



Crosstalk  
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# Mental health

“Take comfort in your friends/Everybody hurts/Don’t throw your hand...”

**M**ental health is becoming a wider topic of conversation in general as well as in the pro-audio world, which is fantastic. The hope I have is that one day the idea of *needing* to “talk about mental health” is as ridiculous as *needing* to discuss “talking about what drum sound we want”.

Mental health should be no more difficult to talk about than discussing a broken leg. It’s been said a million times but we’re not there. I can say this with absolute certainty because I live with mental health conditions. I was, up until quite recently, unwilling to discuss it with anyone. Yet, I would champion the idea that people — other people — should be more open about their experience, because how else do we end the stigma?

If you’re waiting for a confessional about the depths of darkness I’ve experienced, it’s not coming. An Oprah-esque confessional isn’t required to validate the health issues I live with. The reason I’m sharing the rather personal topic of a medical condition via a rather public forum is because, now that the wider entertainment industry has started to talk about it, I’d prefer to move past the “we need to take action” talk and just take action and start talking.

Putting my hypocrisy aside, my personal experience consists of chronic atypical depression that presents as anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

I have never actually consciously thought about the words I used to talk about my own mental health. PTSD is the most straightforward of the two, and the words are right there: it is a disorder. I can’t say I disagree. Depression is another story: Disorder? Condition? Illness? I don’t know... it’s just something I live with now. I don’t suffer from it (anymore). It’s not who I am, and it isn’t a feeling I have and the feelings I experience as a result of depression don’t match the label.

If I am still trying to figure out the right words to use for a health issue I am intimately connected to. What’s a person who has no experience of a mental health condition/ disorder/illness to do?

I am not going to pretend that I can give you a definitive guide to talking about mental health. I will only relate why it took me until my



mid-thirties, 15 years after my initial diagnosis, to find a treatment that worked: other people’s opinions on how to treat depression.

## Opinions: everybody’s got one

One thing I’ve definitely heard too often is that diet and exercise will ‘cure’ me. Diet and exercise ARE important to me, now that my symptoms are being treated and I can function like a normal (I use the term loosely) person. I absolutely needed medication to get to this point. I avoided medication because well-meaning friends and well-meaning media suggested I could eat, exercise and meditate my way out of the depression. I couldn’t get out of bed, and you want me to hit the gym? Please.

My one and only golden rule of talking about mental health is this: unless you are a medical doctor it is dangerous for you, or for me, to offer an opinion on a course of treatment. Dangerous and wrong.

Your experience of mental health, or the experience of your aunt, your brother, your friend etc. is unique, and probably doesn’t apply to someone else. Definitely encourage

seeking professional help. Be supportive. But don’t treat. Rant over.

A few characteristics of the professional audio industry that can exacerbate a mental health condition: deadlines, long hours in isolation, lack of sunlight, extensive travel, lack of sleep, substances. Add being a freelancer or running your own business into the mix and there are even more stressors.

## The creative industry is the problem

There are many scholarly articles linking creativity and mental health but I sometimes wonder if we’re not missing the blooming obvious: it’s not the creativity that’s the problem, it’s the creative industry. Just a thought. Regardless, our industry probably has more than its fair share of people with mental health conditions/disorders/illnesses due to the nature of the work. Which is why I’m writing about it in *Resolution*.

Part of me still worries that being open and honest about my own mental health is... too much. The words “career suicide” come to mind (insert a joke about anxiety here), even though I’ve actually shared very little.

But I remember the deadlines I didn’t meet, the meetings I couldn’t make, the non-prescriptive substances I took for relief from anxiety and the general unpleasantness of pretending everything was fine when everything wasn’t anywhere near fine — all because I was afraid and ashamed to talk about what was actually going on.

Despite my worry, I also know of only one other person, professionally, who has been able to say matter-of-factly that they too have a similar story. Which means I probably know a lot of people who might be keeping things to themselves; the commonly held statistic says that it’s one in four of us.

There’s keeping your health history private — which is absolutely everyone’s right — and then there’s ignoring a problem. I believe everyone has the right to privacy, but I also believe no one should be afraid to ask for help if mental health is an issue. I became less afraid the more I heard it spoken about. Normalised versus marginalised. I just want to keep the conversation going, because it helps. **1**

Subhead lyrics: REM ‘Everybody Hurts’ from the album *Automatic for the People*.