesting that therapy might be useful to them too, to help understand their own feelings around what is happening in the relationship, as well as their own experience of the world.

Rachel's commentary

Sam's story illustrates how a combination of personal and workplace trauma led to mental health problems, which have resulted in a continuing struggle. Like many people with a mental health condition, Sam pushes through, ignoring needs at work to maintain a professional life – in fact, so successfully that these health issues go largely unnoticed in the workplace. This is a common response: fear of showing vulnerability, fear of colleagues' perceptions and responses if mental health problems are spoken about, and fear of the potential impact on future work opportunities.

Unfortunately, this compartmentalising strategy usually has an exhausting and debilitating effect because coping strategies and recovery are delayed until a later, more 'convenient' time when it feels safe to lower the mask and allow the feelings, thoughts and behaviour that are 'unacceptable' at work to emerge. Sam's support network is therefore narrowed, focused mainly internally and on the partner.

Sam and partner both identify the culture, attitudes and lack of support within the industry as having contributed to the onset of mental health problems and in hindering recovery. The protection and support available appears limited.

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

"I have had depression and been medicated for it for 10 years. I know of many others in our business with similar issues. The only real difficulty it presents is that when it strikes, you really don't want to be sociable, and our job, like many others, is based on your work and your ability to teamwork and be part of the gang. It would be good sometimes to know your work is secure if you don't feel like being sociable. Also if you have the kind of work that requires calling to let people know you're available, then that becomes very precarious when you have mental health issues. How you address that though I'm sadly at a loss.

Home and Away

In our survey, some of the main themes confirmed were the stresses that the uncertainty, irregular hours and work patterns, plus long, unpredictable periods away from home associated with working in TV, can bring. That said, patterns like these may be so well established that they've become the 'norm' for many camera professionals and their families. So it can be equally disruptive if that pattern suddenly changes (as happened in the COVID-19 lockdown). Psychotherapist **Alex Golabek**, who has written regularly for GTC In Focus, looks at these particular strains and recommends some strategies for coping.

How to make being away from home work

- Engage in regular communication with friends and family back at home (face-to-face communication is equally good even if online, according to research) to ensure togetherness and alleviate conflict.
- Have a clear agreement with your partner on the amount of time you are both willing to endure without seeing each other in person. This can ensure you feel equally important and value each other's needs.
- If you're single, and have no immediate family depending on you, ensure regular communication with those who are important to you and make an effort to socialise with colleagues and strike up friendships to prevent loneliness.
- Ensure clear communication with your client about what your contract requires and your needs while you are fulfilling it. Employers have a duty of care for your mental health, so expect and ask for help when it's needed.
- Regular therapy for those who work away is very valuable, allowing you to share your thoughts and feelings with a qualified practitioner in a confidential manner. It may also provide you with a better understanding of any experiences you encounter while away and equip you with the strength to make the best decisions for you.

Away from home

As a camera professional, it's likely you've experienced working away from home for days, weeks or months, depending on your line of camerawork. You know you love what you do; it makes you feel fulfilled (at least for the most part), but the job demands your being away, so you just accept this as an inevitable consequence. What are the potential impacts of long-term, long-distance employment though?

On a personal level, hours of travel on top of long working days may result in a reduced ability to nourish and rest properly, both of which can lead to a feeling of disarray and, if involving driving when tired, can be physically dangerous as well. Less time for nutritious meals can mean we reach for fast food and inhale it rather than digest; less time for rest equals disturbed sleep, which can lead to irritability, loss of focus and impaired productivity. The love we have for the job can get buried when our bodies are not able to function effectively. If only the pattern of the allocated hours was more predictable, we could feel safer and calmer.

The stress of not knowing

In fact, long and variable days are cited as some of the most challenging factors by camera operators I've been in contact with; the lack of a sustainable routine can quickly produce feelings of stress, uncertainty and overwhelm. The lack of stability may lead to people choosing to stretch their availability beyond what is physically or psychologically desirable, or using their remaining energy to seek yet more similar work – and this can form a vicious cycle that may seem difficult to break.

The rarity of a standard 9–5 day in the film and TV industry has been noted by many. Film director and writer Nora Ephron broke the mould by allowing her team to leave the set at a reasonable hour, in line with her resistance to Hollywood as a 'male-oriented industry' and her desire that everyone should be able to lead as normal a domestic life as possible.[1] In a recent Zerb article, DoP Martin Hawkins paid tribute to Ricky Gervais for similarly prioritising 'family-friendly' hours on set to allow cast and crew members to maintain some level of reasonable home life when shooting his shows.

It's tough on family and friends

Relationships can suffer when one or both partners are physically away from each other for prolonged amounts of time. Communication breakdown stemming from absence because of the persistent lack of time can pave the way for a fallout or conflict. The less opportunity to talk we have, the more likely the emotional distance will sweep in, uninvited.

No matter your relationship status, homesickness can be experienced by anyone who has ever been away.

Research shows that the children of parents with long-distance careers are more likely to spend less time on their education, and this is more so when it's the mother who periodically leaves.[2] You may have concerns that your absence will introduce instability to your children's supportive structure, yielding behavioural problems. Your offspring may feel unwanted or insignificant because contact with you becomes limited and intermittent. This in turn could lead to a relationship breakdown between you and your partner if they begin to feel overwhelmed with implementing the schedules and discipline, or a sense of loss resulting from being the one that is always available. It could also spark resentment because of the disturbed give-and-take ratio – and back on the conflict wheel we go.

Seeking comfort

To counter this, you may find yourself needing a stress release in any form possible: maybe a drink with your colleagues after wrap – or perhaps several. There's so much to connect over: you've had an exhausting day, full of shared experiences you'd like to go over, and the gossip and banter ease the pain of tiredness. Although this sounds like a good idea in theory, you're now spending even more time at work than originally planned, on a more regular basis. Is this what relaxation has to look like? What if you don't get along with some of the people you're surrounded with? You bite your tongue (connection lost) or let it rip (conflict). Or what if there is someone there who seems to accept and understand you, maybe better than you thought? Infidelity is a common occurrence when we suddenly experience what it's like to feel seen and heard, away from the mundane or normal.

So, what's the alternative? Locking yourself up in the hotel room and spending time alone? Unmonitored, isolation can turn into loneliness.

Doing what you love long-distance can enrich you in ways a 9–5 day could not. The chance to experience different cultures, time zones and cuisines brings an authentic flavour for life you can share with your loved ones. During the good times, the income can provide a lifestyle you've wanted, paying for the mortgage, holiday, dates out, your children's education. The colleagues you meet on various assignments can turn into friends, making you feel you belong, through sharing daily events and challenges. Some relationships will help further your career development so that perhaps your stress levels reduce because you don't need to chase the next contract with such ferocity.

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

> "I had to work the day my first child was born as I needed the money. I had to leave my partner alone in the hospital because I couldn't afford to lose work.

Home, not away

Of course, the global pandemic brought a whole new set of pressures. Firstly, financial: according to Grocott (2020)[3], just 20% of TV freelancers surveyed by Viva La PD were eligible for any income support from the government or furloughing; freelance camera professionals struggled to register as self-employed. Moreover, at the time of the survey, less than 17% of the industry was working and more than half felt they might be forced to change career if the circumstances did not change in June.

Loss of earnings can produce insurmountable immediate stress because the current reality has suddenly stopped mirroring the original plan, no matter how chaotic that may have seemed. There is a constant worry: what kind of work will I be doing post–pandemic? How will it change? Will there be any?

How to make being home work

- When your finances are lower, readjust your expectations to what you actually have. This may mean rebudgeting or choosing another way to shop. Take advantage of financial holidays to try and save some money.
- Freelancers could use the time off to create a career development plan: attend a course; network with people from the industry to become aware of any upcoming opportunities.
- To prevent unnecessary conflict, ensure you communicate with your family adequately. This means frank speaking about your concerns and needs, as well as theirs, and figuring out an appropriate way to meet them.
- Clear communication about your role within the household is crucial for you to feel you belong and for them to feel relieved of some chores.
- Talk about your worries as regards the state of the industry; although this might not change anything, it will enable you to feel empowered and you will receive support and ideas about your new reality.

Change is upon us

Social distancing rules may mean the very format of work will undergo huge changes, along with any previous expected patterns of work. Production of some TV shows may be significantly delayed and others may never resurface, with both outcomes bringing their own uncertainties and challenges for camera professionals.

Such a sudden reduction of income can have devastating effects. Although we may be able short-term to draw on the mortgage and credit holidays available, these are only temporary fixes and do not compensate for potential long-term unemployment or an entirely new way of working.

A new dynamic – with no end in sight

Abrupt change often results in conflict between partners. Unspoken and exchanged concerns among adults can mount to arguments, while children may not be able to comprehend the disruption to their routine. The person who has been away, but earning, may start to feel redundant in more ways than one. Children may resist the rules imposed by the parent they've become accustomed to seeing only periodically, while partners may feel that the psychological and physical space they've come to appreciate has been removed – and they've had no say in that. Frustration on all fronts may rattle the home life, and the roles of each person may become unclear, leading to further disarray.[4]

The life and stability of the camera professional who has now returned and is not planning to leave again for the foreseeable future has been radically altered – and with no visible end in sight. Not only are they no longer bringing in the money, they are also likely feeling out of place because their purpose has been shaken and, even if they were used to uncertainty, it has now taken on an entirely new shape. The future of the whole industry is unclear. They feel stuck in a moment that seems to go on forever in the home, not quite knowing how to fit in and torn apart from their work 'family'. The loneliness here may seem vast – with anxiety and depression just around the corner.

But, as Michelle Obama once said: *"You should never view your challenges as a disadvantage. Instead, it's important for you to understand that your experience facing and overcoming adversity is actually one of your biggest advantages."* We all experience doubt when all we can see is the unknown. What is important to remember is that this is a truly unique time that we will (hopefully) never experience again. We get to spend more time with our loved ones, be more present every day, giving and receiving emotional support where it is needed and abundant. We get to connect with our children and watch them develop, becoming more involved and easing the pressure from our partner. We get to feel more secure, starting real discussions about what is happening for us and around us, without our usual outside censor: time. We get to grow within our communities, more connected. We can enrich our own skillset through courses and webinars, creating new interests and ideas. We also have an option to consider: because this is the career for me, how can I experience it so that I am the happiest I can be?

Alex Golabek

ego therapy
Phone number: 07746 120266
Email: alexgolabek@egotherapy.org
Website: www.egotherapy.org

References

1 Levy A (2009). Nora knows what to do: The filmmaker foodie pays homage to Julia Child. *The New Yorker* (www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/07/06/nora-knows-what-to-do).
2 Cuong NV, Linh VH (2015). Should parents work away from or close to home? The effect of parental absence on children's time use in Vietnam. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* (www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19452829.2015.1103711?journalCode=cjhd20).
3 Grocott S (2020). Even though I'm self-employed and have lost all my work, the government isn't helping me. *Metro* (https://metro.co.uk/2020/05/28/self-employed-rishi-sunak-12755232).
4 Sandstrom H, Huerta S (2013). The negative effects of instability on child development: A research synthesis. Discussion Paper 3. *Urban Institute* (www.urban.org/research/publication/negative-effects-instability-child-development-research-synthesis).

It's all about you:

The Film and TV Charity is working hard to create a healthier, happier industry

The Film + TV Charity, formerly the CTBF until 2017, has established itself as a leading industry source of support across a range of issues. In the GTC's 2020 Mental Health Survey, we asked 'Are you aware of any sources of help relating to stress factors within our industry?' Over half of respondents replied 'No' or that they had never looked, but after that the next largest responses were 'Film and TV Charity' and 'GTC Welfare Officer/Mental Health resources'. The latter was pleasing but perhaps not surprising as this was a GTC survey, but it was also very good to hear that people are becoming widely aware of the excellent work of The Film and TV Charity.

The charity reacted quickly and effectively during COVID-19, rapidly setting up two specific funds in addition to its normal hardship fund. In its first two years since rebranding, it has also established a 24/7 helpline covering a range of potential stress and mental health factors; conducted its substantial and revealing *Looking Glass* research; and recently started an online community to help those experiencing loneliness or isolation.

Film and TV Charity CEO **Alex Pumfrey** explains how the charity can help when you need it and lays out some of its aims for the future.

The Film and TV Charity supports people in all corners of the industry, around the clock. If you're facing professional or personal challenges, from illness to unemployment, relationship breakdown or financial issues, the charity is there for you. We hear the stories that often go unspoken, whether it's the impact of long hours or missing a family wedding because of an over-running shoot – and our friendly team is a place to turn to if you feel stuck. You can find our HQ in Soho or speak to hub managers in Leeds and Bristol. The services are completely free and anonymous.

Some key facts from *The Looking Glass* research:

- **64% of people in the film and TV industry have experienced depression, compared with 42% nationally.**
- **87% of respondents had experienced a mental health problem at some point in their lives compared with 65% nationally.**
- **More than twice as many people in the industry have experienced anxiety than nationally.**
- **More than half (55%) had contemplated taking their own life, compared with 20% of people nationally; 10% of respondents reported that they had attempted to end their life, compared with 7% nationally.**
- **More than 1 in 8 worked more than 60 hours per week (compared with 1 in 50 in other industries).**
- **84% had witnessed or experienced bullying at work.**
- **More than half (55%) felt there was insufficient support for working with challenging content.**

> You often become part of a team for a short period and they are the only people you see. [1]

Looking Glass research

In February 2020, just before the full impact of COVID-19 became apparent, we released the findings from our in-depth research, *The Looking Glass*. The results were shocking and even worse than had been feared. More than 9,000 people completed the survey, and this was followed by qualitative interviews and research, providing the charity with stark evidence of the issues underlying work in this industry, from long working hours to difficulty meeting family commitments, loneliness and isolation, bullying, depression and serious mental health problems.

Of course, COVID-19 has put even more pressure on people and nationally there was a spike in recorded anxiety and depression at the start of lockdown, which has remained around 40% higher than normal.

The charity offers year-round financial grants and although the COVID-19 emergency fund is now closed, the regular grants scheme remains open, so if you're struggling to make ends meet, you should speak to the team (filmtvcharity.org.uk/we-can-help/financial-support). The charity is able to step in and help in many ways and we can be flexible to individual situations. You could receive help with issues ranging from medical costs to white goods, paying for professional counselling, and even cover the costs of bankruptcy. The money could be in your account in just a few days.

Notes

1 Wilkes M, Carey H, Florisson R (2020). *The Looking Glass: Mental health in the UK film, TV and cinema industry*. Research conducted for The Film and TV Charity by Work Foundation (filmtvcharity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Looking-Glass-Final-Report-Final.pdf).

FILM + TV CHARITY

24/7 Support Line

The Support Line was one of the first new services launched by the charity in 2017. If you need some help, you can call the charity any time of day or night to discuss what support may be available. The free, confidential and independent Support Line provides 24/7 support for everyone working in the industry, on everything from debt to depression. The trained team has lots of experience and can give quick and discreet advice.

The 24/7 Support Line can provide:

- Financial, debt advice and referrals to the grants team.
- Counselling and emotional support.
- Up to 6 sessions of CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) via video or phone.
- Specialist bereavement counselling.
- Legal advice, including for housing or family problems.
- If you're in a particularly difficult situation you may be referred to a case worker who can stay in touch over 3 to 6 months to help you find a way forward.

Access the service by phone: 0800 054 00 00, online chat: filmtvcharity.org.uk or email: support@filmtvcharity.org.uk

A few tips for today:

- As well as connecting with others, remember to connect with yourself.
- Try not to judge others and #BeKind.
- Cross one bridge at a time.
- Learning to tolerate uncertainty is a skill.
- Think about your use of social media and whether or not it makes you feel better.
- Be honest with yourself about any bad habits, like eating or drinking too much, that are making you feel worse.

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

When asked in the GTC survey what more could be done in terms of mental health support, a couple of people suggested a helpline:

> **Confidential helpline? It's difficult, as making an initial call to someone is a big step. The TV business is a lonely one.**

> **Perhaps a number to call for advice on mental health problems as well as issues that can have a negative impact on mental health, such as financial difficulties.**

...which just goes to show The Film and TV Charity is thinking along the right lines.

> We know that people in this industry are passionate and love what they do, but it can be hard. We owe it to the thousands of people who came forward, who entrusted us with their private stories, to instigate culture change across the industry. People have told us that they want more support and someone to speak to when something does go wrong.
>
> **Alex Pumfrey**
> CEO of Film and TV Charity

It's good to stay connected – you're not alone

In our research, we found that many people working in this industry often feel isolated and left out – in fact, 1 in 10 people scored the maximum on a standard measure of loneliness.

However, many wanted to be more open about what was going on behind the scenes, and an amazing 86% of respondents said that they would feel comfortable supporting a peer who was going through a difficult time.

COVID-19 has resulted in a huge amount of extra pressure for many, but it's important to remember that feeling anxious is a completely normal reaction to stressful events. We work in a traditionally competitive environment but you are part of a dedicated and creative community, and making connections could help you to feel less isolated. There's evidence to suggest that being part of a supportive group and feeling connected to others in the same situation, even remotely, can be an empowering experience and help to relieve anxiety both immediately and in the longer term.[2]

If you're struggling with your mental health in this pandemic, know this – we are here for you.

Reach out today

mind.org.uk/together

mind for better mental health

Charity no. 219830.

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

> **"Looking back, there are certainly times when talking to someone for support might have helped but who and how are difficult to answer. For me I only really struggled when I was short of work and getting busy again usually resolved the problem but long periods of little work are hard to deal with.**

Online community

Responding to this recognised need, we recently launched a new online community tool, delivered by Big White Wall, where people can chat in groups or one-to-one, under the guidance of trained wall guides. This is accessible at any time for anyone who works in the industry. It's a safe space for professionals to start discussions, feel connected and chat confidentially about their thoughts and concerns. It's a much-needed resource if you aren't able to turn to company structures for help. You can try it now at: **filmtvcharity.org.uk/community**

If you don't feel like talking to others, you can also use the platform to access guided self-help courses to help you manage a range of mental health difficulties, including depression, stress, panic and grief, as well as problem-solving and assertiveness training. You can track your progress and reach out too, if you feel like you need more personal support. The community is monitored 24/7 to ensure safety and anonymity.

A healthier, happier industry, starting now

Our ambitious 2-year action plan in response to the findings from the *Looking Glass* research, named the *Whole Picture Programme*, is now set to launch in October 2020. We already have the support of forward-thinking leaders from across broadcast, film and exhibition to fund the programme, and are working with mental health charity Mind and industry bodies. The plan is part of an ambitious 10+ year sustainable strategy to create real and lasting change across the industry.

Notes

2 Brooks SK, et al. (14 March 2020). The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: Rapid review of the evidence. *The Lancet*, 395(10227):919–920.

Keep in touch

Find out more: **filmtvcharity.org.uk**

Support the charity's ambitious movement for change by following on social media **@filmtvcharity** and registering for emails at: **filmtvcharity.org.uk/keep-in-touch**

Make sure you download resources to share with your crew at: **filmtvcharity.org.uk/resources**

If you're interested in supporting the charity in other ways to create long-term solutions to the issues uncovered in the research, contact the team by emailing: **mentalhealth@filmtvcharity.org.uk**

Registered charity no. 1099660.

Freelancing always feels precarious, but never more so than when things change and the usual ways of finding work are disrupted. Freelance trainer David Thomas looks at some financial skills that can help creatives reduce anxiety, even in uncertain times.

Controlling freelance finances

How do you predict something that's unpredictable? It's a question I am asked regularly during my *Finance for Freelancers* courses.

When I left the BBC after 22 years to set up a training business, this was something I struggled with myself. I'd been used to knowing exactly how much money would drop into my bank account. It was the same every month even if I was on holiday or sick with man-flu. But now I had this financial mist ahead of me. No waymarkers, and no one to guide me. At least that's how it felt. But the more I thought about it, the more I realised there are fixed points; it's just that they're not always where you expect them.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit, many freelancers suddenly found the financial mist turning into a fog. Unpredictable finances are one thing, but now the rules were different too. Our usual professional networks were unable to channel work our way. Many had turned into Zoom-based emotional support networks instead.

There was a real need to find new ways of taking control. So here is my own guide to blowing that mist away.

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

> **"The uncertainty of freelance work is the biggest drain on mental health. Will I be working? When will the job start? Will it get recommissioned? Do the company want to hire me for the new series? How can I stop my rate being eroded? Etc, etc. Not knowing whether you are coming or going leaves you in a state of anxiety and paralyses decision-making in personal life.**

Value your skills

Whether you're getting regular income or a bit here and there, it's important to remember that you have skills that are valuable to someone else.

Another source of anxiety for some is the need to talk about money. We have to agree a price before agreeing to work, and we have to ensure the correct amount is paid after the work is completed – and on time.

I use a mental trick to make this feel less like I'm begging for money. Whenever I talk about money with a client, I remove all emotion from the conversation and imagine I'm discussing money on behalf of my business. It means I don't take it personally and I adopt a matter-of-fact (yet polite) attitude.

After all, they have a budget they need to spend, and my business has the skills they need. It's also helpful to remember that if they don't need your skills on this occasion there are others who will. That removes the pressure and ensures I don't come across as desperate.

Pin things down, chase things up

Having agreed to the work, get into the habit of confirming the conversation in writing, even if it's a SMS conversation. As long as it's in writing and they've agreed the job, the hours and the rate, that's effectively your contract.

And never let a payment lie. I find the easiest way of chasing money that's late is to call up the person who actions the payment (usually an accounts person or someone in the finance department). I do this a day or so after it's late. It means the phone call doesn't feel like a complaint; it's just a polite check that they received the invoice and there wasn't a mistake on it. I hardly ever chase payments through the person who gives me work, as they're not usually the person who makes the payment happen.

And in 15 years of running the business I've noticed that phone calls get noticed and emails get ignored.

Look for the levers of control

When people say they're anxious as a freelancer, it's often because they feel out of control. Someone else chooses to give them work; someone else decides what to pay them; people don't pay properly/enough/on time/at all.

So where do we have control?

In finance terms, the first place to look is not where the money comes in, but where it goes out. It's not good enough to say 'I need to earn as much as I can'. Much better to target a specific figure that you'd like to earn, in order to have the lifestyle you want.

Pinning down monthly budgets for each area of your personal life can be revealing. It's the kind of thing banks make you do when you want to borrow money, but it's also a great way of learning about yourself and your personal relationship with money. Things like rent or mortgage are obvious, but you should also know how much you spend on food per month, or eating out, or going to the gym. You're effectively putting a price on your lifestyle, including all the bits that keep you happy, such as hobbies and pastimes.

Give yourself permission to spend

Just listing your spending in this way will probably cause you to question some of it. You may well spot some ways of cutting back which hadn't occurred to you before. But it's also important to realise that setting budgets is a way of giving yourself permission to spend, albeit within parameters. It can be very liberating and a much nicer feeling than saying to yourself: 'I'm a freelancer so I can't spend anything'.

Match your monthly spending with an earnings target

Once you have a typical monthly budget, you can start to think about how hard you'll need to work in order to meet these costs. For example, if your monthly budget is £1000 and you normally earn £200 a day, you will need to work on average five days a month. This seems obvious in black and white, but it always amazes me how many freelancers never come at their finances from this direction. It's also very motivating to have a target to hit. If you are aiming for £1000 and earn £5 more than that, you will feel like a million dollars.

Plan your freelance life in three parts

Alongside giving yourself permission to spend (within limits), you also need to give yourself permission to have time away from thinking about work. Every freelancer has three parts to their life:

- time for working and earning
- time for working but not earning (e.g. admin, training, networking and finding work)
- time for your personal life.

The balance between these three parts varies from personal to person. The key is to see it as more efficient to be working at some times and not at others. Being mindful that your personal life is separate from your professional life is a great way of reducing stress. Switching off and being 'off duty' for your freelance business becomes more relaxing and frees up your brain to think about other things.

Paint visions of the future

Another good tip for freelancers is to paint a financial picture of how your next year may look. I'm not suggesting you can predict the future, but it's important to be able to plan different scenarios and consider how these would affect the cash you have in the bank. In business parlance this is called cash-flow planning, but as one of my trainees said to me, it's more a question of 'ensuring you're not skint next February'.

So how do you do that?

First, grab a cash-flow planner in the form of a spreadsheet. There are loads around, and I have two specifically aimed at freelancers on my website.

Second, look at your monthly budget information for your personal life and add in any regular costs for the business part of your life.

> The difference with this crisis is that it is affecting so many more people, so everyone is more open about their debts than they were before COVID-19 — they don't feel the same sort of shame and secrecy about their financial problems, helping to remove some of the stigma normally attached – but getting help early and in the right places is still key... The first rule is never feel like it's 'only you'.
>
> **Graham Maunder**
> GTC Chair

Third, do a bit of research about the market you're in. How much do people normally get paid? Which parts of the year will you get less work? (August is rubbish for training work by the way – everyone's out sunbathing!)

You now have all the information you need to fill in the cash-flow planner, estimating what might come in over the next 12 months and what might go out. The spreadsheet will do all the adding up and subtracting for you. And then it weaves its magic.

The line at the bottom

This sort of planner looks at what you've said might happen across the next year, and on the bottom line it tells you whether you will run out of cash at the end of each month.

The point of this is not to predict *the* future. No one can do that. It's to allow you to paint *different versions of the future*. For example, you can ask it to predict what would happen if you got no income for 12 months, or 6 months or 3 months. Looking along the bottom line will warn you not only that you might run out of money, but, crucially, by how much.

Quantifying problems before they arise

I will always remember a freelancer telling me that she really enjoyed doing cash-flow planning when things were 'going normally' but that she'd stopped when the industry went into lockdown because of COVID-19. Fortunately, she then realised that this is precisely when cash-flow predictions are so important. They help you to take control of the future and pin down exactly how short of money you might be at certain times of the next year. That's a much healthier place to be because you are quantifying the predicted shortfall. Thinking you might run out of money is terribly stressful. Much less stressful is seeing that you might run out of money in 6 months' time, and that you'll be short by exactly £600, for example.

We're back to trying to clear the mists and make finances more specific, pinning them down to actual figures. Only then can we look them in the eye and do something about them.

Sources of financial advice

Getting help is key and, apart from the help and advice on offer through the GTC, there are other really good resources out there.

PayPlan is one of the UK's largest providers of free debt advice and has a specialist team that deals with indebted small businesses.

StepChange, the debt charity, says more than 350,000 people visited its COVID-19 hub page in the first month of the pandemic and is another great resource if you are feeling worried about your circumstances. They can also advise on how to arrange long-term solutions and ways of paying money to those you owe.

Business Debtline is the UK's only free dedicated debt advice service for self-employed people and small business owners. It is there to help guide people through the help on offer.

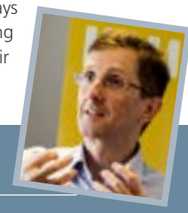
Citizens Advice has excellent free online resources to establish your debts and potential earnings, and help you work out possible solutions.

HMRC has a "Time to Pay" scheme if you're having difficulty paying tax bills. It even set up a dedicated COVID-19 helpline for those affected: 0800 024 1222.

Asking for help

Once you've quantified your monthly budgets and financial predictions, and you're confident of the going rate for your areas of work, you're in a better position to quantify any help you might need. Whether that's from friends and family or industry bodies, you will feel more in control if you know exactly how much help you're asking for. That's much better than hiding from the figures.

If there's one positive to come out of the recent disruption, it's that there is much greater recognition that our industry can be precarious. As a result, a number of organisations have been pulling out all the stops to do something to help. Perhaps the most significant is the Film and TV Charity (*see pp.16–18*), who during COVID-19 came up with some really inventive ways of channelling grants to creative freelancers suffering hardship. They're still doing great work and their helpline should be in everyone's contact book.



KATE WILLOUGHBY

Fact File

David Thomas is an experienced journalist, broadcaster and trainer. He worked in BBC production for 22 years before setting up a business to help freelancers develop their finance and networking skills. Check out training courses, and plenty of free resources at: www.davidthomasmedia.com

Has your life been turned upside down by illness or an accident?

If you, or someone you know is in need of help, please get in contact at **www.backuptech.uk**

Backup offers support and help to get you back on your feet.

backup
the technical entertainment charity

Finding inner strength through community

Dan Kidner is a busy Steadicam operator, well-known to many GTC members – an athletic guy operating in what may be perceived as one of the most overtly 'strong man' genres of camerawork – but here, Dan generously opens up about difficulties dating right back to his childhood that he has struggled with but now largely overcome – firstly by recognising the problem and then by seeking help through The ManKind Project.

I have been asked to contribute a piece regarding my own experience of the television industry and my work with the men's organisation 'The ManKind Project'. All I can speak for is my own lived experience and, if some of what I write resonates, then it will have been worthwhile. So, to offer a bit of background:

I have been working in TV for 22 years, first as a camera trainee at The London Studios, then Teddington Studios as a camera assistant, finally progressing to operator. I went freelance in 2002, working in studio as well as on OBs and single-camera television. In 2009 I also became a Steadicam operator and have worked across a wide variety of film and TV productions since then.

Early years

I was sent to boarding school aged 12, a 'privileged' education some might say, but for me it was a painful experience. For the first few years I lived in a dorm of 14 boys in what can only be described as a feral environment. Nowhere felt safe and constant bullying took its toll. Initially I found it extremely traumatising, but eventually it became a choice between silently crying or bringing the 'emotional shutters' down. I chose the latter, resulting in a numbed-out state. It was a useful coping strategy as nothing really touched me, with the only accessible emotion anger, which I now realise kept me safe and ensured people were held at arm's length. However, as I grew older, this coping strategy ceased to serve me well.

Starting in TV

When I started in TV in 1998 as a trainee camera assistant, I found the training intense. Having just graduated with a film degree, my TV studio experience was limited, which resulted in my feeling I was constantly in catchup mode, harbouring the sense I wasn't 'good enough'. I did gain a lot in terms of work experience, but I found the environment and culture to be judgemental and lacking in compassion. I even ended up going to the doctor as I was getting heart palpitations, only to discover I was suffering from stress-induced high blood pressure, aged 24. I never told anyone about that.

Now, I acknowledge that I have always put a vast amount of pressure on myself as I have a powerful inner perfectionist streak, which undoubtedly contributed to the stress, but I have also always felt that one's time as a trainee assistant is likely to be the most stressful period in the life of any camera operator – and yet this is rarely acknowledged. For any assistant, the first shot they are trusted with will probably be their most scrutinised ever and yet the one they are least likely to be able to deliver on because of the pressure on them. I well remember my own first operating job, on a live kids' show: this was the moment I wanted to be the best I possibly could but, feeling all eyes were on me, the extreme stress and tension inevitably impacted negatively on my camerawork. So, to any junior operators, know that your role as camera operator will never be as challenging or as stressful as that first 'red light'! The paradox is that the less one 'cares', the more relaxed and effective an operator you will become.

Through my early career I felt uncomfortable in my own skin, most likely due to my school experience, so began to use alcohol as a buffer – a way of bringing a more gregarious, confident 'representative' to social circles. I may even have been seen as the heart and soul of the party, but it concealed a very different reality, of which, at the time, I was completely unaware.

Marriage and fatherhood

So, fast forward to 2012: we had just had our second child and I was struggling. Before I became a father I had the misguided belief that I would just know how to be a good dad – my old habits would simply change and I'd be present and show up for my kids. In reality, I continued in my old engrained patterns of behaviour, using alcohol to escape my feelings. I felt calmer if I knew I had some drinking sessions organised to punctuate the week and also found myself with my head buried in my phone not wanting to engage with life.

Looking back, I realise I was suffering from some form of depression, but at the time never stopped for long enough to consider where I was at. Eventually, I decided I needed to look at my life and my issues. My wife had introduced me to an organisation called The ManKind Project (MKP), having already done the women's version, Woman Within (described as 'self-motivated personal development').

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

"Our industry can be very uplifting when you get creative satisfaction and enjoy a great team spirit. On the other hand, working hours can be long, you don't always feel a part of the team you're in and it can be hard to progress and get the right opportunities, which can lead to frustration and low self-esteem.

Rugby World Cup 2015

World Athletics Championships 2017

Discovering The ManKind Project

The first training every man who gets involved with MKP takes is the **New Warrior Training Adventure** (NWTA), a stand-alone, long-weekend training, which in itself often transforms that man's life for the better. It equips men with the personal tools to benefit from other trainings they may choose to participate in, which can include Personal Integration Training or a range of other trainings designed to empower men in their leadership of themselves and others. They may also choose to join one of the many local men's groups in the UK and Ireland; participate in the online community; or come back to staff the trainings they themselves have benefited from.

Seven years earlier, I had resisted exploring MKP, as I didn't feel, or at least hadn't yet faced up to, the fact that I needed anything. When I did take that step, it proved to be the most powerful experience I've ever had and was the start of a journey that has subsequently supported me to make healthier choices, set stronger boundaries and undoubtedly made me a better husband and father.

Since 2012 I have served 15 times on the staff team on NWTAs and I'm now on the Leader track. Around 60,000 men worldwide have also completed these weekends.

The weekends offer men the opportunity to look at their shadows – the parts we hide, repress and deny. This is an initiation we should all have received as boys, but mostly never did. I was struck by the power of the work, the gentle loving support I was offered and by hearing other men's stories that so resonated with my own. Men can so often feel alone in their own thoughts and feelings, and these weekends offer them the opportunity to verbalise those thoughts and feelings. The women's project was initially run on the same lines but it was found that slightly different versions work better for women and men.

It is certainly not easy, but if it hadn't been challenging, I don't believe I'd have the strength and resolve I now possess. Through 'the work' I was able to stop drinking and did so for 6 years, which allowed me to take a step back and assess my life and choices. This has given me greater confidence, stronger boundaries and the ability to be vulnerable, which I now recognise as a great power rather than a weakness. I am by no means the finished article as this is an ongoing journey, but I am pretty sure I would not be with my wife now, and would undoubtedly be in a woeful state of health, if I hadn't done this work.

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

"There is often pressure to socialise after and during working hours which is fine but this often involves drinking alcohol. Whilst it's possible to have a social drink, unfortunately it often becomes excessive drinking. If you don't take part, it can be taken in the wrong way and hence you feel alienated for not 'joining in'.

The ManKind Project

If anyone is interested in taking this step, five trainings a year in the UK and Ireland are usually offered in February, April, July, September and November. Although currently no physical trainings are taking place due to COVID-19, they are scheduled to resume in the autumn.
More information at: https://mankindprojectuki.org

Even during lockdown, the online groups are still running:
https://sites.google.com/mankindprojectuki.org/mkpconnection/home

The MKP sister organisation 'Woman Within' offers weekends for women: https://womanwithin.org.uk

If anyone would like to learn more, contact me on: dkidner@yahoo.com

Maybe a life coach would help

by **Ali Chapman**

Leave aside COVID-19, our survey results (as well as those of the Film and TV Charity's *Looking Glass* research) revealed that the lifestyle of many working in the camera and other TV/film departments frequently creates a situation full of uncertainty, irregularity and with many resulting stress factors, which, if not handled correctly, have the potential to build up into more severe health issues (whether physical or mental).

So how do you 'keep a lid' on things before they get out of hand?

Much to my surprise really, I have been working with a life coach for 18 months now – and I actually can't believe how much this has helped. I am the first to admit (and my coach knows this), I was quite cynical and even resistant to the idea at first. My partner (who is CEO of a successful medium-sized consulting company) has had a life coach for years but, to be honest, I considered this a bit of self-indulgence and one of our little differences (he likes yoga, I like pilates; he likes to talk issues through with people a lot, me less so) – so it was not something I'd thought of for myself. It all seemed a bit 'woo-woo'.

This is not to say that everything in my life was running like a smoothly oiled machine though. Far from it. As a character trait, I pathologically underestimate how long any task or journey is going to take, leaving zero time for contingency, so am constantly stressing to meet deadlines or annoyed with myself at being under pressure when going places; I find it really hard to say 'no' to things, whether it's work, freebies or stuff that will help someone out – and the list of chaos-inducing elements goes on. It's not that I didn't recognise this about myself, but I'd always felt I could just sort it out if only I put my mind to it. But I'm 62, so if I was going to achieve this unaided, maybe I'd have got somewhere by now if it was going to happen under my own steam!

So then (one piece of 'self-help' I did manage to sort out for myself), at the beginning of 2019, recognising that I'd let things slip on the fitness front, I signed up for a holistic exercise programme, which included three exercise sessions a week, a nutrition element – and here's the thing – a year's access to a life coach.

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

"Why should anyone else care? It's boring to me and boring to them. I don't believe that the people who claim to be interested actually are.

As mentioned, this was not something I'd ever identified I needed or wanted, but as it was included in the package I thought I might as well give it a go. It didn't get off to the best start as the coach (not surprisingly) was a bit unsure about my level of commitment – and she was right because I was also deeply unsure! At first, I found myself racking my brain to think of topics I could discuss as I didn't really think I had any 'problems' to bring to the sessions.

To cut a long story short, suffice to say that when the initial package came to an end, I realised I had come to enjoy and value the sessions so much that I opted to carry on; I would now really miss these (online) sessions. It's one hour a month when I can talk openly about anything that's stressing or perplexing me (I can also speak openly to my partner and do so all the time – but sometimes I want an objective view on something, or we differ about the best approach to an issue, or I feel it might be selfish to bring something up with him – the coaching session is my time to talk about anything without having to consider the effect of what I say on someone I care about).

In a year, I can say that life coaching has:

- enabled me to rationalise and organise my time in a more realistic and productive way, meaning I use it more efficiently and feel in less of a muddle
- allowed me to find a way to regularly do some art again (something that had dropped out of my life and which I really missed)
- helped me handle some tricky work situations and pay negotiations, by confirming my value and talking through different strategies
- provided a safe space to talk through issues that come up with family and friends
- kept me on track with my exercise regime.

Most importantly, being more sure of my self-worth and rather better organised makes me feel more in control. It's also reassuring to know that I would have access to a professional who now knows me well if things did spill over into more extreme anxiety about anything.

It's not possible to cover the range of different packages available under the umbrella term 'life coach' here, but if you are someone that doesn't consider they have any particular 'mental health issues' but is constantly a bit stressed, feeling that life could be better if only it were a bit more organised, or you were more in control or confident in certain areas… the list goes on, then I would urge you to look into this as something that might help cope with the vagaries of life as a camera professional.

As a taster of two different facets of life coaching, on the following pages two coaches explain their approaches.

Life isn't about finding yourself, it's about creating yourself

My coaching aims to help clients feel empowered to find a choice. I want them to discover that the way they're currently viewing things is just a perspective. Is the glass half full or half empty?

The aim is to open their minds to different perspectives on their current situation. How else could they view things? Could another perspective mean an easier experience? Sometimes just knowing you have a choice can be empowering and liberating. The more empowered you are, the more likely you are to be able to explore new avenues in times of overwhelm, whereas from a place of disempowerment, it's very hard to see a way forward – and people often end up feeling stuck.

I work with clients to give them tools to handle and deal with stress and uncertainty, as well as the hard moments in life, whether that's a global pandemic or a tight deadline. But it's also important not to disregard the current perspective, so I'll take time to explore that, allowing it to be heard and seen, before enabling them to see things in a new way.

If people are very stuck, seeing only the negatives of a situation, I might try a question like: 'Is there anything you can find that is good about your current situation?' There is always some very small silver lining or gift there somewhere… but can you find it? Does it get any of your time and attention or do the negative parts grab all your attention? Where our attention goes, energy flows and, unfortunately, as humans, we often focus on what's not working, what's not going well, where we're lacking. My coaching attempts to shift the focus.

Another question I like to use is: 'What would you on your best day tell you to do?' Invariably, if you have a negative perspective on something, you're tired, stressed, angry, irritable, overwhelmed. So, instead, when you're in flow, on point, what would that version of you say about this situation? This part of us – which is often not present in moments of stress and overwhelm – tends to have the best advice and clarity.

Gabriella Miller

Gabriella is an internationally certified life and business coach who left the corporate world to set up her own coaching business. She supports people to let go of the mental blocks and barriers that hold them back, enables coaches to build thriving businesses, and helps companies to create positive working cultures filled with employees with growth mindsets. She also co-hosts a podcast, *Pivot Points*, in which she interviews interesting and inspiring people, examining the pivotal moments in their lives and what it took for them to pivot.

www.gabriellamillercoach.com

Let go of who you think you are supposed to be and be who you ARE[1]

When I first started exploring personal development, I wasn't sure what to expect. It felt as if there were things wrong with me – but the further along the journey I go, the more I understand that we, as humans, are whole. We are perfectly imperfect as we are. But we experience trauma along the way. Things happen in our lives, which we then try to understand – and that determines how we feel about ourselves.

For many years, I worked as a corporate lawyer in large organisations. Looking back, I was actually very good at what I did, but because of my own expectations and conditioning, I ended up feeling incredibly uncomfortable in my own skin. Like a round peg in a square hole. And that meant a lot of time trying to be who I thought other people wanted me to be, wearing a mask. That eventually led to my experiencing depression, severe panic attacks and anxiety. Then in 2015 I was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Surprisingly, that was the catalyst I needed to shift my perspective exponentially. All the worries, fears, pressures and expectations fell away.

Suddenly I had the courage and conviction to be myself. At that point I knew I wanted to do everything I could to help other people feel the way I had begun to feel: that they were good enough, just as they are. You don't need to change who you are – what makes you amazing is your YOUNESS.

Life is an adventure, there is no right or wrong; it's a series of experiences that allow us to determine whether we are moving towards or away from who we really are. If things don't work out the way we expect; if we fall down or find ourselves in disappointment, it's all feedback. We can learn from it, adjust our sails, and move on again.

I'd love you to know that it's alright to have hard days, to not be afraid of the emotions we sometimes experience. By working with a coach, therapist or other professional, it's possible to learn to experience your emotions, to move through and be unafraid to feel those emotions; to not get stuck but instead to live vulnerably, wholeheartedly, and with courage and authenticity.

Life is full of challenges, ups and downs, and if you are able to cultivate resilience and a set of tools that can support you in navigating it all, then you get to experience life in full, HD, multicoloured glory!

One of the fundamental tools I use to support myself, and that I teach all my clients, is a balanced breathing technique that comes from a coaching modality called mBIT (multiple Brain Integration Technique). If you are feeling overwhelmed, anxious or afraid; if you are constantly thinking, doing, busy, juggling; this technique will restore calm and clarity. If you are someone who is always in your head, it will help you to return to your body, becoming present, mindful and more connected to who you truly are.

I'd love to share it with you and you can access my guided recording here: youtu.be/dNFh9hup6K4

GTC SURVEY RESPONSE

> **"Honestly, I need someone to almost hold my hand and guide me through understanding why at one moment I'm on top of the game and then the next on the scrapheap.**

Liz Peel-Yates

Liz Peel-Yates is an NLP Master Practitioner and mBit Master Coach. She supports those passionate about fully embracing their human experience, leading by example and through a combination of private and group coaching, workshops, online study and teaching: www.lizpy.com

1 Brené Brown (2010). *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let go of who you think you're supposed to be and embrace who you are.* Hazelden Publishing.

TIPS FOR TALKING

More than ever, we're encouraging everyone to be there for their friends, family and colleagues. We believe in three simple tips to help people support each other:

1

CHECK IN
You might not be able to meet face-to-face, but picking up the phone, having a video call or messaging someone lets them know you are there to talk and ready to listen.

2

LISTEN AND REFLECT
If someone opens up to you, remember that you don't need to fix things or offer advice. Just listening, and showing you take them seriously, can help someone to manage.

3

ASK QUESTIONS
Ask how someone is managing, and ask again if you're worried they aren't sharing the full picture. Asking again, with interest, can help someone to open up.

Follow us on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram, or sign up to our newsletter to see our latest updates and find out how you can get involved.

At Time to Change, we work to improve the way everyone thinks and acts towards those of us with mental health problems. In uncertain times our work doesn't stop – in fact, it steps up a gear as talking about mental health without the fear of negative judgement from others becomes more important than ever.

People tell us they worry that if they broach the topic of mental health problems, it'll create an uncomfortable or awkward situation. We know that talking about mental health really can change lives – even if that conversation is a virtual one.

www.time-to-change.org.uk

time to change

let's end mental health discrimination

Seeking help

Mental Health concerns

It is important to know that you will feel vulnerable, anxious, overwhelmed, sad, hurt, panicky, flat or numb at times – and these are normal emotions. If you experience persistent or extreme symptoms though, seek your GP's advice. Ask lots of questions about all the options, including medication, therapy, dedicated organisations and support groups. Often, a combination will be most effective.

Therapy

You may decide or be advised that therapy could help. Good therapy is active and collaborative; it may be challenging, but always in an accepting, supportive relationship. It can be helpful to talk to someone not personally connected with your life – so it's different from asking friends or family.

This can be a daunting step to take though, with the worry that it will involve a lot of time or expense before any benefit is felt. This is not necessarily the case and many feel relief early on. Many therapists offer flexible appointments rather than a set day/time each week.

Research overwhelmingly indicates that the main curative element in therapy is the nature of the relationship itself, rather than the specific technique. It should feel comfortable and as though both are working together to achieve the goals decided by the client. Free or reduced-fee discussions to explore what you want from therapy and whether the relationship is a comfortable 'fit' before going ahead are often available. Clients are at liberty to leave therapy at any time, although a planned and agreed ending is safest.

There are hundreds of different therapies available so it can be tricky to narrow things down, but here is a quick introduction to some of the main therapeutic approaches:

Psychodynamic

In modern psychodynamic therapy (formerly Freudian psychoanalysis) the therapist works collaboratively with the client to solve problems. It explores unconscious relationship patterns through the transference relationship between the client and therapist: what happens 'in here' (therapy room) reflects the client's process 'out there' (daily life) and 'back then' (early experiences). It seeks the resolution of past traumas/conflicts and to break unhelpful cycles of behaviour.

Humanistic

In person-centred therapy (PCT) the client–therapist relationship is of primary importance. PCT offers a way to harness a client's natural drive towards fulfilment and re-establish control over their world (particularly appropriate for initial crisis intervention, family and relationship problems, self-development). PCT facilitates self-exploration and recognition of blocks to thriving and experiencing all aspects of self, leading to openness and self-trust.

Transactional Analysis (TA)

Integrating psychodynamic and humanistic approaches, TA is a theory of systems, communication and personality. It looks at the concepts of life script: early decisions made about how to function and survive in the world based on environment and parental programming and messages; resulting patterns of behaviour and styles of communicating and behaving; and views about self, the world and others.

Cognitive and behavioural approaches (CBT)

Focused on thoughts and behaviours, these techniques are structured and specific, with particular emphasis on detailed assessment and evaluation of the problem. They involve challenging negative automatic thoughts, dysfunctional assumptions and core beliefs in order to correct faulty cognitive processes and irrational thinking. They seldom explore past events.

Linked to CBT are:

- **Acceptance and Commitment therapy** – values-based and incorporating mindfulness strategies.
- **Dialectical Behaviour therapy** for clients who are particularly emotionally vulnerable, with suicidal thoughts or self-harm.
- **Schema therapy** – focuses on more deeply ingrained, historically rooted core beliefs.
- **EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) –** helps with post-trauma flashbacks and nightmares by changing the way the brain stores memories of traumatic events.
- **Solution Focused Brief therapy** –goal directed, future-focused, short-term therapy drawing on a client's strengths and resources.

More information and find the right therapist –

The following sites are good reliable sources of information, including how to access therapy that may suit your particular need:

- counselling-directory.org.uk
- psychotherapy.org.uk
- psychologytoday.com

Some coping strategies

- **Connect with others** – have open, honest discussions with partner/family about professional challenges that impact relationships and engagement in family events; agree boundaries and non-negotiables.
- **Prioritise self-care** – looking after physical health through good nutrition, hydration, exercise and regular sleep patterns has a positive impact on strengthening the immune system and giving a sense of wellbeing and control as well as improving cognitive functioning.
- **Introduce routine** – build a positive, deliberate routine, even when away from home; small daily or weekly tasks give a sense of impetus and movement, and ticking off tasks on a list will remind your front brain that you are achieving and in control.
- **Self-awareness** – understand how you respond to setbacks and disappointments so that you can see them in perspective and view challenges as opportunities for learning.
- **Be creative** – having an absorbing and satisfying interest takes us into a calming 'bubble' away from day-to-day stresses.
- **Connect with nature** – put anxieties into perspective by connecting with and appreciating the wider world.
- **Breathing and grounding techniques** such as meditation and mindfulness can help bring the brain's executive functioning back online; these are also easily passed on to colleagues who may be struggling.
- **Process your thoughts and experiences** by talking, journaling.
- **Challenge poor practice with employers** who do not provide sufficient mental health support or reasonable working conditions.

“We’re the greatest actors of all because we’re putting on a brave face every single day”

No matter what’s going on right now, things may feel very different once you’ve had a chat.

Make connections and share how you’re feeling in our online mental health community.

All of our services are completely free and confidential.

Join today
filmtvcharity.org.uk/community

FILM + TV CHARITY

BIG WHITE WALL®

The Film and TV Charity 2019; all rights reserved. The Film and TV Charity is a registered charity no: 1099660. A company limited by guarantee. Registered in England and Wales no: 4816786.

This quote is taken from the *Looking Glass*, research commissioned by the charity in 2019.