

MIDWEST BUSINESS GROUP ON HEALTH

# Humans Work Here

*Advancing Strategic Cultural Wellbeing*

Insights from MBGH Mental Health Summit · March 2026

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# Context

*This presentation summarizes key insights from Cohort 1 of the Advancing Strategic Cultural Wellbeing initiative, developed in collaboration between MBGH and I M Human.*

Across two sessions, leaders surfaced four themes:

- How culture shapes emotional wellbeing and performance
- The role of listening as a leadership capability
- Practical ways to translate insight into action
- Wellbeing as a strategy — not a program

*Adapted from a presentation delivered at the MBGH Mental Health Summit, March 2026.*

## Initiative Design

- Two cohort sessions
- 15 employers per session
- Cross-industry participation across the United States

# Two needs were emerging

## A Playbook

*"That was a great workshop — but we need something we can act on every day."*

Leaders needed a structured framework for embedding wellbeing into culture — not just inspiration.

— Clients of I M Human

## A Community

Organizations wanted a space for leaders to come together — to share what's working, what isn't, and to build together.

Share lessons learned.  
Exchange challenges and successes.  
Remove silos.  
Ideate together.

*Not in isolation — but in community.*

*This work explores a simple idea:*

**Culture is not separate  
from performance.  
It shapes it.**

*What follows is what emerged when we started with the human work first.*

# But first, a little about me



*Where this work began*

# Human Work First → Strategy Follows

*Most organizations try to design strategy without first listening.*

## PHASE 1 · HUMAN WORK

01

### Life Moments™

Emotional Mapping

Create space for people to name what they're carrying — build trust.

02

### Wellbeing Calibration

Personal Reflection

Leaders reflect on how they care for themselves and each other.

03

### Culture Visioning

Co-Creation

Employees co-create what a healthier culture could look like.

## PHASE 2 · STRATEGY

04

### Strategic Design

Execution

Synthesize all listening into a structured plan — with ownership, measurement, and business alignment.

# What our cohort was carrying

A father diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

Becoming part of the sandwich generation.

The death of a spouse after a stem cell transplant.

Leaving a CEO role.  
Navigating what comes next.

Imposter syndrome.  
Feelings of being lost, scared, uncertain.

Who will be there to care for us one day?

**85% of managing emotions begins with naming them.**

*When people share Life Moments™, they stop to name what they are carrying. That is where the shift begins.*

# 85% of managing emotions begins with naming them.

*When people are given the space to name what they are carrying — the emotional system begins to regulate.*

**Life Moments™ · uncertainty · pressure**

*Connection and belonging increase.*

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**That is where listening becomes a strategy.**

# After Life Moments™ — we shift inward.

## How are you taking care of yourself?

1

*How are you caring for your own wellbeing?*

2

*What practices help you stay grounded?*

3

*How does your leadership behavior shape culture?*

### WHAT THE COHORT SHARED

Morning walks · Running ·  
Sunlight

Gratitude journaling ·  
Prayer · Meditation

Therapy · Asking for help ·  
Setting limits

Showing myself grace ·  
Allowing rest

# What the cohort shared

*"In the next 6–12 months, what one cultural initiative would you be proud to create?"*

C-suite leaders taking PTO openly and talking about it.

Leaders sharing their own stories and Life Moments™.

Creating safety for people to share what they're going through.

A PTO buddy system so people actually use their benefits.

Pet bereavement policies — acknowledging that loss is real.

Moving wellbeing from a program → into daily culture.

Prayer / meditation gatherings open across all faith traditions.

Leadership development as a wellbeing strategy.

Professional development as a belonging strategy.

**If you ask employees what they need — they will tell you.**

**Co-creation is the engine for engagement.**

# How Human Work Becomes Strategy

## Human Work

*High Touch*

### Life Moments™

*Listening · Trust building*

### Wellbeing Calibration

*Reflection · Self-awareness*

### Culture Visioning

*Co-creation · Shared ownership*

Human work makes strategy possible

## Strategic Design

*Listening becomes strategy.*

Ownership

Measurement

Leadership Accountability

Connection to Operational Performance

# What Most Organizations Do

Traditional Approach

*Programs*

*Benefits*

*Initiatives*

*Campaigns*

vs.

Cultural Approach

**Listening**

**Co-creation**

**Leadership behavior**

**Cultural systems**

**Wellbeing does not scale through programs. It scales through culture.**

## WHAT LISTENING TURNED INTO ACTION LOOKS LIKE

*Example: Bridgeway Strategic Cultural Wellbeing Plan*

Listening surfaced real themes. Each became a strategic bucket with ownership and execution.

Communication & Transparency	Listening Systems	Leadership Development	Recognition & Appreciation	Culture & Engagement
Board communications	Active feedback loops	Development & growth	Appreciation systems	Purpose & values
Transparency / visibility	Organizational Emotional Map™	Culture & engagement committee	Acknowledgement practices	Culture committee
Metrics & goals	Structured listening	Leadership modeling wellbeing	Community development	External engagement
Office captains	Lessons learned / sharing	Onboarding	Our story	Operational growth

*Guiding principles: People First · Transparency & Listening · Follow-Through · Culture of Growth*

# How Culture Shapes Wellbeing

Human Work

*Listening · Life Moments™ · Reflection*



Culture Design

*Trust · Leadership Behavior · Co-creation*



Wellbeing Outcomes

*Belonging · Psychological Safety · Health*



Organizational Performance

*Retention · Engagement · Productivity*

**Wellbeing does not scale through programs. It scales through culture.**

**Programs don't scale  
wellbeing.**

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**Culture does.**

# What we heard

*What showed up in the room — when people were given the space to share*

## Life Moments™ people are carrying:

- A parent diagnosed with cancer.
- Navigating a partner's mental health challenges.
- Supporting a family member struggling with addiction.
- Grief from the loss of a parent.
- Becoming a parent while balancing work and home.
- Managing chronic health challenges.

## What a world-class culture could look like:

- Feeling safe to speak up.
- Not being afraid to ask questions or challenge the status quo.
- Real investment in wellbeing — not just words.
- Flexibility in how and when work gets done.
- Clarity of priorities and follow-through.
- Feeling supported in taking time off.

*Shared in real time during the presentation*

# What to carry with you

1 Wellbeing does not scale through programs. It scales through culture.

2 Listening is one of the most powerful tools leaders have.

3 Employees will tell you what they need — if you create the space.

4 When people help design culture, they are more invested in it.

# Continue the work

*The next MBGH cohort begins in April.*

## Advancing Strategic Cultural Wellbeing

- A practical playbook built for your organization.
- A community of leaders doing this work.
- A structured path from listening to strategy.

**Register for an upcoming cohort**



## Thank you for being part of the MBGH cohort.

This work is already underway across organizations.

*If this sparked ideas about how listening and culture could play a larger role in your organization, I'd welcome the opportunity to explore how this could be brought to life in your context.*

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*Designing World-Class Cultures of Emotional Wellbeing*