

## **Pilot James's Story: Walking the Black Dog**

If I'm honest I think the Black Dog has kind of always followed me around from time to time over my career. I mean I have better language to put around that now, but the first couple of times I think I just did whatever I had to in order to get through it.

The first time I'd just been through a break-up that really affected me, and I did what everyone around me did at the time and that was to hit the bar. I think I took it too far though and before long I discovered I had a reputation for drinking too much, and I started getting in trouble for 'hijinks' and crossing the line of what I could get away with. I was just covering up what was going on for me with a socially acceptable coping mechanism, albeit an unhealthy one. That's how I would explain it today. Back then, I was just getting through.

Another time I remember thinking "should I go on this flight or should I go see the psych". It was really a toss up, I was so conflicted. Looking back on it now it's an easy decision but back then, amongst all these high performing people all around me who all had it together I'm in there thinking "why am I the only one who is struggling to get it together?" Years later I caught up with a mate and he had gone through something similar and I just really admired his courage in telling me, because here I was having had this experience but he had the guts to tell me first.

I don't think I'm done with the Black Dog, but I think I've got it on a tighter lead, and I know when things are starting to feel wobbly and I can course-correct. That's the benefit of having come through a few dark patches and seen what works and what's just all talk.

When I was drinking too much, I remember being worried about being judged by some of the boys who clearly thought I was over-doing it. I could have really used their help back then, I just didn't know how to ask.