



# INCH BY INCH, MAKE LIFE A CINCH

How mastering micro skills can change your  
perspective, your health and your work

Globe eBooks

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CHAPTER ONE

MENTAL  
HEALTH

# Kendra Fisher: Playing the role of ‘normal’

Team Canada goalie Kendra Fisher shares her story of coping with mental illness

**BILL HOWATT AND KENDRA FISHER**

Mental health continues to be a growing topic of conversation in Canada. One of the most effective ways to help reduce stigma and normalize mental health issues that affect 7.5 million Canadians each year is sharing personal stories of people who have moved from suffering mental health issues in silence to active living.

This is the first part of a three-part interview with [Kendra Fisher](#), best known as a top women’s ice hockey and inline hockey goaltender who has represented Canada. She is committed to sharing her [personal story](#) to bring mental health issues forward to help break the silence around them through her organization [mentallyfit.com](#).

## HOW WOULD YOU SUMMARIZE YOUR CHILDHOOD MEMORIES?

Growing up always felt easy to me, or at least I had convinced myself of that. I always managed to define myself by the “on paper” version of my life. I come from a great family, always had friends, was given the opportunity to experience the things

I wanted to try, and when I found my passions I was gratefully able to pursue them. Anything that was ever “wrong” was easily brushed aside with my belief that I was so lucky, so fortunate; “How could I complain when others suffered so greatly, had such tragic lives?”

## WHEN DID SPORTS BECOME A PART OF YOUR LIFE?

At a young age, I knew my life would always be guided by sport. We are all gifted with a natural ability for something. For some, their singing stops others mid-stride; some look at a math equation with Goodwill Hunting-like ease. For me, it’s always been sport. The field has never mattered, nor the equipment needed. Sports just make sense to me; they helped to define me.

By the time I was seven, baseball, tennis and hockey had each become constant in my life, and at eight years old, I was asked by my tennis coach to move to Toronto in order to focus on hitting the circuit by my early teens.

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**WHEN DID YOU FIRST EXPERIENCE ANY DEGREE OF MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES?**

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I'm not sure. I wish I had made any other decision, but at eight there was a terrified version of myself that wasn't ready to be away from my family, my home. I do recall a scared little girl who was guiding me by fear: fear of death, fear of being alone, fear of what others saw in me, fear of the loneliness and confusion that consumed me behind closed doors. As I look back, this was a point in my life where I was struggling with my mental health and happiness, but no one knew about it other than me.

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**HOW DID YOU COPE WITH THESE EARLY MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES?**

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Making the decision on tennis narrowed to hockey. I moved on to become "the" goalie. I was going to be the best, I was going to fill my closets with red and white jerseys, my name displayed proudly on the back. It wasn't even an option yet, but I was determined to go to the Olympics. To hide from my daily fears and struggles, I focused my energy on hockey.

On the surface, as far as anybody else was concerned, I was on my way to my Olympic dream. I only allowed in a few close friends who were aware of my daily torment. For the rest of the world, I performed as the goalie, the only female in a male world, making my way through to Midget AAA with the Grey Bruce Highlanders. Hockey

was the part of my world that just made sense – a world that existed in an eight-foot crease where I was untouchable. My internal fears faded, and my thoughts were quiet for those two hours on the ice.

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**BY AGE 16, OUTSIDE OF HOCKEY, HOW WAS YOUR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE?**

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Beyond the crease, I was lost, confused. I couldn't find words, adjectives that would do justice to my story. To onlookers who did not know me closely I appeared to be the pinnacle of confidence.

The truth was, I was nobody's best friend and everybody's acquaintance. I was included in everyone's plans, invited to all social outings; however, never the life of the party. My name never came up in stories about the weekend's events. I floated from group to group, connecting with everyone, though really disconnected from them all.

I survived high school by being the goalie, coveted by coaches, respected by teammates, considered a great friend, a loved daughter and sister, while my true feelings and fear were invisible to the majority. I offered a version of myself that filled a need for everybody around me.

I was drawn to my peers' personal tragedies, always inserting myself in others' heartbreak. I was committed to get others through their crises. Today, I suspect I was keen to help others in hopes of learning how to lessen my own pain.

I wanted so badly what my friends had,

what my teammates and my peers seemed to have, while – at best – most days I was able to just breathe. I was suffering in silence with no clarity on why, what I could do, or how to live my life without fear.



# Kendra Fisher: Mental illness and a broken dream

Team Canada goalie Kendra Fisher shares her story of coping with mental illness

BILL HOWATT AND KENDRA FISHER

Suicide takes about 4,000 Canadian lives each year, and women are three to four times more likely to attempt suicide than men. Different risk factors contribute to why a person may attempt suicide; one leading factor is mental illness.

This is the second part of a three-part interview with [Kendra Fisher](#), best known as a top women's ice hockey and inline hockey goaltender who has represented Canada. She is committed to sharing her [personal story](#) to bring mental health issues forward to help break the silence around them through her organization [mentallyfit.com](#).

**AS YOU SUFFERED IN SILENCE, WHAT DID YOU WANT?**

I wanted to learn how to feel “normal.” What’s normal? I wanted friends, the kind of friends that thought to call when they were making plans, not only when they were in crisis.

I wanted the same social life my teammates had with such ease when we stepped off the ice. I wanted to be dating, knowing my weekends were full of the expectations

of nights spent getting to know each other – that giddiness I saw in my friends.

I wanted to feel like when I walked into a room nobody was talking about me; to be able to realize their laughter was in no way related to my arrival, their looks a simple coincidence.

I wanted to be able to breathe without feeling like I was going to die, my heart pounding out of my chest, throat closing, feeling like I was about to collapse. I wanted eating to be subconscious, not a careful process of snacking just enough to stay upright without the feeling of knives being shoved through my insides.

I wanted to feel, to understand happy, for laughter to be more than a mastered facial expression. I wanted a better tomorrow to come, instead of dreading what had become my routine of just getting through.

When were you fully aware you were suffering in silence?

By my late teens, this became my reality. I created a masterful illusion to make others feel comfortable in my presence, an exhausting lie, focusing every moment on hiding every part of myself that wasn't

“easy” for others.

As a result, my world shrunk, my ability to work was gone. Going to school was impossible, and every bit of energy I could manifest was dedicated to hockey and hiding from the world. I’d been to doctors, specialists; there were no answers.

Even though for me my day-to-day reality was my heart felt like it would pound out of my chest most hours, my brain was constantly convincing me there must be something invading it. My stomach was barely able to handle food any more.

But still, my body was healthy; the doctors promised me there was nothing wrong with my health. I was alone. It felt like no one understood me or had any idea how to help me. I knew something was not right, but I had no answers.

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**WHAT WAS THE TURNING POINT WHEN YOU KNEW YOU COULD NO LONGER KEEP UP THE ACT OF ACTING NORMAL?**

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With my dreams of playing for Team Canada within reach, it was the summer of 1999. My world would forever change, and I knew I had finally lost control.

As a carded member of Team Canada’s National Hockey Program, I had finally been invited to tryouts, the next step to the Olympic dream.

I recall spending half of the flight from Toronto to Calgary for tryouts locked in a bathroom, convinced I was dying. In tears, I couldn’t breathe, so desperately wanting

off the plane.

I managed to struggle through our first ice time, then found somewhere to break down. I got through off-ice testing, then cried in a stairwell. I pushed through team meetings and meals, then found a wash-room to fall apart in. This was what my first day of Team Canada tryouts looked like, and it would be my last.

I remember sitting across from my coaches, trying to explain my time leading up to camp. The doctors I’d seen, the lack of answers. I tried to explain my “symptoms,” and told them I needed help. I felt like I was dying. I was terrified I was dying, and I needed to get back to the doctors before I did.

Curiously, I was not able to process their response until years later, but quite simply, they looked at me and asked, “Would it help any to know you’ve already made Team Canada?” They had already chosen me. I made Team Canada.

I guess their hope was the perceived stress of the process being removed would be the answer. Sadly, it was a kind gesture, but it was not the medicine I needed to remove the fear I soaked in daily.

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**NOW THAT THE SILENCE WAS BROKEN, WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?**

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This setback is my most memorable, as it represented the moment I could no longer act normal or be the goalie I wanted so desperately to be.

Now I was not able to play hockey. I couldn't breathe any more. This wasn't about hockey any more; this was my life I was fighting for now.

In the weeks that followed, I received a list of mental illness diagnoses; a Generalized Anxiety Disorder coupled with a severe Panic Disorder and severe Panic Attacks, Agoraphobia, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and Clinical Depression.

I remember lying in my psychologist's office, listening to her read this laundry list, and all I could think was, she's got this all wrong. I just made Team Canada. I have great friends and family. I have scholarship offers to every Ivy League and Division 1 school I could want. I am one of the best goalies in the world. There is no way they are talking about me, it didn't make sense.

Denial is normal. To take charge of our mental health requires action. I made a claim to myself I was ready to do what I was told to get healthy.

# Kendra Fisher: Finding a future after a mental illness diagnosis

Former Team Canada goalie Kendra Fisher shares her story of coping with mental illness

**BILL HOWATT AND KENDRA FISHER**

Far too many people who experience mental health issues are not seeking or getting the support they need. Both federal and provincial governments are actively exploring how to get more treatment support for Canadians with mental health issues. The good news is that a clear majority of mental health issues are treatable.

This is the third part of a three-part interview with [Kendra Fisher](#), best known as a top women's ice hockey and inline hockey goaltender who has represented Canada. She is committed to sharing her [personal story](#) to bring mental health issues forward to help break the silence around them through her organization [mentallyfit.com](#).

## HOW DID YOU BEGIN TO DEAL WITH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES?

I spent the better part of the next five years of my life with diagnosed mental illness just getting by. I followed a routine that was prescribed by my doctors. I took my meds, I saw my psychologist, I went through the motions of being the world's worst patient.

I say this because I was entirely unaccepting of my diagnosis and without hope for any quality of life. I did what I was told to do but was not getting any better. The longer I failed to "get better," the less I cared to try. After five years I came to the conclusion that this version of "life" for me was not acceptable.

## WHAT WAS THE TURNING POINT WHEN YOU KNEW YOU WERE READY TO TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

I could not choose to spend my days in terror, not caring, dreading tomorrow, and failing to see any point in living life this way. I had isolated myself, had a few friends who took turns spending 24/7 with me. I couldn't spend a moment alone. I wouldn't leave my apartment unless I had to.

I was terrified to sleep, convinced I wouldn't wake up, or worse, I'd wake up in full-blown panic attack, which felt worse than I imagined death to be. Eating was functional, but monitored, so forced. I hit "that" moment, that crossroad, with such force. Some call it "bottom," but I realized

it was a choice: live or die. A voice inside me said it was time to dig down and do the work I needed to live.

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**CLEARLY, YOU MADE THE DECISION TO LIVE; WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

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It has been 12 years since I chose life. I learned how to live with mental illness. I learned I did not have to suffer in silence, and I could learn how to improve my quality of life, but I had to be open, patient and motivated to do the work.

I didn't cure it. My mental illness is not gone. It's as much a part of me as is being a goalie, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a mother, a professional speaker. It is there, a constant that I have learned to embrace as a daily reminder to care for myself and others.

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**WHAT LESSONS DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHERS SUFFERING IN SILENCE?**

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Mental illness doesn't exist in black and white. There are so many tools, medications and resources. The first decision is to choose life. Choose to help and embrace it.

I learned about my medications, how they affected me, what worked for me and what did not. I wanted to see my psychologist and learned to do so without feeling embarrassment or judgment. I came to see the benefits of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

I became active again in physical fitness,

and learned the value of cardio exercise for helping treat anxiety and depression. I engaged in yoga and mindfulness, mastering the practices of deep breathing and relaxation. I learned how nutrition correlates to mood disorders, and changed my diet to support my mental health.

I worked with a naturopathic doctor to pick the right vitamins and supplements for my situation.

I studied the relationships between sleep and mental illness, and I get the right amount of sleep I need each day.

I spent five years after choosing life, learning what my life would look like moving forward. Today I can tell you I have been living it well for the past seven years.

What is your personal mission going forward?

Every single day, I consciously choose to live with my diagnosis. I challenge complacency and rely on my network: my supports, my wife, family, friends, the tools I've learned, the practices I know to work.

I accept that my failure to do what keeps me healthy will be my downfall. I follow my plan daily and practice all my new learned habits. I give those who love me permission to call out laziness or complacency, and welcome their compassion and support.

Every day, I live my life out loud, demanding an end to silence and shame around mental illness. I fight for others to find access to resources that were granted to me through the good fortune of being an athlete.

I teach others how to tread water through the endless waitlists and challenges to access the needed resources.

I applaud the fight against stigma, however, for me it is now time move from talk to action. I will continue this mission every single day, for the one in five of you who can't see tomorrow. I want you to know you are not alone, and there is a path; you only need to be open and ask for help.

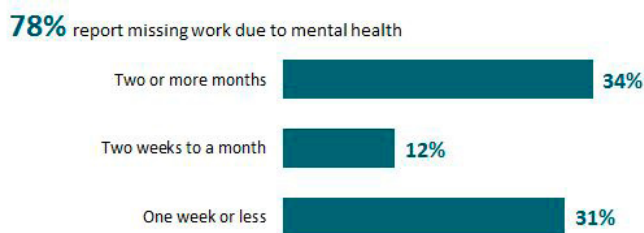
# Survey finds employees wary to tell work about a mental health issue

Online survey also finds respondents feel stress and trauma led to mental health concerns

**BILL HOWATT AND JESSE ADAMS**

A study on mental health in the workplace by The Globe and Mail and Morneau Shepell has found that stress or trauma are the leading causes of mental health issues, and that most people don't let their employer know they are suffering from a mental issue.

The online survey, which had 1,575 voluntary participants, found that 34 per cent of participants said stress was a main reason for their mental health issue, and that 55 per cent of respondents did not tell their workplace about their mental health issue. Of those respondents, 70 per cent reported that their work experience affected their mental health and 72 per cent said they felt their mental health issue will hurt their career potential.



The [Mental Health Commission of Canada](#) reports that one out of five working Canadians lives with a mental illness each year. With a work force of just over **18 million** people, this means that 3.6 million working Canadians have experienced, or will experience, some form of a mental health concern this year.

The Globe and Mail and Morneau Shepell online survey ([The Mental Health Experience in Canada's Workplaces: What's Your Experience?](#)) collected information about the mental health experience of Canada's work force, such as: the types of issues (physical and mental health); how people cope with their issues; therapy options; mental health stigma; how organizations support staff with a mental health issue, and the impact of mental health issues on work experience and missing work.

The aim is to use this information to help individuals and organizations understand the experience of employees with a mental health issue. This understanding will continue to expand and foster the mental

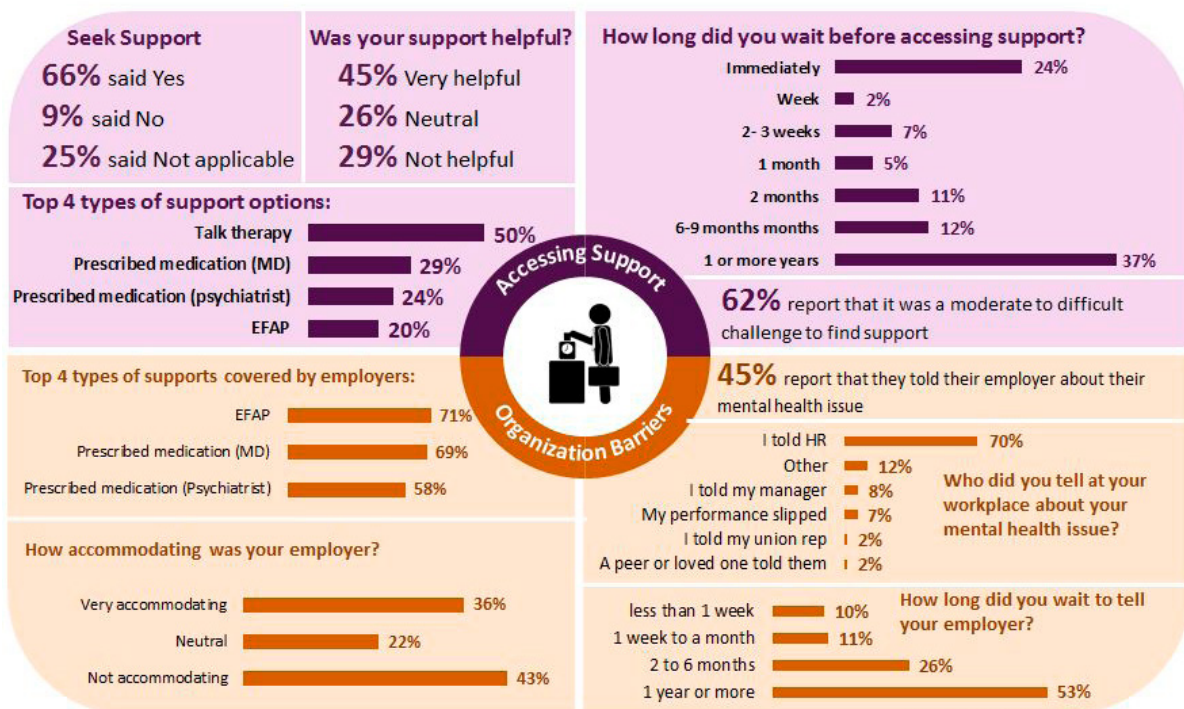
health conversation in Canada, support organizations in providing support for their staff who are experiencing challenges, and bring light to the difficulties facing workers with mental health issues.

This article is the first of a two-part series to provide a high-level overview of the results we gathered and discussed at the first annual Employee Recommended Workplace Awards ceremony, held in June at The Globe and Mail Centre in Toronto. In addition to these articles, our goal is to create a detailed white paper that displays all the data we collected in this first study. We're leaving the survey open so the one in five workers with a mental health issue who has not participated yet can add their voice to this conversation. [You can participate in the survey by clicking on this link.](#)

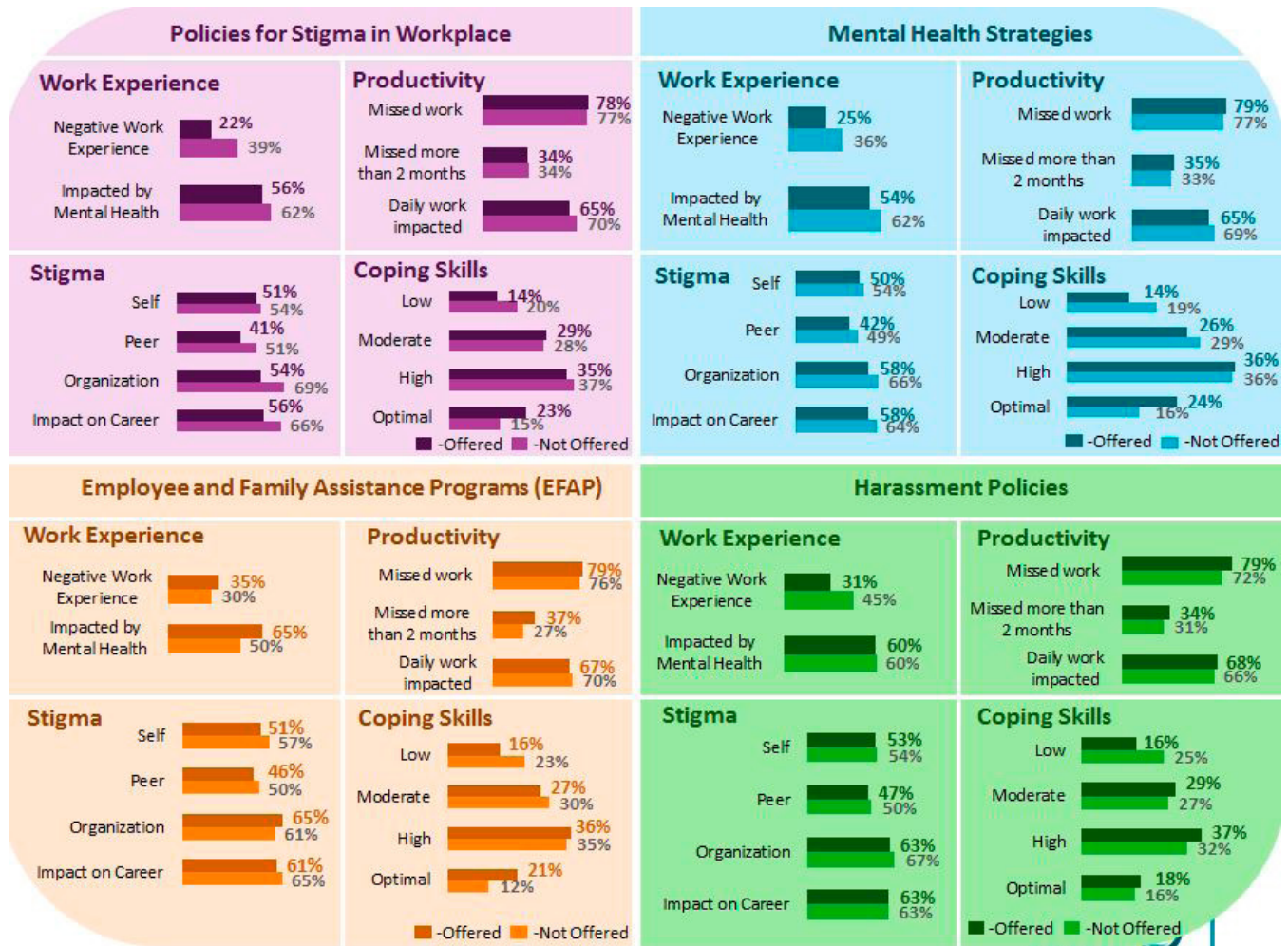
## AWARENESS

Perhaps the No. 1 barrier for seeking support for a mental health issue is a lack of awareness. Often, individuals can struggle with a mental health issue without knowing they have one. Similarly, many people who are not suffering from a mental health issue don't fully understand what those issues can include, don't understand what mental health issues are, what happens if you're experiencing one, why these challenges can occur, and the impact of living with a mental health issue.

The survey shed light on several interesting trends. The graphic below gives an overview of the key findings from those experiencing mental health issues who participated in the survey.







## ACCOUNTABILITY

Mental health issues don't often occur because of a single event; often it's the accumulation of multiple events or prolonged, unwanted bad stress. Preventing or coping with a mental health issue in the workplace involves active participation by both employers and employees. The employer's responsibility is to build an environment that supports mental health, ensures

psychological safety, and removes stigma. On the other hand, every individual in the workplace owns their own mental health. Individuals can reduce their risk and learn to cope better with a mental health issue or illness by building up their coping and resiliency skills, getting professional mental health support and working to improve their total health.

**ACTION**

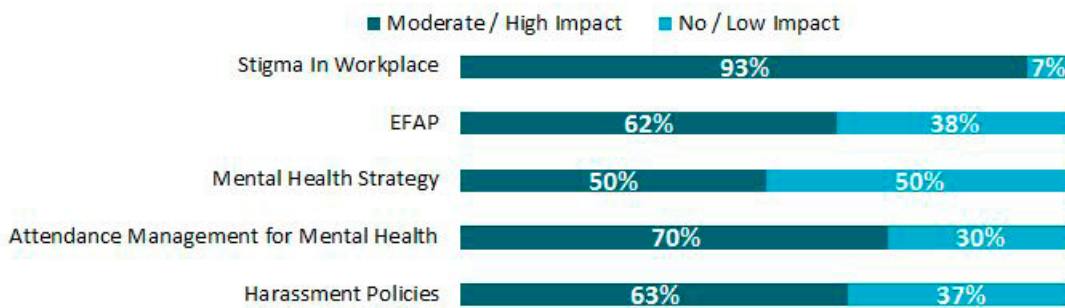
In our survey, not only did we examine the profile and experience of those with a mental health issue, but we also examined how people cope. The following dashboard provides a high-level overview of some of the findings with respect to how people with mental health issues and illness reported they are coping.

What you can do within your organization and community is to help normalize mental health concerns and illnesses and stress the need for support, and advocate for those who may be experiencing mental health issues. If you have a mental health

issue, consider your experience compared with the results we found. If you're concerned about your mental health, we encourage you to seek support from a mental health professional, have a conversation with a trusted loved one, or speak with an HR representative at work.

*Bill Howatt is the chief research and development officer of work force productivity with Morneau Shepell in Toronto*

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# The mental benefits of the sound of silence

How silence can help your mental health, reduce your stress and help you cope

**BILL HOWATT**

**D**id you know that silence is good for your mental health?

Noise is all around most of us for all our waking moments, from the hum of a computer, ventilation fans, people talking to traffic. Pause for a moment and listen closely to what you hear. Take note as you focus on the different sounds what happens inside of you. If anything changes as you bring the sound forward, you may become distracted until you tune it out again.

Nick Seaver, who does the TEDx talk called [The Gift of Silence](#), begins by displaying 18 seconds of silence to set up the story of where he and his wife spent 18 months in silence. He purports that silence and solitude are the worst form of punishment, because people are left alone with their own minds. Would you agree? Do you find it hard to stop and find quiet and enjoy pure silence?

This micro skill promotes the value of silence. Some may think that we like background noise because we find it soothing. This may be true; however, if the brain is actively processing noise it's working and as a result it doesn't get a chance to turn

off, rest and reset.

Silence is different than sleep; it's akin to meditation for the brain. However, different than meditation, we're left alone to process our thoughts.

It can be hard to escape noise to find silence. Silence is the absence of noise. Adding [silence](#) to your day can increase your creativity and decision making that can assist you in solving daily challenges and keep you on track to reach your desired goals.

[One study](#) reported that just two minutes of silence a day can – for some – be more relaxing and helpful than listening to relaxing music. Another study found that increasing periods of silence helps the brain generate [new brain cells](#) that can positively support mental health.

## **AWARENESS**

First, see how difficult it is for you to find a quiet space with the absence of any noise. Once you get there, set your watch for two minutes of silence where you sit in quiet and relax. If you find this difficult, that's fine. The real first step to adopting silence

is noticing it. The more you do, the more likely your brain will be grateful, as well as you and the people around you. Practising silence is a form of mindfulness where you're aware and in the moment, open to just pausing from the world of noise, and allowing your brain some resources and space. In these moments, you may find more clarity.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

When some people are learning skills such as silence or mindfulness, their brain may not co-operate, resulting in some tension and the brain firing off a mini alarm: "I forgot to call Mary back; I need to text her now that I will call in the morning."

This micro skill requires practice, patience and the self-discipline that you will accept your first thought. For example, "For the next two minutes I'm going to sit in silence and the world can wait."

### ACTION

Here are steps you can take to create silence:

**Begin with preparation** Determine where your quiet spot will be, and have all distractions like cellphones and telephones turned off. Safe ear plugs and noise cancellation headphones may be helpful for finding silence.

**Set a silence target** Start with short silence sprints of two to three minutes, and build

from there.

**Be still and silent** Get into a comfortable position with your eyes open, gazing down at the floor, and allow your mind to do as it pleases. Set no rule other than being still and silent for the targeted silence session. There's no need for pressure; this isn't a pass or fail, just silence.

**Ignore the impulse for stimuli** Commit to your silence target without checking texts, e-mail or reading. Just be still and silent with your thoughts. Keep it simple; no distractions.

**Stop and re-enter your world** Once your time is up, get on with your day. With pressure gone, notice how you may have remembered a name you were looking for, found a solution to a particular problem or felt more relaxed after the silence session. This can help your critical conscious brain see the benefits. The more you practise, the more you'll notice how silence can help you gain new perspectives that were not possible with all the stimuli and noise around you.

*Bill Howatt is the chief research and development officer of work force productivity with Morneau Shepell in Toronto*

# Do you know how to play to improve your mental health?

Follow the acronym PLAY and it will help you find the positives in your day and boost your mental health

**BILL HOWATT**

**W**hat do you do each day for your mental health?

Most of us find it easier to answer this question: What do you do to take care of your physical health? We know the formula for that: move our bodies, eat more fruits and vegetables, drink water instead of sugar-filled products, and get proper sleep. Simple! Why some of us don't follow such a regime can be due to our mental health.

The play micro skill introduces a formula designed to positively influence our mental health daily.

## **AWARENESS**

This micro skill focuses on mental health, not mental illness, as there's a **difference**. To understand mental health, consider a weather pattern. One day can be sunny, dark, cloudy, rainy, marked by a thunder and lightning storm, and back to sun before dusk. Mental health can be the same; it can change based on what we're thinking about and experiencing in our lives. The first point to understand is that it's normal for our mental health to change based on what

we're experiencing. Like feeling sluggish after not eating a healthy meal, our mental health can be influenced by circumstances, the strength of our  **coping skills**, and what we are currently thinking.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Some of us don't understand that we're not passive participants in our mental health. We own our mental health, and we can positively influence it daily. People who don't know this can often feel overwhelmed and caught in storm patterns that can last hours, days, weeks, months, and even years. Failure to take care of our mental health can result in mental illness. People with an organic mental illness benefit from taking proactive steps to impact their mental health daily. To provide context, consider a person who is clinically depressed, has received treatment, and is able to manage their depression with medication and cognitive behavioural therapy. They live with a mental illness, and what they do daily defines their mental health.

## **ACTION**

Adopting the acronym PLAY can affect your mental health:

**P** – Look for the positive first. When you walk into your kitchen where there are dirty dishes in the sink and flowers on the counter, what do you notice first? Many of us train our brains, without knowing it, to notice the negative thing first, and this can shape how we think and feel. Look for the positive first, to be less critical, negative and judgmental of yourself and others.

**L** – Life is busy, with lots of moving parts, challenges and information to process each day. Many spend time reliving what happened yesterday or thinking about what's coming. By being proactive and living, if even for a few moments, to enjoy each day is good for our mental health. It doesn't need to be hard to get off the treadmill to clear our heads. Slow down and enjoy a few moments; pause to enjoy a blue sky, text a friend to say hello, or take a walk and get some fresh air. The key is to mindfully do something daily for our mental health.

**A** – We all have needs and wants. Life is not always perfect or fair. However, if we think about it, we have good things going for us, such as being educated, being able to read, and living in a safe part of the world. Taking time each day to acknowledge what we have is good for our mental health versus focusing on what we don't have. This

doesn't prevent us from striving for more, it helps us enjoy what we have.

**Y** – Adopt the word yes to give yourself permission to focus on your mental health. It's not a sign of weakness; it's a sign of strength. Without awareness, accountability and action, we can be at risk of engaging in negative behaviour patterns such as drinking more than two drinks of alcohol daily to cope with life stress that over time can affect our mental health. Many of us don't take charge of our physical health unless there's a health issue. There are lessons we can learn from this that can be adopted to promote mental health. Being proactive, learning and developing a mental health action plan promotes well-being and resiliency, and is a wise investment of time and energy.

# Dealing with negative mental ‘spyware’ that holds you back

Negative thoughts can prevent you from taking action that will improve your life; here are some tips to manage

**BILL HOWATT**

**H**ave you ever looked at another person you would like to meet but failed to walk over and introduce yourself?

If you have, you’re not alone; this is more common than you may think. Regardless of the situation, whether at work or in your personal life, the reason may be fear of rejection.

The purpose of this micro skill is to introduce the concept of cognitive spyware and what we can do to remove automatic programs that impact our decisions and actions.

Cognitive spyware is made up of **cognitive schemas** that influence how we automatically process our interactions with the world. Cognitive schemas can be positive or negative. One way to think of a negative cognitive schema is like spyware on your computer. It can sneak through your anti-virus software and get on your machine without your knowledge and run in the background. Spyware comes in many forms, from minor to major, such as ransomware that takes over your computer.

When a negative schema becomes

ingrained in our brain it can automatically generate responses that may not be in our best interests or what we really want. For example, you’re at a social gathering and see someone you think is interesting and would like to meet. You say to yourself, “I would like to meet them but feel that I can’t go over to say hello.”

Why? It may be due to cognitive spyware running a negative cognitive schema that automatically generates a response such as: “They would never be interested in me.” This thought deters you from trying. You end up accepting failure in your head, rather than trying and seeing what happens. This kind of negative cognitive schema also could stop you from suggesting a new idea at work or tackling a new project.

## **AWARENESS**

One consequence of negative spyware is that it can limit our social interactions. Some of us are lonely and one reason can be due to negative spyware that stops us from trying to meet people. If you feel that you are lonely, complete this **Loneliness**

### Quick Survey.

Negative cognitive schemas can negatively affect our mental health.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Fear of rejection is real. This means that fear stops us from trying. The reality is, as distasteful as it may sound to a person who is lonely or fearful of trying in a social context to meet people, is to accept the value of taking a calculated risk that can end in failure.

**Albert Ellis**, one of the fathers of modern day psychology, suggested to some clients who were socially fearful of meeting people to sit at a busy park bench, say hello to someone and try to start a conversation. His logic was that most people who are fearful have irrational thinking as to the consequences. When his clients reported their experience, he would help them learn how to dispute their irrational thinking. His process is akin to cleaning spyware out of their computers.

Until a person understands what's happening, it's difficult for them to take accountability. The good thing is that negative, unwanted spyware can be eliminated, but we need to be willing to do the work.

### ACTION

Here are four steps for cleaning unwanted negative spyware that's affecting your social interactions.

#### 1. Notice and challenge the negative

**schema** Once you notice that a negative thought is limiting you from taking part in a social interaction, the first step is to simply acknowledge it. Then ask yourself, "Where are the facts that I know this negative thought is 100 per cent true?" The reality is, there's no evidence other than your perception.

**2. Frame the risk** Ask yourself, "What's the worst thing that could happen by going over and saying hello to this person?" Answer this question a few times until you can't think of anything negative.

**3. Self-debrief** Ask yourself, "What if the person is interested in meeting me? How will I ever know unless I ask?" Compare the risks to the benefits. Often, the worst case is failure to gain the benefit of meeting a new person. The ultimate outcome for not trying and risking failure can be loneliness or struggles with building your social network.

**4. Go or no go** Make your decision to go or not go. Take action and own it.

If the above plan doesn't work for you and you can't delete this spyware yourself you're not doomed. A trained cognitive behavioural therapist can often, within five to 10 sessions, help you learn how to clear out negative cognitive schemas that are affecting your social interactions and your



overall mental health. None of us likes being lonely, and with support we don't need to be.

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# Strategies to calm the anxious brain

While we can't control random negative thoughts, we can control how we react to them

**BILL HOWATT**

**D**oes your mind sometimes create thoughts – ones that make you anxious or worried – that you'd rather not have?

When our unconscious brain provides a random thought like this – if we're not aware – we can become overly focused on these thoughts that can negatively affect our mental health.

This micro skill introduces a concept called cognitive defusion – a strategy we can use when we need to become **untangled** from our thoughts.

By learning how to defuse unwanted thoughts we can remove their power over us. Those thoughts can be as simple as our mind telling us there's a difference between what we have and what we want. The thought is nothing more than a warning light. What we do with this thought defines our thinking and emotions.

## **AWARENESS**

When an automatic, unwanted, negative thought comes to the top of your mind, doesn't feel good, and is distracting, the first step is not to fight it or hide from it. Acknowledge it as being present and a

source of information. By “thanking our mind” for this thought without fighting it or judging we position ourselves to defuse its intensity, allowing us to use the information for some healthy action.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

**Dr. William Glasser**, author of choice theory, suggested that we may not have 100 per cent control over our thinking, but we have 100 per cent control over our actions. Where our body goes, our mind follows. By changing our focus from troublesome thoughts to an action we enjoy, or by giving our mind an opportunity to engage in something we find interesting, we can leave the negative thought at the curb and take control of our thinking. This is not hiding from the negative thought; it's moving past it. There may be nothing to do now, and there's no value in focusing on negativity that's distracting.

## **ACTION**

Persistent, negative thoughts that refocused attention doesn't curb may require more action. Negative thoughts can be like weeds; they can multiply and take over our

mind.

Cognitive defusing is about helping gain perspective so that we don't give negative thoughts power to grow. "See thoughts as what they are, not what they say they are," advises [Steven Hayes](#), a professor at the Department of Psychology at the University of Nevada. Meaning a thought is just a thought – nothing more, nothing less.

**Accept thoughts by name without any judgment** – If negative thoughts are hanging around after you've engaged in an activity to re-direct them, this is fine. Stop for a moment and acknowledge the thought by name, like you would when meeting a new person. For example, "So it seems there's anxiety, because I'm having thoughts that are due to my concerns about money and work."

**Redirect your mind** – Take charge of your mind. Unhelpful thoughts are projections of some past or future concern that aren't happening right now, so redirect your mind in a non-judgmental way to something more positive. For example, "I get that this thought is providing me information and isn't as helpful as it could be. Thanks for the anxiety, but I think I'd rather be calm."

**Focus on the now** – We live in the now, not the future. Take a deep breath, focus on the now, and recognize that the unhealthy thought has no connection with what's happening in the present; it's just a

thought. Practise focusing on the now, accept the thought and redirect your focus "since this isn't happening now and there's no danger, I'll focus on getting my planned work done, then get to the gym for a good workout."

By practising [cognitive defusion](#) you can learn to look at negative thoughts as not being bad, just words and images in your mind that you can shape, process and release. The benefit is that this micro skill can teach you how to accept negative thoughts as information only; they don't need to dictate your actions or feelings.

# How to avoid ‘double-bad feelings’ that can derail your goals

When stress and busyness overwhelm you, it can be hard to manage and stick to your plans

**BILL HOWATT**

**H**ave you ever noticed the relationship between bad feelings and failing?

Some context is helpful when processing a question like this one.

Here’s an example. For the coming year, Jack set personal health goals pledging to make better nutritional choices and increase his physical activity. He hoped he would achieve these goals.

However, within a few days life ramped up again, as usual, demanding Jack’s attention and time. By the end of the workday, he was feeling overwhelmed. These bad feelings influenced his decisions to skip exercise and to replace his planned dinner of salad and roast chicken with a takeout burger and fries in an attempt to feel better. The result? Double-bad feelings.

This micro skill assists in short-circuiting “double-bad feelings.” To understand this, consider that at the end of the day Jack was feeling overwhelmed, which resulted in him failing to achieve his daily personal health goals. After skipping his workout and tossing his plans for a healthy meal, within an hour he began to feel guilty for

not following through on his plan.

## **AWARENESS**

Can you relate to Jack’s situation? The root causes of double-bad feelings are often not directly related. However, the emotional impact of two bad feelings, one right after another, can amplify your feelings of failure. One quite common negative consequence for a person like Jack is to consciously or unconsciously quit their personal goal after feeling they have failed.

To curb the risk of being controlled by double-bad feelings we need to understand and accept the notion that unchecked, powerful emotions influence our behaviours, and often misguide our decisions. Most of us can relate to making a decision that we later regret because of unwanted feelings or feelings we want to change.

The key point is to understand that in cases like Jack’s, when we’re overtaken by unwanted feelings (feeling overwhelmed and stressed) and we slip (revert to an old behaviour), this doesn’t mean we’re a failure. It means only that we lost our focus on

a desired goal at that moment and the good feeling associated with success.

We always have the option to refocus and restart our plan or aim to be better the next day. It's helpful to keep in mind that we're human, and failing is often a part of the learning process (such as falling off while learning to ride a bike).

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Accept the notion that when we have unwanted feelings and do not manage them well, we are at increased risk for engaging in unhealthy behaviours that are different from our desired, healthier choices. This information can be helpful when unwanted feelings happen, so we can avoid engaging in behaviours that can result in more unwanted feelings.

### ACTION

Learn how to leverage this micro skill by picking one area where you seem to keep failing because of unwanted feelings that trigger behaviours that lead to additional unwanted feelings.

**Set your anchor** Focus on the outcome you want to achieve and why (determine the benefit and value to you). Be crystal clear on what success will feel and look like if you're able to achieve your desired goal.

**Anticipate unwanted emotions** To learn how to curb unwanted feelings it's helpful to anticipate them, so that you can prepare

for them. One challenge for unanticipated, unwanted feelings is that when they arise you can feel surprised, out of control and powerless. The more you prepare and practise to curb unwanted feelings – such as finding healthier ways to manage stress or feelings of being overwhelmed – the better you'll be prepared to manage them.

**Unwanted feelings first aid** **Emotional intelligence** teaches that as you increase your self-awareness for unwanted feelings you can learn to better manage them. Try the following three steps:

**Detect** When you notice an unwanted feeling starting to occur, move safely away from what triggered your emotions so that you can create space (for example, excuse yourself to use the restroom, play a favourite song, call a close friend). This gives you time before you react so that your thinking brain can catch up with your unwanted feelings so you can make better choices. Unwanted feelings are powerful, but they have no control over your behavioural choices.

**Re-align** With unwanted feelings can come urges to take actions that you think will make you feel better (such as eating sweets or junk food) but are not in your best long-term interest. Emotionally driven urges are often intense but can pass when we learn to look past them and focus on what we really want. Tap into the feelings you want by

locking into them to give you the strength to allow emotionally driven behavioural urges to pass. The more you practise, the better prepared you'll be to move past urges when they arise.

**Accept or acknowledge** If you slip by doing something or saying something you didn't

want to, fix it fast by apologizing and do what is required to fix. Accept that unwanted feelings and choices don't mean you're a failure or define who you are and who you can be. When you successfully curb unwanted feelings and urges, acknowledge it and enjoy feelings you want and worked hard for.



# Don't forget to keep your brain healthy too

Your plan to stay healthy needs to include your brain as well as your body

**BILL HOWATT**

**W**hat do you do daily to promote your brain health?

Brain health refers to the things we do to assist the brain to work at its optimal potential. Brain health habits can predict risk for decline in mental function as we age.

This micro skill introduces the concept of daily brain health and how micro decisions can affect us today and into our future.

## **AWARENESS**

Whether you're 25, 35, 45, 55 or 65, are you aware of your daily workplace routines, micro decisions and behaviours that affect your brain health? The first step to improving your brain health is to self-evaluate how much you're paying attention to it and being clear on what will positively affect it.

Most of us are motivated to protect our brain health, so don't take powerful, dangerous, illicit drugs that can create permanent brain damage. However, many don't pay conscious attention to brain health the same as heart health.

Our brain requires the same attention as heart health for long-term, sustained health and high quality of life – especially

in a job where we're bored or don't feel challenged. People in such a situation – often without realizing it – over the years risk declining mental fitness if they're not proactive outside the workplace. A decline in mental fitness over time can affect your **brain reserves** that provide a buffer to adapt to change and resist damage.

To affect brain health, you also need to be motivated and understand the value for your current and future vitality.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

The brain is our most important organ, and like our heart, lungs and skin it benefits the most when we pay attention to it and don't take it for granted. As we age, there's no guarantee of preventing dementia. In fact, the Alzheimer Society of Canada suggests that it's never too late to make improvements that can support brain health. The earlier you adopt brain health, the more likely you will age with as healthy and functioning a brain as possible.

We can turn proactive actions into lifestyle habits to support us over our lifetime so that when we're ready financially to

retire, our brains will be ready and able to allow us to enjoy that phase of life.

### **ACTION**

Adopting simple lifestyle changes can have a positive impact on brain health. It's to our advantage to not delay the habits that can promote good brain health.

Consider a person who didn't pay attention to their diet, had a heart attack at 45, and that to live longer had to make massive lifestyle changes. Their heart was damaged and would never be as healthy as it could be. Brain health is the same. It would be a mistake to think that it's something that's applicable only to senior citizens looking to offset dementia.

**Mental gymnastics** Engaging in new learnings, word puzzles, drawing, crafts, reading and taking courses can have a positive impact on the brain by **stimulating** the generation of new connections between nerve cells and even new brain cells that facilitate neurological plasticity. This can build up functional brain reserves for future cell loss.

**Make smart diet choices** All the stress that we're exposed to daily, including commutes, environmental hazards (such as noise and chemicals), people interactions and financial challenges can increase our risk for a process called oxidation that damages brain cells. Making smart food choices and eating healthy foods that are

rich in antioxidants can support brain health.

**Reduce your stress load** Bad stress accumulates over time from many sources and if not dealt with can cause **vascular changes** and chemical imbalances that negatively affect brain health.

**Make sleep important** A good night's sleep is important for your immune system and mood. It can reduce the risk of the brain building up an abnormal **protein** called beta-amyloid plaque, which is linked to Alzheimer's disease.

**Pay attention to lifestyle choices** For maximum brain health, remove all forms of tobacco, and limit your drinking to two drinks a day, to reduce your risk for dementia that can result from chronic abuse of alcohol.

**Physical activity** This is a proven strategy for increasing blood flow. It creates chemical changes in the brain to support learning, memory and ability to think and solve problems.

**Maintain your social interactions** Staying connected with family, friends and your community puts you in position for engaging conversations and stimulation that are important for brain health.



# Dealing with a prickly colleague can be good for your mental health

When you worry and fret about being around a certain person it causes stress and anxiety, so reframing your relationship can help

**BILL HOWATT**

**A**re there people in your life that you'd rather not have to interact with daily or on a regular basis?

There's no intention for this to sound like a rhetorical question. It's meant to solicit a binary response: yes or no. If you answer yes, are you interested in exploring how to improve this situation?

It's common to not want to be around people with whom we're not comfortable. Provided the reason has nothing to do with psychological or physical safety, there can be a benefit to learning how to reframe these kinds of interactions.

Being around a person you don't enjoy being with drains mental energy, affects emotions and mood, and even negatively affects your mental health if you're not aware of what's happening.

One way to change this is to reframe any relationship that's troubling you into something neutral or positive. Either option is better than constant negativity.

The root cause for why someone doesn't want to be around another person may be linked to some misunderstanding,

unresolved conflict, betrayal, rejection, personalities that never clicked, or some other reason. The cause is the daily reminder why they don't want to be around them, which reinforces the mental framework that prevents things from improving.

## **AWARENESS**

Changing how we perceive an interaction begins with acknowledging what we do, think and feel.

Often, being around a person we don't want to be with can lead to ineffective relationship coping habits: worrying, avoiding, dreading. When we're not aware, these interactions can also have a negative impact on the people we want to be around, which can strain desired relationships as well.

Once you're aware, the next step is to determine whether you're willing to change what you do and think.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Any relationship takes two to get along. All you can control are your own behaviours and thinking. Reframing a relationship

begins with redefining it in your head. How the other person responds is up to them. Once you decide to reframe the relationship you can positively affect your interaction. You also can reduce the risk of bringing unwanted emotions and feelings into relationships you highly value and need (such as your partner).

Until you decide to reframe interaction from negative to positive there's little chance anything will change. Whether the other person is a family member, co-worker or community member, reframing a relationship provides an opportunity to change perspectives, attitudes and behaviours.

### ACTION

The art of reframing relationships begins with a commitment to change the old relationship script and be open to release the past to create a better future.

The following model is meant to be used one person at a time.

- 1. Be clear of consequences for not reframing** Define the emotional burden on you for not changing your mental frame. Write out a paragraph as to how difficult this relationship is, why it is, and how it affects your behaviour, thinking and emotions.
- 2. Explore the value for reframing** List the benefits for you. Regardless of how the other person acts, how will changing your mental frame help you and the

people you care about?

- 3. Redesign the interaction** You can do this step alone. However, by taking a risk and engaging the other person in an honest conversation about your desire to mend the relationship and why, it's rare that they would not know your feelings. They will react by embracing the opportunity, or will not. The goal of this step is reframing how you will act around them (such as I will not avoid this person, I will be more open to their ideas).
- 4. Implement the reframe** Start your new reframe with each interaction, which is a chance to practise. Being non-judgmental, open and positive over time can have a positive impact on your mental health. It's healthier for the mind and body when we focus on the positive versus the negative.
- 5. Reinforce reframe** Developing a new habit takes time, patience and reinforcement. At the end of each day, reflect on the benefits for acting positive versus the old negative frame. In the end, your happiness will come from inside, not the outside.



CHAPTER TWO

# OUTLOOK

# Don't like your life story? Then rewrite it

We all have the power to change our roles and life story if we want to

**BILL HOWATT**

**W**hat is your favourite story of all time? As you think about your answer, reflect on why it is your favourite story. Who was the main character, and what was most interesting about them? What role did they play?

Stories are an important part of the human condition. They provide us with many benefits, such as entertainment and education. Most of us enjoy a good movie or book to escape our day-to-day life. Stories allow our minds to go to new and exciting places, to imagine and experience our life at that moment through a different lens.

Most stories have a main theme and structure, with a clear beginning, middle and end. The lesson we draw out of a story can vary from being profoundly clear to abstract. Stories end differently, but most of us can relate to those that have happy or unhappy endings.

This micro skill of storytelling focuses not on what stories we enjoy and read, but which ones we create for our life that will ultimately define our mental health and happiness.

## **AWARENESS**

While most people can relate to others' stories, some people may not be mindful of what character they're playing in their own life story that's being written daily.

On a typical day, what character are you playing the most? For help use the **Karpman drama triangle** roles listed below. How much do you see yourself in each role, and how do others see you?

**The victim** You have feelings of being the victim: helpless, hopeless, stuck and unable to find a solution or make things easier and better for yourself.

**The rescuer** To others, you often act like a hero who has a need to help victims, and you feel guilt when you're not able to help others in need. The not-so-obvious is that when you take this role it's often at your own expense, because you're committed to focusing on others first, providing you with a rationale to not focus on yourself and your needs.

**The persecutor** You regularly blame or try

to control others. To onlookers, you appear to lack empathy for others' needs, and are primarily focused on self-interest only.

The point of this exercise is to notice the different kinds of roles we can play. These are meant to be a few examples. If we're not aware of the roles we're playing, we may not be aware of how they affect our end story.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

We all get one life to live, and we all can be the authors of our own story. Some have not been taught, or yet believe, that we can each write our own story. For this micro skill to have any impact we need to accept that we're the author of our life story, and what roles we play will have an influence on how our story will end.

### ACTION

Four steps you can take to start to improve your life story:

#### 1. FRAME YOUR CHARACTERS.

To shape your life story, start with the key characters and how your character influences others. Sit in a quiet spot, fire up your laptop, and define the different characters in your life that matter most to you (such as your spouse, child, parent, peer).

**Define your character** In your life story, who do you want to play, and what traits do you want this character to be known for? This isn't who you are now; it may be, but

more importantly who you want to be.

**Define your core cast** Who are the most important people to you, and what characters are they playing today?

**Finalize your cast** We can't pick our family or children, but after that it's optional. Each of us must determine whether we have the right cast in our life, so we can create the storyline we want. Only we can make that final decision.

#### 2. DEFINE YOUR STORYLINE.

Now that you've defined the characters, what's the storyline? What kind of story are you going to live (for example, fast paced or slow)? Have fun with this and write out the backdrop to frame your storyline. Be specific with the kind of life and experience you want for you and all your characters.

#### 3. UNPACK YOUR SCRIPT, NOT WITH WORDS BUT WITH DAILY ACTIONS.

Your character has defined roles within your storyline. Each day your actions will determine whether you're following it. The key to success is being clear and committed to be the character you want to be.

#### 4. GET INPUT FROM YOUR CAST.

There's no better way to ensure you're playing the character right than to ask your cast to evaluate whether the storyline is playing out as you designed it.

The good news is that this is your story

and if you aren't happy with it you can stop, rethink what you really want, rewrite it and relaunch your story. We each have one life, one story, and we live it one day at time.

# How to create your own happiness at work and play

Stop and think about what you're doing each day and whether it contributes to your happiness

**BILL HOWATT**

On a scale of one (low) to 10 (high), how happy are you on a typical day?

Martin Seligman, a world expert in positive psychology, suggested that happy people demonstrated themselves as being satisfied, upbeat and with good temperament. His research found that happiness has three dimensions: pleasant, good and meaningful life.

In 2014, The Globe and Mail and Howatt HR launched the [Your Life at Work Survey](#) that's still online today and is a tool that measures individuals' quality of work life. To launch this study, we ran articles on topics such as [happiness](#) that examined what affected a person's mental health. We included a short risk survey on several topics.

For the happiness survey, there were 1,239 participants. Here are some of the findings from this survey:

- The average score was 20 out of 30, which falls in the "You're okay" range – but okay is not the "happy" range. Happiness requires intention and outcomes around

the three dimensions that Mr. Seligman suggested.

- 36 per cent fell in "Sorry – You're not happy" range while 33 per cent fell in the "You're happy" range.
- The top three items with the highest score from 1 to 5 were: 3.5/5 "I am a happy person"; 3.4/5 "I get up every day with a purpose"; 3.3/5 "Overall, my life is what I want it to be."

This survey is meant to educate, not diagnose, to help bring awareness to our role in our own happiness and indicate that it's not passive. It's dynamic, meaning we play an important role in creating our own happiness and well-being.

## **AWARENESS**

Leading a happy life requires awareness of what you're doing daily that promotes a mental state of well-being and contentment. To find out your happiness baseline, complete the [Happiness IQ Quick Survey](#).

You can then compare your score with the above benchmarks.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

**Research** suggests that happiness is a set of skills we can learn through practice. Fifty per cent is genetic, 10 per cent is based on the environment; and 40 per cent is a result of what we do.

One key takeaway from research is that our happiness is affected much more by our daily actions than our environment. Waiting around for circumstances or for others to make you happy may be a disappointing proposition. It appears that each of us has the capability to positively affect our own happiness by our decisions and actions.

However, if we don't have the knowledge or skills, we can feel trapped and hopeless. The good news is that there's ample positive psychology research to suggest that people can get off the **treadmill of life** and learn the skills to discover and add more happiness to their lives.

### ACTION

Happiness has a positive impact on our mental health and overall well-being, both psychologically and physically. Happy people increase their opportunity to live longer, healthier lives.

**Positive relationship count** Being around people who are safe, positive and care about you unconditionally supports your

happiness. We may not be able to pick our parents, siblings or other family; however, we can pick the people we want to socialize with and be our life partners. Outside of your family, how many people in your life positively affect you? **Research suggests** that people who have one or more close friends are on average happier because these relationships allow for self-disclosure and play a role in unloading stress. The key point is that we can pay attention to how the relationships in our life are supporting our happiness. Adding one positive relationship to your life can have a major impact on your happiness.

**Connection with community** Life moves fast and many of us can get caught in a cycle of moving from A to B. A is work and B is home. Fitting in much more can seem impossible because of the mental objections we create, such as time, energy and motivation. If we're not as happy as we want to be there's value in slowing down and evaluating your sense of connection to your community. **Research found** that people who were positively connected to and interacted with their neighbourhood social networks felt that it significantly improved their quality of life and well-being.

**Focus on strengths first** The drive to perfection is wearing down many of us. When we hyper-focus on our flaws they drain energy and put our focus on the negative. Focus on your strengths first, such



as kindness and willingness to help others. Pick one or two traits that are your strengths. At the end of the week, take a moment to reflect and write down how your strengths helped you feel and what you have learned. Research suggests that doing this activity created a **happiness boost** lasting up to six months.

# How to boost your emotional intelligence

Stop. Breathe. Think. And don't make emotional decisions

**BILL HOWATT**

**D**o you think you have a high or low emotional intelligence score?

Emotional intelligence (also known as EQ) can be defined as the ability to recognize, understand and manage our emotions, and to recognize how our emotions are affecting others – both positively and negatively. Those with a high EQ are typically on track to have good mental health. One reason is that when we can effectively manage our emotions under pressure we are less likely to make kneejerk, emotional decisions and actions.

In 2014, The Globe and Mail and Howatt HR launched the [Your Life at Work Survey](#) that's still online today and measures individuals' quality of work life. To launch this study, we ran articles on topics such as EQ that rated a person's mental health. We included a short risk survey on several topics.

For our EQ survey, there were 982 participants. This survey is meant to be educational, with the goal of increasing awareness of the role of EQ on our day-to-day mental health. Some findings from this survey:

- The average score was 37 out of 48, falling in the “Moderate EQ” range.
- 47 per cent of respondents scored “High EQ”; 40 per cent “Moderate”; and 13 per cent “Developmental opportunity for EQ.”
- The top two items with the highest score were: 3.4/4 “I adapt to change well” and 3.3/4 “I take responsibility for my actions.”
- The two lowest scores were: 2.7/4 “I care about how my emotions impact others,” and 2.8/4 “I rarely lose control of my emotions.”

EQ plays an important role in managing how we interact with our environment. The better we do, the higher our chance to fit into what psychologist [Alfred Adler](#) referred to as the social interest – our ability to feel a part of our community, peers, work and family.

## AWARENESS

Developing your EQ starts with self-awareness of your current level. You can get your EQ baseline by completing the **Emotional Intelligence (EQ) Quick Survey**. You can then compare your score with the above benchmarks.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Emotions are powerful drivers of behaviour. Most of us have one or two people in our world who are our kryptonite – that no matter how hard we try to communicate clearly and unemotionally with that person, whether it's a child, peer or partner, we end up losing our cool. We know that's not the way to deal with the situation and we know that losing our composure will only create more difficulty and strain on these important, personal relationships.

Psychologist **Daniel Goleman**, who brought the concept of EQ into the mainstream, suggested that EQ is not innate. It's learned through practice and can be developed, but mastering it requires attention, self-direction and commitment. When successful, the benefits and rewards become obvious in our relationships, careers and mental health.

## ACTION

We can increase our EQ by practicing micro skills. Some that I have used with clients include:

**No emotional decisions** The more connected we are to our emotions and how they can affect our daily decision-making, the more likely we are to not make decisions when we are emotionally overwhelmed. Adopt one simple rule: "I will never make a decision when I am emotional, because I don't want to make a poor one I'll regret later."

**Act of noticing** Most of us want to feel valued at some level by ourselves or others. Sometimes if we hyper-focus on our own needs we can over-focus to the point that we become self-absorbed. By being aware of this potential, we can instead learn to focus on others' needs and demonstrate empathy and compassion, which benefits others, feeds our sense of value, and supports developing a higher EQ.

**Notice others' body language** The old expression that a picture is worth a thousand words is aligned with EQ. When we notice others' **non-verbal** cues we are more able to adjust our message and social interactions. Focusing on how the message is being received versus the message itself can provide increased opportunity to build strong, trusted relationships.

**Save 10 by taking 10** It's amazing how 10 seconds of emotional discharge can take 10 hours or more to fix. When you're feeling emotionally charged, before you fire off

what you think you want to say, stop, pause and break away to regain your composure by taking 10 minutes to write out what you want to say. Then read it out loud to yourself

and ask how you would take it if you were receiving this message. By filtering out emotions from our key messages we increase our ability to have a successful outcome.



# How to tell if you're a workaholic

Difficulty leaving work behind at the end of the day can hint that you are addicted to work

**BILL HOWATT**

**W**ould you describe yourself as a workaholic?

Today in Canada, approximately **31 per cent** of workers identify themselves as workaholics. They're **preoccupied** with work, which takes priority over everything else in life including family, friends and their physical and mental health.

When it becomes a problem, like any other addictive disorder, work can have a negative impact on an individual's overall quality of life. This **Workaholism Quick Survey** screens for workaholism as any other addiction such as drugs, alcohol or gambling. One challenge for determining whether you have a work addiction is that hard work is both encouraged and rewarded in society. However, there's a line where, once crossed, the need to work all the time becomes a compulsion.

In 2014, The Globe and Mail and Howatt HR launched the **Your Life at Work Survey** that's still online today and helps individuals measure the quality of their work life. To launch this study, we ran articles on topics such as **Are you addicted to work?**, which examined how this addiction can affect a person's mental health. We included

a short risk survey on the topic.

For the workaholic survey there were 677 participants. Here are some of the findings from this survey:

- Twenty-three per cent fell in the serious risk category, suggesting that if they're not a workaholic, they're displaying behaviours that put them at risk. They were asked to self-evaluate whether they're experiencing any consequences of workaholism such as relationship issues or physical health issues resulting from lack of activity or attention to diet, rest and nutrition.
- Thirty-two per cent fell in the sub-clinical category, suggesting there may not be a concern. However, these persons were asked to monitor their work hours and to note whether they are able to relax when they are not at work.
- Thirty-eight per cent were at moderate risk. They were cautioned that having a difficult time taking vacations and relaxing, or worrying about failing at work

can increase their drive to work longer. Another risk for a person who is stressed, working long hours, and not getting enough rest is **burnout**.

- Eight per cent fell in the low-risk category. These persons were encouraged to monitor their work and ability to relax when not at work.

This survey is not meant to be a diagnostic tool; it is only a self-awareness tool to help people step back and evaluate their risk for workaholism.

### AWARENESS

If you're interested in knowing your degree of risk for work addiction, complete the [Workaholism Quick Survey](#).

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Like any mental health challenge, you're accountable for your own health. If you're concerned about the amount of time you spend at work, you may want to meet with a professional who is an expert on work addictions to assess your risk, and if required, help you develop an action plan to curb your risk. [Effective treatment](#) plans can get to the root of what's driving your compulsion to work all the time. This is good news, because a work addiction is different than alcohol or drugs. However, most of us can't abstain totally from work, as we need money to pay our bills and live.

### ACTION

Community resources such as [Workaholics Anonymous](#) are available to support a person with a work addiction. However, prevention by early identification and action is possible when we're aware and take accountability for our actions. If you're concerned about your risk, set some structure for yourself. Here's how:

**Define work periods** Set definite work periods such as 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday to Friday, and restrict all your core work to these times. Weekends and evenings are your time for family, friends, physical health and living.

**Daily journal** Monitor yourself daily, and be honest whether when you have free time you can separate from work and focus on your personal life. If work is on your mind all the time, you're not getting a chance to decompress. [Journaling](#) can be a helpful way to write away stress and to hold yourself accountable so that you can determine whether work is becoming a pre-occupation, and the only time you feel you can relax is when you're thinking of or doing work.

# Rewire your brain to think positively

You can teach your brain to focus on the positives and not the negatives

**BILL HOWATT**

When you walk into your kitchen, what do you notice first, the beautiful flowers on the counter or dirty dishes in the sink?

If it's the dirty dishes, that would be quite common – noticing the negative before the positive.

**Rick Hanson**, a neuropsychologist and best-selling author, reported that we're evolutionarily wired to notice the bad over the good. This clearly made sense 200,000 years ago for our ancestors who were trying to avoid threats and survive.

**Neuroplasticity** refers to the brain's ability to reorganize itself and change its hard-wiring structures over our lifetime. This can be both positive and negative for our mental health. If we're not aware that our brain has a natural bias to notice negativity first, and we don't know that we can train it to see more positively, we risk becoming more prone to focusing on negativity. This can affect our thinking, emotions and general mental health. As negativity becomes more intense, it can result in increased risk for mental illness such as depression.

It's beneficial to understand some basic brain research in order to take positive action to offset thinking patterns that

promote **negative plasticity**. With proper treatment and support, we can learn to stop negativity and repair the brain so it can become more positively wired. This is the micro skill of thinking of the positives first.

## **AWARENESS**

This micro skill leverages lessons learned from meditation. They promote the benefits of being patient when learning this skill and not judging yourself, just noticing and then gently refocusing your attention. When you walk into a situation, approach it with the intention of looking for the positive. By being aware that your brain is naturally biased, and reminding and refocusing, you can train it to find the positives first.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

If you've been overly prone to see the negatives first and have a difficult time seeing the positives, this can be changed if you really want to. For this micro skill to work it's necessary to understand and accept that only you can directly affect your brain to increase its positive plasticity. If you can't seem to do it alone, professionals can help you learn how. Positive change begins with

awareness, and requires self-motivation. If you're committed to find more of the positives in your life, this can benefit your mental health over time.

### **ACTION**

Your brain's wiring is affected by your habitual thinking habits. The more you create positive plasticity, the more likely you'll wire more happiness into your brain.

#### **1. Search for the positives.**

Before you walk into your home after work, make a commitment that you'll notice three positives before allowing your brain to focus on a negative. You can take this practice to work, team sports and relationships. This trains your brain to look for the positive over the negative. If your brain goes to a negative, don't judge it; release it and move on to find the positive.

#### **2. Give the positive more air time and importance.**

It's common for people when they get together to talk about what's not working and focus on negatives. Make a commitment to give the positives more air time when you interact with others. By focusing on the positive and talking about it you create conditions and expectations for your brain to notice more positives, so you have more to share. This activity can influence others to think positively, which will help them as well.

#### **3. Refocus to the positive.**

Life isn't perfect, so there will be times when you have a challenge that's not positive and you want it over with. The key is to move away from the negative, because it inhibits you from finding a solution. By acknowledging the challenge and changing your focus to finding a solution – a positive – you move your attention away from the fear centre of the brain to turn on other parts that drive decision-making and planning. This helps to increase your resiliency and to be able to move through life's challenges and setbacks.



# How to get more grit

Having grit will help you have the perseverance to achieve your goals

**BILL HOWATT**

**W**hat is one thing you want to accomplish in 2018?

Having a clearly defined personal goal with a defined outcome can assist in driving our **purpose** for getting out of bed and embracing our day. Picking one goal and focusing on it with purpose and conviction can feed our spirit that promotes and supports positive mental health.

One key action is picking a personal goal that inspires us. Research by American psychologist and author **Angela Duckworth** suggests that having a goal aligned with a defined passion can fuel our motivation to push through adversity associated with learning and overcoming failures on the path to achieving the goal.

Sometimes it's not the most talented person who finishes first; it's the **person** who has the most courage, follows through on what they say, remains optimistic in tough times, and focuses on excellence to finish without being frozen by the need for perfection. **Grit** is a positive trait based on passion and motivation to achieve a measurable, long-term goal.

Do you know someone who had never run a marathon who woke up one day and said they were going to run one? Training

and putting themselves through a transformation from huffing and puffing to walk up the stairs to being fit enough to run a full marathon is a wonderful example of grit in action.

When we pick a goal and challenge ourselves – whether physically, mentally (such as taking a course), work (starting a new career or project) or life (focusing on improving our finances or relationships) – we become engaged in the process and we develop our grit.

In 2014, The Globe and Mail and Howatt HR launched the **Your Life at Work Survey** that's still active online helping individuals to measure their quality of work life. To launch this study, we ran articles on topics such as, "Do you have the grit to reach your goals?"

Here are the results from 844 respondents who took our grit survey:

- Nineteen per cent fell in the low grit category. This score suggests a person is struggling to finish goals and following through on their plans.
- Fifty per cent fell in the moderate grit

category. This suggests a person sets goals with good intentions and motivation to achieve; however, they may not follow through because they change their mind or get distracted by another goal.

- Thirty per cent fell in the high grit category. This score suggests a person has the resolve and commitment to follow through more times than not on what they set out to accomplish.
- The average score on the 10-item scale was 35/50.
- The three items that received the lowest score – which indicated why some people have a lower than desired grit score – were:
  - “I take rejection hard”;
  - “I frequently set a goal and then change it”;
  - “Setbacks discourage me”.

### AWARENESS

Before you set your next personal goal, consider the role grit can play in supporting your success. The first step is to become aware of the link between passion and success. Think about the last three goals you wanted to achieve, complete the [Grit Quick Survey](#), and compare your results with outcomes of these goals.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

The first lesson from self-awareness with respect to grit is to understand the role

self-determination and conviction play in accomplishing personal goals. Next is to consider how what we want to accomplish is supported by our environment (such as by our family, partner or employer). When we pick goals, it's beneficial to consider potential, unintended consequences that may occur by spending time and energy on passion. Ideally, our goals don't hurt or take away from others we love or care about.

### ACTION

When you pick a goal you're comfortable with pursuing, the more you can tap into grit, the more likely you'll be successful in overcoming short-term barriers. As well, you're likely to have long-term drive to achieve your desired success.

### TIPS FOR SPARKING GRIT DAILY:

**Intentionally plug into like-minded people** One way to fuel yourself is to surround yourself with people who want the same thing as you.

**Pay attention to your self-talk** Praise yourself for trying to keep your mind on the process required to achieve your goal.

**Define milestones in small chunks** Have one or two simple and clearly defined actions that support your goal. Focus on the defined tasks and take one step at a time.

**Reinforce your purpose** Answer why what you want is important to you, and say it to

yourself before you go to bed.

**Stay nimble** No plan is perfect. Accept that to achieve your goal your plan may need to change or evolve, based on circumstances. Keep top of mind that in the end it's the goal that matters, so you can allow yourself to be flexible and adapt as needed.

# Why being kind to others is good for your soul

Regularly performing random acts of kindness can boost your own happiness and satisfaction

**BILL HOWATT**

**H**ow regularly do you perform random acts of kindness?

If you're not sure, take a moment to explore how the micro skill of performing random acts of kindness for others can be a major benefit to your health and happiness, which will improve your life at home and at work.

A random act of kindness is a non-premeditated action designed to provide kindness to the outside world. Kindness is the quality of demonstrating being generous, considerate and friendly.

Essentially, random acts of kindness are acts by individuals who actively seek out opportunities to help others they may or may not know. Actions fall on a continuum, from those that can take seconds to some involving hours. Some examples are: holding a door open, helping a person across a street, asking someone who looks lost if they need directions, complimenting someone, sending a sick person a get-well card, volunteering, donating retail points to charities, and the list goes on.

There's science that suggests performing

random acts of kindness can increase serotonin, the feel-good chemical in our brains; increase energy levels and happiness; and decrease stress and anxiety. Researchers have reported that acts of kindness reduce risk for depression, improve your mood, and can increase good fortune and well-being.

## **AWARENESS**

The barrier to providing random acts of kindness is low. Acting begins with simply becoming aware of what you're doing. Many of us offer acts of kindness sporadically, when the situation arises. If a senior citizen falls at a crosswalk, many will stop and do all we can to help. What some may not notice is how good we feel after we help others.

Activating this micro skill and gaining all its benefits begins with consciously connecting the dots of how helping others benefits us, as well as how good we feel after we perform kind acts. Increasing our awareness by paying attention to our own experiences can increase our motivation to

engage in more acts of kindness.

Struggling to do our best with what we have, and feeling overwhelmed by the day-to-day demands of life can put us at risk of thinking that we have no time to do more. But when we pause and shift our frame of reference to understand that random acts don't need to take a lot of time, we can slow down, do something for someone else, and reap the benefits with them.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

When you're distracted by the challenges of life, the notion that slowing down to help others is good for you may not sound appealing, until you test it a few times and experience firsthand the true benefits. While some people may not appreciate or even seem grateful to receive a random act of kindness, the intention is to help without any expectation of reward – or even acknowledgement. To adopt this micro skill, it's beneficial to accept that you can only control your own acts. More people will be grateful than not, but the end goal is to consciously perform acts of kindness unconditionally.

### ACTION

This is not a complicated micro skill to add to your behaviour. It requires only three actions to convert it to a daily habit:

**Be open to opportunities** Decide that you want to perform random acts of kindness and then allow your creativity to generate

ideas. As well, review ideas created by others who post theirs, such as on websites including [100 random acts of kindness](#).

**Activate** Look for at least one opportunity each day to perform a random act of kindness, to help others and yourself. It's important to keep this simple. It doesn't need to be overwhelming nor a big drain on your time, finances or effort; it only needs to be something that feels natural, right, and what you want to do.

**Acknowledge** Notice after you perform a random act of kindness how you feel inside. Allow yourself to soak up the positive feelings. This can help to anchor these kinds of acts and to reinforce their benefits. When done in the spirit of what all random acts of kindness are intended to be, you never do harm to others or yourself. Society benefits when its members act together to make it a better place for all.

# Prepare for failure and it will lead to success

We don't want to fail, but if you plan for it you set realistic expectations and build contingency plans that can lead to success

**BILL HOWATT**

**H**ow do you prepare for failure each day?

Many people aren't sure how to answer this question because it just doesn't make any sense to them. Most are more comfortable answering how they prepare for success each day. Unfortunately, many people do not prepare for either. They default to a reactive approach to try to keep up with daily demands.

This micro skill supports the value of anticipating failure. This helps in setting realistic expectations and building contingency plans. Now, for the skeptical reader, be clear that wanting failure and planning for it are different. No one is perfect. We all have failed and suffered setbacks, so it only makes sense to be mentally prepared for failure, rather than being surprised and disappointed when failure happens, to the point of never wanting to try again.

One experience most people can relate to is learning how to ride a bike. No one wants to fall off, but we plan for it, by wearing the right safety equipment, having someone run beside us to catch us before we

fall, or learning on grass to provide a softer landing. With all this preparation, most bike learners fall and get a few bumps and bruises as a part of the learning process, but don't get severely injured. Before starting, most know there is a real risk of getting hurt in some way, so why doesn't it deter us? Because learning to ride a bike provides a reward, it's fun and gives us freedom and independence. And we can plan for that potential failure, and limit the risk.

## **AWARENESS**

Living life to its fullest means that we have had failure. We read of people's successes but we don't often know of their failures. Winston Churchill once said, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal, it is the courage to continue that counts." Whether it's learning to ride a bike, reading, parenting, relationships, work or sports, whenever we have a difference between what we want to happen and our reality, we can view it as failure.

When we start anything that we care about, there's a chance that we'll fail.

Accepting failure as an option provides an opportunity to prepare for success as well. Preparing for failure begins with self-awareness. When we're pragmatic and open with each failure there's an opportunity for learning.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

When we fail, we have a choice as to how we respond. Though failure can feel like a setback, it's not the failure that will define us; it's what we do afterward that counts most. Ask any top sales professional how many "no's" they heard before they got to a "yes." Most will tell you that the faster they fail, the faster they will be successful. Thomas Edison said it well: "I have not failed. I just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

We can only try to do our best each day, and even with our best we may fail. Those who prepare for failure are more likely to adopt Edison's thinking and make the pre-loaded decision that failure is information that we can learn from, not the end result. Choosing to give up, rather than making two or three more attempts before you succeed, can be the difference between happiness and settling for less than you really want in life.

### ACTION

If I fail today, what will I do? Notice the question is not specific; it's general.

For example, you interview for a new job you really want and don't get it. What you

do next is binary: You will or will not try again. Both have consequences.

Preparing for failure can be specific. The follow-up to learn from not getting a job may be a post-interview discussion on whether there was anything you could have done differently, any coaching, as well as self-reflection as to what you need to change for the next time.

Our general mental health is influenced by how we perceive we're doing with respect to managing both success and failure. Planning for failure doesn't mean we want it or make it happen. It means we're willing to take risks – and with risk comes the potential to fail. As well, with each failure are opportunities for learning and achieving life goals and fulfilling personal needs.

Though failure can hurt, when powerful emotions become manageable and we're open to learn and be honest with ourselves, there's opportunity for post-failure growth. When we can reframe failure and see it as more than a disappointment, we position ourselves for the opportunity to learn and grow from failure. The only way we can ever win in the game of life is to have played.

# Why it's positive to be a positive person

Shake away your tendency to be negative and find ways to point out all the positives in your life – it will boost your happiness

**BILL HOWATT**

**W**hat best describes your general outlook on life: positive or negative?

A person who is slanted toward the negative typically focuses on the things in their life they don't like, to the point that it impacts their mood, energy and general outlook. Some negative people complain to anyone who will listen, while others isolate themselves and focus on their negativity in solitude. One consequence for those who spend most of their time focused on negativity is that they miss opportunities to enjoy more positive moments. Even negative people have positive moments, but not as many as they may like.

A positive person focuses on what's good in their life, finds joy in the simple things, and takes the general attitude that while there are lots of things they can't directly control, they can control what they choose to focus on. Positive people can inspire and influence others to reframe their thoughts and to think about things differently. They can be infectious in a good way.

Most people enjoy the company of a positive person. Without being pushy, a

positive person can challenge individuals to focus on what they can control. Most positive people know that life isn't perfect. There are ups and downs, but to enjoy the ups it's important to be aware of and acknowledge them. The general attitude of positive folks is that there's more good than bad in life, and you don't need to be perfect to enjoy it.

Interestingly, being positive or negative requires the same amount of energy, but with two different outcomes that affect your mental health: intention and choice. Whatever we focus on the most is our default state, which we can change from negative to positive through practice.

A growing field called positive psychology is looking at how people can learn to become more positive and happy, promoting positive mental health as well as physical health by creating a healthy immune system.

## **AWARENESS**

It's rare for any one person to be either 100-per-cent negative or positive. One



objective way to evaluate the percentage of time that you're positive or negative is to get your baseline. Here's how to do it. For the next 14 days, keep a positive/negative hourly log. After each hour, give yourself a score from 0 to 10. Consider this a mood meter: Any time you mark a five or below is a negative hour; above five is positive. At the end of the two weeks, tally your scores and divide the total by the number of hours you've tracked, to obtain your average score. For example, if you have a seven out of 10, that says you're positive 70 per cent of the time.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Once you have your score you can decide whether you're happy with it or want to improve it. It's valuable to be clear on the benefits of being positive versus negative. A person who is positive spends less time worried, stressed and focused on what's wrong versus what's right. They're more likely to be grateful for all the good things they have in life and are more consistent and predictable with friends and family. An overly negative person can appear to be self-absorbed in their concerns and miss opportunities to put other needs first that would help them feel better.

### ACTION

Following are some actions that can reinforce the decision and benefits for putting more focus on positive than negative.

**Positive pre-framing** When you come home from work, before you point out anything negative or correct anyone, focus on five things that are positive.

**Smile** Each day, look for an opportunity to smile at 10 people and count how many smile back. Do this for two weeks and you may notice that more people are smiling back – and you may also find yourself smiling more.

**Encourage** Encourage others to do something positive for themselves, such as applying for a new role or asking out someone they like. Interestingly, being effective like this requires us to be positive, so that we can sell the why that we're suggesting that others take action.

**Challenge negative thinking** If something is bugging you and you feel negative, it can be helpful to challenge the issue by talking about it. For example, if you're not happy in a current work role, consider letting your manager know before you mentally turn off or start to look for another role. Make it clear that you want to find a resolution and don't want to be negative; you want their help to find the positive. Most leaders would appreciate your honesty, and if they really care about you they will want to help you find a positive path.

# Ways to create a happy relationship

A happier you is a more productive you, and relationships are a large part of that

**BILL HOWATT**

**H**ow do you rate your ability to be intimate?

To answer this question, you need to be in a committed relationship. How long you stay in this relationship depends on your ability to be intimate with your partner. Keeping your relationship vibrant and intimate can help you be happier, and that helps you in your life at home and at work.

Intimacy is what converts friendship, dating and romance into love. Many people confuse intimacy with sex. These two words have separate meanings; however, for a long-term, healthy and happy sex life there must be high levels of intimacy.

For intimacy to be authentic both parties must have feelings of equality and trust. When a couple experiences a high level of intimacy their emotional bond strengthens love, contentment and happiness. The higher the perceived levels of intimacy, the greater the desire to want to be together.

Intimacy-making is the intentional action of strengthening the emotional bond between two people. It provides the experience, evidence and safety for two people to meet each other's emotional needs. It's the conscious action of strengthening a relationship emotionally.

One sign that intimacy levels are low is when the desire to be with one another is waning and both parties are fine filling their time separately. Long-lasting intimacy is dynamic, requiring commitment, effort and focus. Nothing lasts forever without attention and effort to maintain it – not even intimacy. Maintaining intimacy with the right person isn't hard work; it's highly rewarding and enjoyable.

## **AWARENESS**

Three activities that influence your ability to improve intimacy:

**Doing something for your partner** Giving gifts, being helpful and following through on your commitments.

**Doing something with your partner** Spending quality time doing activities you both like, and listening to your partner.

**Doing something directed at your partner** Avoiding, correcting and judging your partner.

Take a moment and evaluate the percentage of time you engage in each of the above

activities.

The most important element for building deep intimacy is doing activities with your partner. This can be walking, talking and sharing. Wanting to share time with another person provides an opportunity to experience life together and to build a long-lasting and caring relationship.

Doing things for a loved one is nice, but it's important to not try to replace emotional connection with materialism (such as thinking that buying things for another person is enough to prove your commitment). However, acts of kindness and supporting a partner provide evidence of commitment to their happiness.

For intimacy-making to happen you must want to spend time with your partner. People who have high levels of intimacy or want to foster it want to be with their partner. Intimacy is a two-way street; the bond to build it requires reciprocation.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Intimacy making has no agenda nor defined outcome. There's no expectation that doing something will equal something. Intimacy-making with a person we value provides a rush of emotional energy. It's not work, it's pleasure. You know you're in a highly intimate relationship when your emotions change by a simple text, touch or smile. You look forward daily to hearing, touching and seeing the other person.

There's no way to act and fool another person with respect to intimacy. Creating

intimacy requires being accountable to yourself. When, or if, intimacy feels like work, it's time to self-evaluate what you want and how fair it is for you and the other person to stay in a relationship.

### ACTION

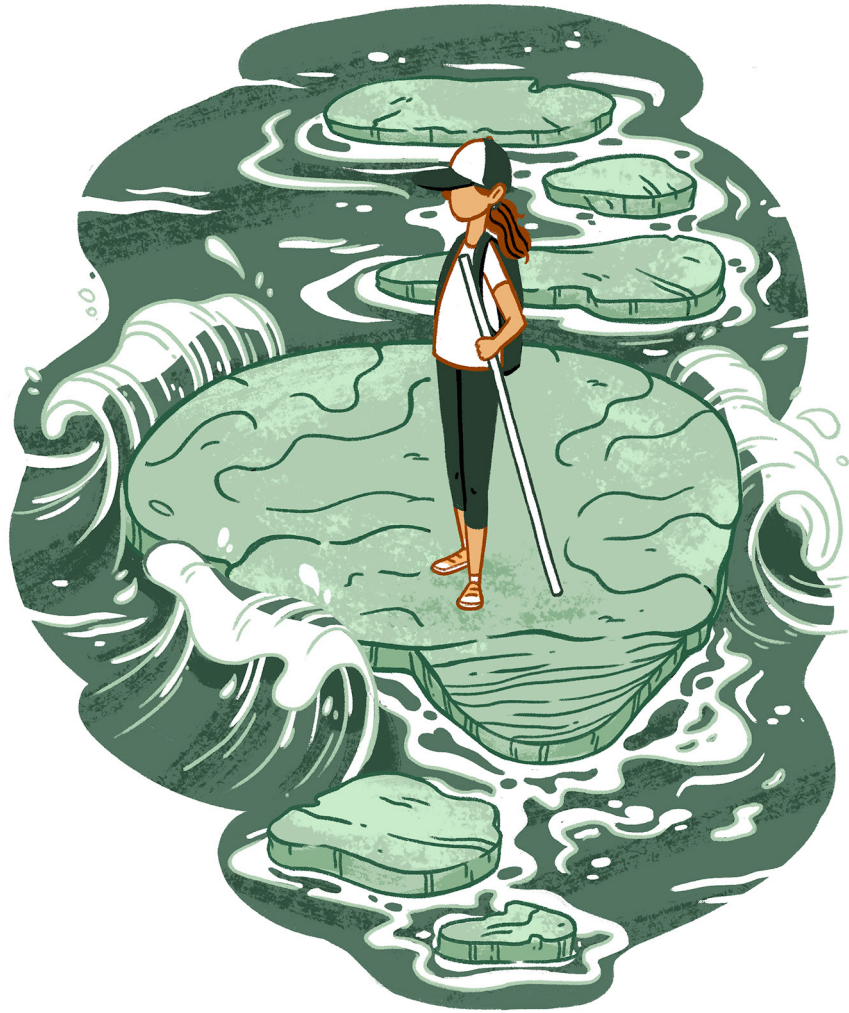
Improving intimacy strengthens an emotional connection. Actions a couple can take include:

**Define what intimacy means** Though it may sound simple, it's helpful to not assume that intimacy has the same meaning for you and your partner. Take an inventory by asking, "What does intimacy mean to you?" Ask for examples of what you both do now that fuels intimacy.

**Strengthen the conditions for intimacy making** Once you're clear on the definition, explore what you both are doing well to facilitate intimacy and where there could be improvement. If you find it hard to ask your partner to rate their intimacy level on a scale of one (low) to 10 (high), this may suggest your relationship is not safe, open and transparent. Intimacy has no boundaries. It creates the atmosphere to engage in conversation on any topic both individuals feel safe discussing. Intimacy provides an opportunity for constant learning and sharing of each other's needs and wants. It helps to remove regret, secrets and assumptions that can lead to frustration and relationship breakdowns.

**Design your plan to improve intimacy**

Many people fall out of love because they get consumed by their busy and demanding lives, and don't make intimacy a priority. There's nothing wrong for you as a couple to define what intimacy-making is for you. It can help you clarify and make a commitment to intimacy and the time you both expect and want invested in intimacy. This can help to ensure clear expectations, so you know what to do and what time to protect for each other.



CHAPTER THREE

# STRESS

# Write away your stress with a journal

Using a journal can help you track the positive parts of your day instead of getting held back by the negatives

**BILL HOWATT**

**H**ow do you objectively evaluate each day as being positive or negative?

The key word is objectively. Many of us, without being aware of it, put more weight on negative than positive events in life. This suggests that one negative event will have more influence in shaping our perception of the success of a day than any positives.

The purpose of this micro skill is to explore the value of adding journaling at the end of your day as a way to process the day's events. This can help you catalogue the positives in your world and to look at stress not as pain but as a challenge that you can manage and deal with as it comes.

Here's an example. One [researcher](#), a social psychology professor, found that people have a tendency to be more upset about losing \$50 than being happy about gaining \$50. Positive psychology gurus such as [Shawn Achor](#), author of *The Happiness Advantage* and the [TEDxBloomington](#) talk titled "The happy secret to better work" (viewed by more than 17 million people since 2012), promote the need for people to focus less on what's negative in life and more on what's positive. He emphasizes

the value of investing energy in our social network with the intention of bringing a positive attitude and taking stock of three things we're grateful for every day. If we do this, we can improve our mental map and learn to see a more positive view of the world, and as a result become happier.

[Journaling](#) has been found to be an effective way to promote well-being, and for processing emotions and increasing self-awareness.

## **AWARENESS**

We all have lots of data coming at us every day in many different forms, from the Internet, social media and e-mails. Keeping up with the amount of information we need and elect to engage in can be overwhelming. [Prospect theory](#) teaches that we have a desire to avoid negative experiences more than a desire to take action to obtain positive experiences.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

We each own our own mental health. It can be difficult, without a frame of reference or knowing what to do, to take charge of our mental health and reduce the risk of

putting more focus on negative than positive events. Journaling has been found as one way to process negative events in a way that has a **positive impact** on mental health.

### **ACTION**

One line of **research found** that journaling, which is the physical act of writing, activates the analytical and rational left brain. When this happens, the left brain is focused and busy, freeing the right brain to create new ways to see the day's events.

There's value in considering some of the benefits that may motivate you to consider adopting this daily micro skill:

**Organizes thinking** James Pennebaker, author of *Writing to Heal*, reported that the act of writing out their experiences and putting them into their own languages has been found to help people organize them in a way that is less overwhelming and easier to comprehend and process.

**Promotes health** One study found that people who journaled on average 20 minutes a day before surgery were able to recover faster than those who did not. The research found that the act of writing out stressful events can help a person to see the stress as a challenge, not a hindrance.

### **Processes daily thought and emotions**

**Journaling** only five minutes a day can help process and clear out unwanted thoughts

and can act like a toothbrush for the mind.

Journaling doesn't need to be complicated. You can use pen and paper; you may elect to write out your daily thoughts electronically; or you may decide to purchase one of the many online journaling tools out there.

I have created an **online journal** that doesn't have a lot of frills, but it's free. It has a few self-assessment tools, daily self-measures that can track your emotions and what you're grateful for each day. As well, you can write out your daily reflections and set your personal goals. This journal was designed to support students who completed the **Pathway to Coping** online course so they had a place to monitor their daily progress.

Processing each day's events in a journal can put you in position to close out the day on a positive note, and to start the next day with a clean slate.

# How to manage when work stress leads you to overeat

Many people turn to food when stress gets to them. Here are tips to help keep your healthy eating on track

**BILL HOWATT**

When you're stressed, it's amazing how often many people will turn to food to help them feel better.

Your mental health is influenced by how well you perceive your interactions within your world. Those who view all stress as bad versus a potential opportunity are more at risk for feeling overwhelmed, and in some cases may use food as a way to deal with stress and to feel better.

In 2014, The Globe and Howatt HR launched the [Your Life at Work Survey](#) that's still online today. It is a tool that you can use to measure your quality of work life. To launch this study, we ran articles on topics that impacted mental health, such as [food addictions](#). We included a short risk survey on each topic.

The items for this quick survey were developed using Dr. Robert Coombs's book [Handbook of Addictive Disorders](#). Here are some findings from our food addictions survey of 678 participants.

- The average score was 23 out of 40, which falls in the high-risk category for a

potential food addiction.

- 80 per cent of participants in the survey were in the high-risk category.
- 14 per cent of participants fell in the moderate-risk category, and six per cent were in the low-risk category.
- The top four items with the highest score from 0 (no concern) to 4 (serious concern) were: 3/4 crave bread or food high in sugar and salt; 2.8/4 consider food as a source of pleasure; 2.7/4 eat even when they don't feel hungry; and 2.7/4 struggle to control how much they eat.
- It appears that most survey participants could relate to the connection between food and stress.

A high score doesn't mean a person has a food addiction; it indicates food may be a challenge worth exploring in more detail. Typically, an early indication that food is a problem is the inability to control food



intake habits. As well, higher levels of body fat can put a person at **metabolic risk**. If food is an issue for you, here are some tips to help manage this challenge.

### AWARENESS

If you're concerned that you may engage in mindless eating when you're stressed, take five minutes to complete the **food addiction quick survey** to assess your risk level for developing or having a food addiction. As well, you can benchmark your score against the average of others who explored their risk level.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

After we become aware that we may be engaging in mindless eating to cope with stress, the next step is to determine how strong the compulsion is to eat. If you can't change your habits based on a rational decision to do what's good for you, this may be a sign that you're at risk. Only you can take control of your health. If you need support, that's fine; there are lots of options to help you to control your food intake.

### ACTION

Moving from mindless to mindful eating starts with focusing on one small decision at a time.

#### **Create a daily food intake game plan**

Define what you need to eat on a typical day. Eating a healthy breakfast, lunch,

supper and snack each day makes sense. Preparing meals at home increases the likelihood that you'll eat healthily. Another option is to sign up with a company that sends meals to your home in a box. The company provides the daily game plan so you don't have to think about it.

**Remove food pressure** Changing food habits for some people feels like all or nothing. For example, "I can't eat sugar; it's bad for me." Mindful eating is being honest with yourself and acknowledging why you're eating. Eating cake at your grandfather's 90th birthday is fine. It's when you eat cake daily as a way to manage your emotions that it's harmful. Mindful eating is about eating for a defined purpose, such as long-term health.

**Mindful food intake check** Before you put something into your mouth, determine the value of the food for your body. Mindful eating means being clear on why you're eating something and how it can help you before you put it in your mouth. This can help promote healthy daily micro food decisions. It's easy to manage one small decision at a time, such as picking vegetables over French fries or drinking water instead of a sugary drink. Mindful eating is about making a lot of small, good decisions.

**Implement daily feedback monitors** Daily feedback keeps you on track and old habits at bay. We can track our daily food micro

decisions for each meal and snack we eat in two columns. The first column is yes, good for me, the second column is no, not good for me. The goal is to train yourself to increase the number of check marks in the yes column. You don't need to be perfect, just aware and honest with yourself – one bite at a time.

# Spend time with your pet to reduce stress

Pet therapy can help you cut your stress level and give you a way to work through a challenge without judgment

**BILL HOWATT**

**D**o you have one relationship whose every interaction is non-judgmental and positive, one that, when you are struggling with your thoughts, you can engage with this person and become more calm, clear and optimistic?

Having a trusted human who takes on this role for you is a gift. Those of us who are fortunate to have a relationship like this know firsthand its benefits on our mental health. However, if you're struggling to find this one person in your life, one alternative is a pet.

**Pet therapy** has been found to positively impact a person's mental health by creating positive emotions, decreasing feelings of isolation, and encouraging communication.

Being the proud owner of two Valley Bulldogs, Sophia and Dozer, whom I love dearly and enjoy spending as much time as I can with, I've noticed over the years how they help me process thoughts I'm struggling with. This micro skill introduces a concept I refer to as pet talk.

Pet talk is, in essence, a mindfulness

activity facilitated by a trusted pet. The pet can be yours, a friend's or in the care of an animal shelter or rescue facility. The only requirement for this to work is for both you and the animal to feel safe. Pet talk can be done sitting, walking, holding or patting. As long as both you and the pet are comfortable and relaxed, this process can be done with intention.

## **AWARENESS**

To begin, pet talk requires some preparation. Be aware that you have some thinking you want to process (such as a problem you need to deal with or a decision you need to make) and then decide that you want to focus on this with your pet in a quiet place, where both of you are calm. A pet facilitates creating a relaxing environment that's non-judgmental, and animals are patient and attentive to your every word and thought.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Only you can create the state and intentions to engage in pet talk. You need to

suspend your own judgment and trust the process for it to work. The goal is to bring your focus to the present and make a commitment to deal with the thoughts that you believe require attention and some action. There's no pass or fail when it comes to pet talk; it's a process that promotes calm and creativity. The goal is to move past thoughts that you may be struggling with so you can decide to act. The decision may be a resolution to get a second opinion or to seek out support.

#### **ACTION**

One benefit of pet talk is supported by mindfulness and metacognition (our internal thoughts and beliefs). **Research shows** that being able to focus on our thoughts without judgment, and allow ourselves to be open to these thoughts and feelings, can help remove tensions about the situation we're processing to the point that we can perceive it in a different way. This can help create new clarity and a path to a healthy resolution.

#### **PET TALK IN ACTION:**

**Preparation** Get to a safe spot with your pet and begin by engaging it and enjoying the interaction. Pet interactions can help us quickly relax our mental state so we can get our minds turned off and bring us to the current moment. Take five minutes to just relax and enjoy being with your pet. I find that I relax and breathe more slowly when I'm sitting and patting one of my pets.

**Seek permission** A pure two-way relationship never takes one another for granted. When I'm sitting with Dozer or Sophia and want to begin pet talk, I start by asking if they'd be okay to help me out. I typically get a wagging tail and a few licks. I then internally or externally ask for permission to share a few things I'd like their help processing. I've never been turned down; they're always ready to work with me.

**Focus on active thought** Take the thoughts you're looking to process and notice the feelings attached to them. If any of your thoughts are negative or judgmental about yourself or others, ask yourself why you're feeling this way and how it's helping. Ask yourself if you believe your pet agrees with your thoughts. The point is to shift your thinking from negative to neutral or positive so you can be more objective.

**Consider your pet's wisdom** My pets never agree with my negative thinking about myself or others, or that I'm not capable of solving my problems or making good decisions. Imagine what wisdom your pet would suggest to help you reframe your thoughts and come up with a solution. What questions would they ask you; what advice would they give; what would they like you to think and feel at the end of your talk?

Pet talk typically takes me 20 to 30 minutes. I find that slowing down, following the above process and answering the

questions through my pet's belief system helps me facilitate creativity without judgment to gain new perspectives.

Most pet owners understand the power of human-pet relationships. They're special and can be a great source of support to our emotional well-being.

# How to turn stress into something positive

Keeping track of your stress levels and learning to take action can help keep you from getting stressed out

**BILL HOWATT**

**W**hen you think of stress, do positive or negative emotions come to mind?

Many of us relate to stress with negative emotions. Most negative stress originates from issues related to money, career, relationships and health. When faced with stress that we find challenging and overwhelming, it's helpful to get ahead of it before it accumulates. The better we monitor our daily stress levels and take proactive actions to cope with it, the less we risk mental health issues.

Not all stress is bad, or needs to be. One positive form of stress is **eustress**, which motivates and can drive us to overcome challenges so we can achieve goals, such as earning a university degree or getting a new job.

Starting Jan. 1, 2018, some forms of chronic bad stress, such as workplace harassment, bullying and negative comments or unwarranted statements from a leader, may be recognized under workers compensation in **Ontario**. Over time, these stresses can have a negative impact if actions are not taken to prevent mental injury.

But not all forms of stress will be covered under this chronic mental stress policy. These include job change, termination, demotion, transfer, discipline and changes in working hours or productivity expectations. Therefore, it's beneficial to pay attention to your daily stress load, and act to resolve it before it becomes chronic.

In a 2017 article "**How to manage your stress load**," the idea of monitoring your level of stress was introduced. The early findings from a related stress survey with 522 participants found the following:

- 59 per cent were rated moderate to high risk. This suggests that they were under chronic mental stress, experiencing physical (such as sleep issues), psychological (such as increased anxiety) or behavioural symptoms (such as grinding their teeth).
- 30 per cent fell in the low-to-moderate risk range, suggesting they're doing okay most days coping with stress. However, one category of their life is typically more

challenging than they would like.

- Only 11 per cent fell in the low risk category, suggesting that they're coping well with their life demands and stress.
- The average score was 36 out of 60 for those in the low- to moderate-risk categories.
- The three items that had the highest risk score were:
  - I'm struggling to keep up with the demands of home and work;
  - It feels like my stress level is high each day;
  - I struggle to do the kinds of things that can help me manage my stress better (such as physical fitness, meditation, hobbies).

### AWARENESS

The more we can learn to cope with stress cognitively versus emotionally, the more likely we'll be able to focus on finding a favourable solution. It's better to pay attention to our stress load than to ignore it.

By monitoring our stress load and being honest with ourselves, we can act to prevent bad stress from engulfing us. Using the [stress load weekly monitor](#) is one way of proactively dealing with the amount of stress you face.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

If your stress load becomes moderate to

high, ignoring it won't change it. Taking accountability for what we can control and focusing on that are important first steps. When we can stop and look at bad stress objectively as a challenge to solve, we position ourselves to be proactive.

### ACTION

Finding a resolution to stressful life situations may not always be immediate. It can take some time to get through a divorce or a difficult work situation. Moving past a stressful situation requires a plan and then action.

If you don't think you have the internal resources to solve a stress challenge, seeking support from a trusted peer can be helpful. If this doesn't work, seek out professional help through your work employee and family assistance program to uncover some options. The goal is to solve problems and make cognitive rather than emotional decisions that result in re-living stress and leading to a sense of being trapped. We can seldom change what happened to us, but we can control what we do and how we react.

The more we develop our [resiliency](#) and [coping skills](#), the more prepared we'll be to offload stress.

# What to do when your relationship is stressing you out

‘Relationship confusion’ can mean anxiety and stress, and can hurt your happiness and productivity

**BILL HOWATT**

**A**re you in an intimate relationship and confused?

If yes, the next question to ask yourself is: why are you confused? Then: what are you doing to clear up this confusion?

Relationships can be a source of joy as well as distraction and stress when we’re experiencing relationship confusion. And this distraction and stress can affect other parts of our lives, including our ability to be productive at work.

One factor that fuels relationship confusion is when a partner’s words and actions don’t match. Relationship confusion is rooted in perceptions and continues because no action is taken to clear up the confusion.

When relationship confusion increases, so does the anxiety and stress that can impact your mental health and overall happiness. The reasons people fail to take action when they’re feeling confusion over their relationship can be due to fear of losing the relationship and wanting to avoid negative emotions such as rejection, loneliness and grief.

This micro skill provides some guidance to individuals who are experiencing relationship confusion, and explains how they can take action to improve the situation.

## **AWARENESS**

Relationship confusion is often linked to a specific gap. Before addressing this gap, it’s helpful to step back and define what your ideal relationship looks like and how you would know if you were in one.

For two people to build a caring relationship with little to no relationship confusion, the core building blocks are an alignment of values, wants, interests and trust.

William Glasser, the author of Choice Theory, says that for a couple to build a healthy and loving relationship, they must understand how to meet and support each other’s four basic psychological needs:

- Fun (which includes hobbies, music, sports)
- Freedom (which includes independence, time alone and time with others)



- Love (time with their partner, sex, family)
- Power (career, money, education)

When there's relationship confusion, there are gaps in the above building blocks and basic needs. Here are some questions you need to ask yourself.

- What are the gaps that you're experiencing?
- How is this relationship confusion impacting your quality of life?
- If you want to be happy in this relationship, do you agree that you'll need to do something different?

Perhaps the most challenging thing for a person in relationship confusion is to stop hoping and be honest with themselves that the confusion is negatively impacting their overall happiness and productivity.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Once you're aware and motivated to close the gaps that fuel your relationship confusion, it's helpful to consider that if another person doesn't feel or behave the same as you, this is not a reflection of you; it's their choice. It may not be what you want, but love isn't a perfect science, and we can't make another human love us or want to be with us. Be honest with yourself and

answer this question: "Could another person make you love them?"

As much as we want something, this desire alone is not enough. A loving relationship is a two-way street. Both parties must be committed to learn what each other really wants and needs and then be willing and happy to provide it. Hoping another person will love us the way we want seldom works, and often leads to confusion and sadness.

Deciding to address relationship confusion is an important first step. It can create the energy to close and fix the perceptions around confusion, or it may be the action that ultimately ends a relationship that would never meet anyone's needs. Each of us needs to decide for ourselves what we want and will accept, and understand that we can only control what we think and do. Enjoying a relationship to the fullest requires two people taking care of each other's needs.

### ACTION

Here are some coaching tips to address relationship confusion:

#### **Validate why you want this relationship.**

Emotions are powerful, and they can blind us. Sometimes we want what we can't have, without understanding why we really want it. What are the top three things this person provides for you? If you're struggling to list them, perhaps you're not sure why you want this relationship, and that can be a

source of relationship confusion. To benefit from a relationship you must be clear and have evidence of what this relationship provides you. If the relationship is not providing you anything, then are you really in a relationship?

**Clarify the type of relationship.**

Relationships fall on a continuum, from new acquaintances to friends, dating to exclusive partners, and even to marriage. Sometimes confusion happens because the parties are not aligned on this continuum, didn't talk about it or made assumptions. This creates confusion. It's best to be clear and set boundaries and expectations. Get agreement on where you are, and if you'd like to be further along the continuum,

discuss the milestones required to move to the next step.

**Seek clarity on relationship gaps.** One way to resolve relationship confusion is to ask your partner to have a conversation to seek clarity on what you're confused about. Make your concern clear and say what you want to happen to resolve this confusion. If the other person isn't open to listen to you and how you feel confused and help you sort through it, then you most likely are not in a real relationship. If this is the case, you haven't lost a relationship; you've gained an opportunity to seek clarity and to decide what you want to do with this information.



# What to do when your to-do list overwhelms you

You have to measure your capacity each day to decide how much you can handle, and when to push back

**BILL HOWATT**

Most of us try to fit one more thing into an already-busy day.

Just when we think we have the day in control, we get one more thing added to our to-do list. This can lead to a feeling of being piled on and can drain our energy to the point of feeling emotionally and mentally exhausted. When this cycle becomes chronic, it can result in feeling overwhelmed.

This micro skill focuses on managing our perceived capacity level, which is what we believe we can cope with and manage each day. Like a glass, we all have a capacity before we feel full to the brim and things start to feel like they're overflowing and we're falling behind. One risk when we don't manage our perceived capacity level is increased stress, along with feeling chronically fatigued, which over time may result in **burnout**.

Timothy Brook, Gregory Blue and Jérôme Bourgon published *Death by a Thousand Cuts* in 1905. This book describes in vivid detail a tragic story about repeating what on the surface in isolation does minor

damage to the human body; however, when repeated over and over, destroys it.

Consider the title of this book in relation to this issue. On the surface, doing one more thing may not be a big deal. However, the accumulation of this activity over and over – when we're already feeling at capacity – can put our health and happiness at risk.

## **AWARENESS**

In our limited number of waking hours each day, we have a defined capacity for what we can achieve at home and at work. The first step is to evaluate how relevant this topic is for you. If you can relate to this concept and are experiencing the feeling of being pushed past your capacity daily, this micro skill may be something for you to consider. Improving your situation begins with an honest self-evaluation and deciding that you want to become better at managing your capacity level.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Each morning, you can think about how

much perceived capacity (belief of what you can cope with during a day) will be used by your day's plans (meetings and tasks on your daily calendar, deliverables at work, chores at home). If you say to yourself, "I'm going to work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., be with the kids from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., have some personal time after that to relax, and be in bed by 11 p.m.," this is setting your daily standard and expectations. When we don't follow our standard and start to add one more thing in each of the above activities, or feel like we have no choice, our perceived framework erodes, and we may feel like we're on a treadmill. Setting personal boundaries and sticking to them is one way to prevent the treadmill from speeding up.

### **ACTION**

Once you define your daily perceived capacity level, the next step is managing it. The following tips are meant to assist you.

**Determine your planned versus unplanned capacity** At the start of the day, take a mental inventory of the percentage of the day you have planned. It may be wise to plan for the unforeseen and build in some additional capacity. For example, Sam starts his day knowing he's at 90 per cent capacity. His schedule is full from the time he wakes to the end of the day; there's really no room left. Pushing ourselves at 100 per cent daily can be taxing, because that's all we have.

In contrast to Sam, Sally determines that she's at 60 per cent of her planned capacity, leaving 40 per cent unplanned. So, it's clear who has more capacity and would believe they could cope with more. Being aware of your capacity at the start of each day can help set your boundaries for the day, and let you know when you may need to say no to another task or activity. Learning to say no and explain why is not a sign of weakness. It can spark conversations to change priorities.

**Stop something if you want to add one more thing** When you believe you're at capacity and think it's indeed necessary to add one more thing, look for what you can stop doing to free up some capacity. Life is about choices. Ask if it really matters if you delay something for a day. This mindset can help you avoid feeling you're on a treadmill. Self-management takes focus and requires you to make yourself a priority.

**Monitor your daily capacity score** There may be days when you elect to push yourself and strain your capacity level to 95 per cent. However, if you rationalize and keep finding reasons why you need to push yourself beyond your capacity level, then you most likely will be back where you started. Logging your daily capacity score provides an objective record that can help you self-monitor. If you keep running at 100 per cent and are not sure what to do,

hiring a professional coach may help you develop some skills around daily goal setting, self-advocating personal boundaries, and taking personal accountability.



CHAPTER FOUR

# DECISIONS

# How to ensure you won't send an e-mail you'll regret

It's a vital skill to know when you need to self-edit your e-mails

**BILL HOWATT**

**H**ave you ever sent an e-mail in frustration that you later regretted?

E-mail is an easy way to create a commotion and say things you may not say in person. Why? When we e-mail, we don't have the person sitting or standing in front of us to filter out information or to hold us back. When we talk or confront someone in person, however, we can read their body language, go back in conversation to gain appreciation or perspective, and ask questions to fill in the blanks.

When we don't self-edit thoughts in our e-mails – like we do in person – we risk sending messages that we might later regret. Self-editing refers to filtering emotion out of our e-mail. When this isn't done, we risk sending messages that are emotionally charged. These can erode relationships and trust, fuel **unresolved conflict**, and misrepresent what we really mean.

The purpose of this micro skill is to introduce the notion of self-editing e-mail.

The average office employee gets **121 e-mails a day**, which equates to 605 each work week and 2,450 a month. E-mail has evolved from a communications tactic to

a communications staple. With the vast number of e-mails, it's little wonder that many people are feeling overwhelmed as they try to tame their e-mail inbox.

Some estimate that the average employee spends a **third of their time** processing e-mails at work, as well as time after work hours to keep up. This creates additional stress and strains on their emotional energy. When our resiliency and energy reserves are down we are more at risk to react emotionally.

## **AWARENESS**

If you have sent e-mails that you regret, then this micro skill will be a valuable skill to add to your toolbox.

Why people send unedited e-mails may be due to e-mail fatigue, personality type, lack of awareness that they're not filtering their conversation, or reacting to information. These are drivers that may spark an emotional e-mail response.

Awareness is the first step to curbing a behaviour. When we press send on an unfiltered e-mail we often have a sense of what we want to happen or stop. However, we

may not be fully aware of how our emotional state is shaping our words and how these words may be received, like we do when we speak in person. Remember, the person receiving your e-mail can only read your words, not the tone of voice in your head as you write them.

E-mail is an excellent way to communicate facts and ask for information; it's not the best method to communicate an emotional point of view or to further a debate.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

What we put in writing never goes away, and we own it. E-mail is forever. Expressing concerns without an emotional filter that's perceived as judgmental can result in unexpected consequences, such as damaging relationships or breaching a respectful workplace policy.

When we're upset it's common to want a resolution. That's why some people send an unedited response within a few moments of receiving a negative e-mail. Whenever you get information that's different from what you want and that creates an emotional response, this is a cue to allow yourself time for your emotions to calm down and your cognitive rational mind to catch up before responding.

### **ACTION**

Here are two simple self-editing rules that can reduce the risk for sending emotionally charged e-mails:

- E-mail is rarely the right medium to communicate emotions and concerns. Instead of sending an impulsive e-mail response, pause and give yourself a day, or even better an overnight, to gather your thoughts. Write out the two points you'd like to discuss or resolve, stick with the facts, and keep your emotions out of it. And then, instead of e-mailing, pick up the phone or meet with the person to discuss your points and get these resolved. If there are additional points, schedule another meeting to close out the conversation.
- If you elect to use e-mail, then use the 24-hour rule. Write your e-mail in bullet form and state your points in clear, simple form without emotion. Make it clear to the reader why you have a concern, what you'd like to see happen, and how you recommend the issue be resolved. Once the e-mail is written, put it in your draft folder. Leave it for the day and re-read it in the morning, editing it for emotion and judgment. Be clear on what you want. Trying to hurt someone or getting back at them uses negative energy, and in the end will hurt you as much or more than the other person. Self-editing is about sticking with the facts and getting results.



# A four-step plan to help you make hopeful decisions

The acronym HOPE stands for: healthy, optimistic, positive, experience and can help you make a plan that works

**BILL HOWATT**

**O**n a typical day, what do you hope for? Take today, for example. When you woke up, what did you hope would happen? We typically don't think about the day when asked this question; we tend to focus on a situation. For example, "I sent her a text and I hope she'll call me back today." Hope can be thought of as something passive. As a result, if she doesn't text back, this can result in negative emotions.

Researchers like Charles Richard Snyder studied how hope can have a positive impact on our overall health and happiness. Mr. Snyder suggested that hope can evolve when we have a plan in mind, are committed to it and execute the plan to achieve a goal. He and his colleagues defined hope as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)." This suggests that hope doesn't need to be passive; it's better to be active in creating hope.

The purpose of this micro skill is to introduce the acronym HOPE (healthy,

optimistic, positive, experience). This acronym can support our daily decision-making that promotes well-being.

We don't have to look at hope as being passive; we can turn it into action. We only need to take a moment to think about each situation and decision through the HOPE acronym. This can increase the likelihood that the choices we make are in our best interests over the short and long terms.

I once heard Anderson Cooper say "Hope is not a plan." What we do each day impacts and ultimately defines the level of hope we have.

## **AWARENESS**

Hope is a fuel that supports our day-to-day resiliency when we're faced with a setback. The degree of hope we have can influence our decisions. Whether we're faced with a small, medium or major setback, the degree of hope plays a role for seeing a path to get through it. Life happens, and we're often challenged to adapt and adjust to unplanned events. Add HOPE to your daily decision-making to ensure that you're making

decisions at a cognitive versus emotional level.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

The HOPE acronym can be especially helpful for unplanned events that drain our resiliency. HOPE evaluates whether our decisions have the potential to be good for our well-being. Each one of us is accountable for our own daily decisions that collectively determine our own overall happiness. We can have a positive impact on our hope by taking charge of what we think about and what we do.

### ACTION

To help protect ourselves from emotional decision-making, we need only follow a two- or three-step action plan, depending on whether we can do it alone or if we could benefit from support:

**Micro hope evaluation** Using a scale of 1 (not sure), 3 (sure), 5 (very sure), think about the choice you have and run it through the following four-item HOPE scale:

- 1. Healthy:** how confident are you that this is a healthy decision?
- 2. Optimistic:** how optimistic are you that this is your best possible decision?
- 3. Promising:** how sure are you that this decision will help your overall well-being?

**4. Experience:** how likely would you want this to become a daily habit for you?

**Conscious hope decision** For any choice that gets a score lower than 12, you should look for alternatives. The goal of HOPE is to guide you to make decisions that are positive for your well-being and to avoid making emotionally-driven decisions.

**Stuck** If you're stuck and not able to come up with a decision that's above a score of 12, this can be a sign that you're not hopeful or your resiliency is being challenged. This is an excellent time to give yourself permission to pause and consider the right kind of support that can help you make a healthy decision. Awareness is the first sign for determining things that are not as we like. We don't need to settle; we can often learn how to find more hope by engaging in conversations with people who have hope in our potential, such as a trusted peer, family member, coach or mental health professional.

# Tips to gain control of your daily decisions

Gain control of your decisions by thinking positively and taking ownership of the outcome

**BILL HOWATT**

**H**ow much do you feel in control of your daily outcomes?

Let's unpack this question. Control refers to your ability to steer, decide and define what choices you make. What you do defines your good or bad outcomes for the day.

Our mental health is influenced by our sense of control over our life outcomes. The more we believe our outcomes are based on our actions, the more control we believe we have over those outcomes.

This micro skill focuses on a concept known as locus of control, which defines how much control we have over our life.

## **AWARENESS**

When we have an internal locus of control (ILOC), we believe that we can influence events and their outcomes, and take responsibility for our decisions. When we have an external locus of control (ELOC), we typically blame our situation or events that happen on factors that we believe we can't control, such as the environment, other people or luck. Take a moment to

complete this [locus of control quick survey](#) to get your current baseline with respect to ILOC or ELOC.

Context is important when exploring locus of control. A golfer with an ILOC wouldn't golf in a lightning storm, but since they always have free choice they could choose to play in the storm, even though it may not make any sense. The people who aren't happy with their jobs or marriages and feel trapped could choose to leave or confront their issues. Sometimes it's not control that stops us from making a choice, it is fear around the potential consequences.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Life can be challenging, and one factor that impacts both ILOC and ELOC is [stability of control](#). A person with a stable ILOC who fails may believe it's due to their lack of ability, whereas someone with an unstable ELOC may believe it's due to bad luck. Objectively taking stock of both our locus of control and abilities can indicate where we can improve and set realistic

expectations.

For example, an amateur golfer with a high internal locus of control who doesn't make a professional tournament cut knows it's due to his or her level of ability, not bad luck. The more we can put our life into context of what we can control and take accountability for our abilities and decisions, the more likely we will know where we can improve to help us have more confidence in taking control of our present and future. The outcome can have a positive impact on our mental health outlook and on our life.

### **ACTION**

Locus of control is a skill that can be developed once people become aware of what it is, take accountability for their abilities, and make commitments to be more in control of their lives on a day-to-day basis. I refer to ILOC as a developmental coping skill that can be taught and mastered. Like your ABCs, once you develop this skill, you will have it and can choose to use it.

### **DEVELOPING ILOC:**

**Self-talk:** Pay attention to your self-talk. What we say to ourselves over and over is what we typically believe. When you feel you're not in control, evaluate the context of the situation. Practise being honest with yourself about what you can and cannot do or change.

**Set one goal daily:** The practice of setting a goal daily and finishing it is excellent for

developing ILOC. The goal doesn't need to be big; it can be a simple nutritional decision like picking to drink water instead of a sugary soda.

**Think in terms of success:** Define in writing who you want to be over the next two weeks and make one decision that gets you on that track. Track the number decisions you make that shine a light on how your daily choices impact your sense of control. Smile: It takes just seconds to smile at a person you pass daily. Notice when you smile that the majority of people smile back. Because you choose to smile, you influence another person to smile back. Well-being is the result of many little decisions taken over a period that become habit-forming and are within our control.

**Stand:** Many of us are over-committed and struggle to keep up. But when we're asked to do one more thing, we haven't learned how to say no and explain why we need to say no. Evaluate whether you could benefit from declining and saying why. This can result in your dropping something so you can focus on something you desire to accomplish. You will feel more in control of your time with less stress.

# How to stick with a decision to change

By creating a plan, you can give yourself the reasons to stay on the path to make changes

**BILL HOWATT**

**H**ow often do you struggle with self-control?

To provide more context, consider your food choices at meal time. A motivated person who is aiming to eat better could set the rational goal to increase daily fruit and vegetable intake and cut out unhealthy calories.

On the surface, this is a rational decision. So then why do so many people fail to follow through? Some may believe the reason is a gap in self-control. There's a school of thought that suggests human beings are more likely to make an irrational rather than a rational decision.

The science of **behavioural economics** suggests that most people in the moment of making behavioural choices don't weigh the costs or calculate the benefits of their decisions. Many focus on immediate happiness (such as what will make them feel good now), regardless of the long-term impact (such as overeating and weight gain).

This model applies to choices that impact many elements of life, including finances, relationships, jobs, mental and physical

health.

This micro skill provides a framework for how to make better daily decisions using some lessons from behavioural economics. One way to use this micro skill is to make better daily dietary decisions rather than picking unhealthy default options (such as choosing a salad instead of fries, water versus soda, fruit versus cake or other sweets) that aren't good for our long-term health.

## **AWARENESS**

Through a behavioural-economic lens, many people are prone to making errors in judgment that bias their decision-making. It's also common to omit information. Often, a poor choice doesn't have immediate consequences, but can have long-term effects. For example, one pound equals 3,500 calories, so if you slip on your calorie intake each week by 1,000 calories, over six months you'll gain nearly seven pounds.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Making a less-effective nutrition choice increases the likelihood of chronic **health**

risk (for example, preventable diseases, obesity, Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease).

When it comes to making decisions, we're more likely to opt into a healthy future choice than partake in one today. Deciding to make healthy choices begins with being accountable and wanting to enjoy both today and our future to their full potential. One common behavioural change challenge is understanding and accepting that positive gains or gratification are often delayed, as well as losses.

### ACTION

Pick one behaviour you want to change.

### BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE PROGRAM

For this program to work you need to be motivated and ready to make the desired change. The goal is to increase the likelihood that your decision will be made rationally rather than irrationally.

Write out your desired behavioural change: For example, "I want my daily calorie intake to be between 2,000 and 2,200 calories. I want to consume foods such as fruits, vegetables and proteins that promote health."

Build a daily decision tree programming card that you'll keep with you at all times and read every morning, at noon and before you go to bed. Respond to each of the following statements in fewer than 30 words to create your program.

### MY DAILY DECISION CARD

- 1. Define the risk for not changing.** "Not eating healthy foods increases my risk for cancer, heart disease, diabetes and negatively impacts my mental energy."
- 2. Define the impact on your health.** "Eating the correct daily calorie intake with the right foods will help me achieve and maintain my health and body weight goals."
- 3. Define the benefits.** "By making good daily decisions with respect to my diet, I'll increase my energy and self-confidence, and maintain my ideal weight."
- 4. Define the barriers.** "Time to prepare healthy meal choices. I'll create my daily diet plan to make my meal decisions for the day."
- 5. Define cues to action.** "Before each meal I'll visualize that if I eat this healthy meal, it supports my health goals. I want my daily meal decisions to be good for me now and in my future."

### PROGRAM SUCCESS FACTORS

To increase the likelihood that your behavioural change program will become your automatic daily opt-in option:

- Understand the importance of keeping things simple. Use your daily cue card as

a guide so that you don't have to process or think about what you're going to do each day. You have already created your daily options.

- Commit to learn about the area you want to improve. Continuous learning reinforces and expands our knowledge base.
- Be clear on what's in it for you. Remind yourself daily why you're acting for benefits now and for tomorrow.
- Use a daily journal or checklist to log your progress toward your goals. Understand that this isn't about being perfect. One day doesn't define you; a pattern of days does.

# How to map out your personal game plan

Take a look back at last year, give it a grade and then set up a plan of action for the changes you want to make this year

**BILL HOWATT**

**W**hat's your personal game plan for this new year?

A personal game plan refers to the decisions we make at the start of each year to achieve a desired outcome before the year ends.

The start of each new year provides a window of opportunity to think about what we want to have accomplished within the next 12 months. Each new year can be thought of as being pure and filled with hope.

This micro skill assists in mapping your game plan for the next 12 months.

## **AWARENESS**

Before making any decisions, take a moment to pause and reflect on the past 12 months. For each of the five areas of money, career, relationships, mental health and physical health, answer the following questions:

- Why was this area good or bad for me? Be specific.

- What worked well for me in this area?
- What would I like to change in this area?
- How would making the above changes improve my overall fulfillment and happiness?

Now give the past year a grade from A+ to F.

The wonderful thing about a new year is that it's a blank slate. Regardless of the grade you gave last year, consider three things you would like to accomplish over the next 12 months. There likely are more than three things, but for this micro skill pick the three biggest rocks you'd like to move or maintain.

As an example, Kelly wants: 1) Financial – get my credit card paid off and maintain a zero balance; 2) Relationship – finalize whether my personal relationship with my girlfriend is going to advance to the next stage, or reframe my expectations and move on; 3) Health – maintain my current fitness level, complete three 10-kilometre



runs this year.

By picking just three key things he wants to impact, Kelly can evaluate them clearly at the end of the year. He can always add more goals if he chooses, but if he achieves these three he will have accomplished something he can be proud of.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Our environment plays a role in influencing our personal thinking and behaviour. Many kinds of environmental factors can impact us positively and negatively, such as work, work peers, friends, politics, partnerships, family and community.

When mapping a path for the new year, it's helpful to consider the different kinds of environmental supports and drains we have. Sometimes a goal will be to move away from some environmental factors.

Ultimately, when mapping your three goals, it's important to pick ones that you directly control. Leaving personal fulfillment to chance and solely dependent on the environment can lead to a sense of disappointment and a feeling of powerlessness.

Be accountable for what you want and then do what's needed. As a general guideline, it's best for all when we set positive goals that don't intentionally hurt others.

### ACTION

This micro skill's success requires taking ideas and putting them into concrete actions designed to achieve goals. For each

goal, be clear on its intrinsic benefits as well as what motivates you to achieve it.

**Readiness** To achieve a goal, ensure you have the knowledge and skills to proceed. If you don't, this would be the first step.

**Priority** The top three goals need to be priorities, to reduce the risk that they will get bumped. Priority-setting is critical for success, as it can be easy to ignore a task today and make the excuse that it will be done in the future, thus diminishing its importance.

**Schedule** Once a goal has been made a priority, it's necessary to schedule the specific time when you'll work on it and when you'll have it completed.

**Success** Be crystal clear on what success looks like, so there's no ambiguity, and you can celebrate it.

**Steps** What are the tasks you'll need to do to achieve your goal? It's common for tasks to be repeated over and over, such as lifestyle habits. Daily measuring and **journalling** provide a feedback loop that can assist in maintaining focus.

**Repeat** Repeating this three-goal step each year frames your desired goals, and provides steps for success and an annual grade.



CHAPTER FIVE

BUSINESS  
HEALTH

# How any business can improve employee mental health

There are programs any sized organization can follow in order to help address mental health issues at work

**BILL HOWATT AND LOUISE BRADLEY**

Can a business of any size, in any sector, leverage the National Standard of Canada of Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard) to protect and promote employee mental health?

Both the short and long answer to this question is “yes.” Of course, every organization will use it differently. A three-year [Case Study Research Project](#) undertaken by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) released findings in March, 2017, which point to the Standard’s adaptability among 40 Canadian organizations of diverse sizes and sectors.

It was found that the Standard could be equally applied by multinational corporations like Bell Canada, and by small organizations with fewer than 10 employees. And while the Standard is designed to be flexible enough to meet the needs of all businesses, the Case Study clearly identified best practices around effectively leveraging the Standard.

This article examines some of those best practices.

## **AWARENESS**

The Standard is not a prescriptive and unbending framework. Rather it’s a set of tools and resources that can be tailored to the specific needs of your organization. The concept of the Standard will likely be familiar to those who have previously implemented the Deming Cycle, otherwise known as Plan-Do-Check-Act. In short, the Standard is a form of management methodology that allows organizations to continuously improve processes. This is especially relevant when referring to building psychologically healthy workplaces, because there is no “finish line.”

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

It’s not surprising that employees perform well when their psychological health is optimized. Psychological health at work involves identifying risks and hazards that may impact the mental health of employees and proactively working to mitigate or eliminate the impact of such hazards. Just as an employer that allows window-washers to ascend 15 stories high without safety

equipment would be deemed irresponsible and legally liable in the case of an accident, we are starting to recognize that bullying, harassment and poor management practices are psychological hazards an employer has a responsibility to mitigate.

In a recent case in [Prince Edward Island](#), a widow was awarded damages after her husband's fatal heart attack was tied to workplace stress and bullying. This sets a new benchmark for employer responsibility when it comes to taking steps to address workplace mental health.

The results of the Case Study tell a story of common efforts taken across these 40 organizations, which have resulted in 72 per cent compliance with the Standard after only three years.

## ACTION

The following actions have translated to measureable success in implementation of the Standard among the Case Study Participants:

### 1. Plan. Assess your work environment.

Use available data sources to tell the story of your workplace environment's psychological safety hazards and risks. Among Case Study organizations, the top three data sources mined for information included the use of employee assistance programs, return to work and accommodation data and long- and short-term disability. Other sources of valuable information include incident reports, and psychological

health risk assessments, like Morneau Shepell's [Total Health Index \(THI\)](#), the [Guarding Minds @ Work](#) employee survey by the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, which is sensitive to relevant psychosocial risk factors, and the [13 PHS factors on-line resource published on-line](#) by The Globe and Mail.

### 2. Do. Take action and build awareness.

Over the course of the three year evaluation, 78 per cent of organizations implemented respectful workplace policies and educated their employees about them; 70 per cent of organizations provided employee assistance programs and services; and 66 per cent worked to enhance mental health knowledge and awareness among employees. Other important actions included training managers to identify and intervene when an employee may be showing signs of a mental health problem or illness and supporting stay-at-work programs that provide continuing support for employees with psychological health issues.

### 3. Check. Measure the impact.

It's critical to measure the effect of implementing the Standard. And the Case Study tells us that this was the most challenging component across organizations.

## TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTING A TARGETED EVALUATION STRATEGY INCLUDE:

1. Determine at the start what is going to

be measured, and how frequently.

2. Identify new and existing indicators specific to psychological health and safety.

3. Match preventative interventions, like resilience training, with early indicators, such as improved attendance or decreased short-term disability claims. Conversely, match reactive interventions, like disability management programs, with the right key performance indicators, like average case duration until return to work.

4. When considering the design of your strategy, ensure your organization determines the key performance it will use to measure success and has the ability to access the data for analysis. In short, the personnel responsible for evaluation must have access to information across the organization and be able to compare with previous years and among similar sectors.

#### **4. Act. Find ways to make improvements.**

The Standard is based on continuous improvement. Effective evaluation will allow your organization to measure change with respect to the programs in place and address priorities identified in the planning process. These efforts will drive further planning, implementation and change.

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# A step by step plan to improve workplace mental health

Companies can save on health costs by addressing workplace mental health issues

BILL HOWATT AND LOUISE BRADLEY

**T**hirteen psychological health and safety factors underpin the National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, a voluntary set of guidelines, tools and resources to promote employee mental health and prevent psychological harm at work. While the 13 factors are optional to implementing the Standard, they offer a valuable roadmap.

Addressing the 13 factors may seem daunting, but it doesn't need to be.

Certainly, it's a worthwhile endeavour considering that businesses that adopt policies and programs to address psychological health and safety incur between 15 to 33 per cent fewer costs related to psychological health issues.

This article examines how to tackle the 13 factors systematically, one bite at a time.

**READ  
MORE**

How any business can improve employee mental health

## AWARENESS

The 13 factors are grounded in a large body

of research on psychological and social risk. Many are interrelated and influence one another.

Some factors are tied to how work is carried out rather than to the nature of the work itself. Is the workload reasonable? Are deadlines realistic? Do employees have sufficient control over their work?

Other factors are anchored in the context in which work occurs and can mitigate risks like heavy workloads. Are your employees supported by their leadership with advice, direction and planning? Do they have the information, practical resources and training they need to succeed? More broadly, are your policies and practices fair? Do they support psychological health and safety?

Most organizations already have a solid foundation in place. Your organization likely has adopted important elements, such as an employee assistance program or anti-harassment policies. But the key is to resist one-off action in favour of a holistic and systematic plan that tackles

all 13 factors in order of priority.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

In addition to the health and business case for addressing psychological health and safety in the workplace, there is also a legal argument.

Ten years ago, typically only egregious acts of harassment and bullying resulting in catastrophic psychological harm could give rise to legal actions for mental injury. Now even the negligent and chronic infliction of excessive work demands can be the subject of such claims under certain conditions. In his discussion paper, [Tracking the Perfect Legal Storm](#), Martin Shain outlines the seven major trends in the law.

And while employee participation in psychological safety is vital, it is the employer who is ultimately accountable for monitoring and creating a work environment that supports employee mental health. People who are typically mentally healthy and resilient can be brought to the brink of mental distress – and sometimes pushed over – by work conditions over which employers have significant control and employees have little influence. Employees who have physical or mental health conditions are also due protection.

### ACTION

Any organization can use the 13 factors to build a mental health action plan.

## 1. Create an action plan founded on the 13 factors.

**a. Take a temperature check.** The six-question [Guarding Minds @ Work initial scan](#) scores how your employees perceive their basic work conditions in terms of demand, control, effort and reward. This is often enough to identify high, medium and low risk zones in your workplace. The role of perceived fairness and supervisor support as mitigating factors to employee satisfaction or stress is also measured.

**b. Delve deeper.** Validate these initial findings and pinpoint more precise areas for action through interviews, feedback/focus groups or assessment tools like the [Morneau Shepell Total Health Index](#) or the [Guarding Minds @ Work Employee Survey](#), both aligned with the 13 factors. The Guarding Minds survey report assembles a complete profile of your organization, ranking each factor as a significant, moderate or minimal concern or a relative strength.

**c. Rank your priorities.** Begin with areas of significant concern. Remember, not all factors are created equal – [psychological protection](#) and psychological support should be a priority within each category of concern. Pay particular attention to discrimination, harassment and unfair treatment due to mental illness. Reflect

on what's happening in your organization. If there's a change in leadership, consider prioritizing the [clear leadership and expectations factor](#). Or maybe another has a disproportionate effect on your organization's finances.

**d. Execute your plan in small bites.**

Tackle one factor at a time and limit your actions to three per factor. This will focus your efforts and increase the prospect of success. [The Guarding Minds @ Work suggested responses](#) web resource includes a quality framework to help organizations weigh the benefits, risks and anticipated difficulties of actions. This resource also offers a menu of possible evidence-based actions.

**2. Engage employees.**

Educate, communicate and actively engage employees of all levels on the 13 factors. [Short whiteboard animation videos](#) developed by Ottawa Public Health and the Mental Health Commission of Canada, help stimulate small group discussions on how both the organization and the individual can address the 13 factors. The video series is especially useful to organizations with limited resources, and are accompanied by a detailed guide to facilitate conversations.

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# Should my company hire someone to implement a mental health strategy?

There are key questions to ask before you hire, and there are many free resources to help you out

**BILL HOWATT AND LOUISE BRADLEY**

**H**ow does my organization develop and implement a mental health strategy?

This is a common question among organizations of all sizes. They want to proceed, but they don't know where – or how – to start.

Often, leaders will look to external resources. Awareness about mental health has spurred the creation of a number of programs and tools, some are free while others require companies to pay.

This article offers decision makers factors to consider before hiring an external resource to develop a mental health strategy.

## **AWARENESS**

In the last five years in Canada, the mental health conversation has become a much more positive dialogue. Many organizations and senior leaders are fostering a supportive culture by bringing this awareness into the workplace.

Demand is on the rise for new tools and resources, and for professionals specialized

in improving workplace culture to curb mental health problems and promote mental wellness.

Consider that in one-on-one mental health therapy, practitioners must have a minimum of a master's degree, a professional designation and malpractice insurance before a client can walk through the door. By contrast, the mental health consulting space is not regulated, therefore the onus of due diligence rests with the hiring organization. Why? Put simply, anyone can create a product or solution and hang out their shingle as a “workplace mental health expert.” Given that there is no regulatory body, when seeking out an external resource, buyer beware.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

The person responsible for hiring an external resource is accountable for the selection. A set of criteria should be established to determine why a particular resource is competent and qualified.

If an organization's first experience with a mental health strategy development is onerous or ineffective, that negative impression can make it harder to try again.

When planning to allocate resources, consider how the organization will measure results and financial impact for every dollar spent on promotion, prevention and intervention. It is far easier to create a program evaluation methodology before starting than it is after the fact. Adhering to a disciplined approach will strengthen an ongoing business case.

### ACTION

This advice can be used to establish a hiring decision tree:

**1. Use trusted, free public domain resources.** The resources listed below can help shape and support a mental health strategy. Open communication and education can help decrease stigma. Frank dialogue can help employees understand they “own” their personal mental health and explain the tangible actions they can take to support their mental wellness in the workplace:

a. The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) has created a library of [free resources](#), videos and guides to support employers interested in exploring how to adopt the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard).

b. [Guarding Minds @ Work](#), an initiative undertaken by the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction at Simon Fraser University, includes tools to support implementation of the Standard and how to measure the 13 psychosocial factors known to have a powerful impact on organizational health.

c. [The Globe and Mail Your Life at Work Survey](#) lets employees self-evaluate their coping skills and provides articles on improving those skills.

d. The Globe and Mail and Morneau Shepell [Employee Recommended Workplace Award](#) provides an approach for preventing and supporting employee with mental health problems and illnesses. This award provides both the employer and employees the opportunity to obtain their total health baseline (examining the pillars of physical, mental, work, and life health) and offers access to free articles on coping skills and other tools. This can help start the conversation around two-way accountability – in other words how both employer and employee can promote and achieve total health.

### 2. Do your due diligence:

a. Set realistic expectations for what you want before starting your process – This can be used in your evaluation and how you will measure success.

One coping skills program was offered to 1,000 employees. A self-evaluation activity revealed that 15 per cent of employees wanted to participate in an online program and 110 employees (11 per cent) completed the three-month program and provided feedback to help curb absenteeism, presenteeism and short-term disability losses. But this alone does not mean success. Program impact requires evaluating outcomes of the people who started the program against those who didn't complete it, to determine whether the program had any measurable, incremental positive impact.

b. Do your homework before making a buying decision – Review any relevant case studies, white papers, marketing materials, presentations, testimonials, and how the product or service evaluates success.

A credible program or provider can teach their theory and demonstrate their credibility in a simple conversation. They can explain why their offering works, what it is, and how it will be implemented and measured.

c. Define hiring criteria – When hiring a service, set your professional expectations around standards to support employees' mental health.

Saying one knows how to fix a car is easy, but without expertise and training, the car

may never start. A service with evidence-based results will enable consultants to explain how their personal and professional credentials make them qualified to support employees' mental health in the relevant application, such as strategy, prevention, early intervention and treatment.

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# Calculating the business cost of ignoring mental health

Making a case for spending on mental health means looking at the cost of illness

BILL HOWATT AND LOUISE BRADLEY

**D**o you need your people to make your business a success?

While the answer is as simple as, “Yes, of course,” the reality is far more complicated. People are not machines. Without proper support, they may not perform to their full potential, or may even break down.

Whether your organization is small, medium or large, building a business case for investing in employee mental health starts with marshalling the financial facts. It means obtaining senior leadership support to invest, develop and implement a **mental health strategy**.

## **AWARENESS**

Every employee has an assigned job function. Key performance behaviours (KPBs), are the behaviours required for employees to be successful in their assigned functions. These include coping and resiliency, which affect an employees’ health, engagement and productivity. In short, KPBs influence what employees think and how they do their work. An organization’s success is dependent on the aggregate of those factors.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

If employers want to optimize their work force productivity and performance, they should promote mental health and wellness and build resiliency among employees. However, simply telling senior leaders that investing in mental health is **good business** may not be enough. Building a mental health business case involves providing the financial facts specific to their organization.

## **ACTION**

Get the facts.

### **Identify your key people performance**

**indicators** These are the metrics that are directly linked to your organization’s strategic objectives and results, such as the targeted number of sick days per employee per year. Whatever key metrics you select, it’s important to understand the why and the risk when they’re not achieved.

**Determine sick time costs** Establish the average employee’s sick day cost and factor in any additional expenses for replacement staff.

- Multiply the average number of sick days by the total number of full-time equivalent employees to get the total number of days lost to illness, both mental and physical.
- Multiply this total by the average sick day cost to determine the total sick time cost to your organization.
- Beyond sick days, tabulate your total disability costs by adding the days lost over the past 12 months due to short- and long-term disability and workers' compensation claims related to mental health issues. Add this number with the sick day costs, to get the total disability cost, not including administration and management expenditures.

**Explore opportunity risks** In addition to absenteeism losses, **presenteeism** is a big driver of mental health costs and equates to 7.5 times the number of days absent.

**Clarify your cost of doing nothing** In addition to the above, other **tangible costs** such as medication and insurance premiums, along with intangible costs such as unresolved conflict and management time, can be calculated. The more facts you have, the stronger you can make your business case against maintaining the status quo.

**Calculate your current spending on employee mental health supports** Look

beyond the typical eight to 10 per cent of payroll spent on employee benefits. Rather, determine how much your organization spends per full-time equivalent worker on prevention and in employee mental health supports. This includes all programming such as manager and employee training as well as employee and family assistance programs.

**Demonstrate contrast** When presenting your business case, paint a simple picture of current risk factors and costs for each key people performance indicator. Take for example, a fictitious organization of 1,000 employees with an average of **eight** sick days per full-time equivalent employee:

- The average number of eight sick days per year is at a cost of \$200 per day/per employee, which equals \$1.6-million
- When you look at absenteeism and presenteeism together the total loss is much greater and equals \$13.6-million [8,000 sick days plus 60,000 presenteeism days) times \$200]
- Over five years, this is trending to be just under \$70-million in losses, not including other **direct and indirect costs**.

**Write out your mental health business case** Once you have all your facts and are ready to present the financial baseline and metrics of your business case, focus

on contrasting current program spending against the risks of not acting, extrapolating this to year-over-year trends.

- Present the current risk, financial facts, metrics and program spending in a clear and simple way.
- Establish goals and targets and degree of improvement (for example, a five-percent decrease in short-term disability cases).
- Give a clear set of actionable recommendations. For example, adopt the Mental Health Commission of Canada's [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#), or develop a [mental health strategy](#), proposed budget and targeted value of investment.

A successful business case will gain senior leadership approval to act, with limits and direction around financial support. It will also educate your leadership regarding what mental health is and its impact on the work force and the business.

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# Why you need a mental health leader

Without leadership from the top, making changes to support mental health is a challenge

**BILL HOWATT AND LOUISE BRADLEY**

**W**hile everyone has a role to play in building a psychologically healthy workplace culture, the role of senior leadership within an organization cannot be overstated.

Ultimately, the sustainability, efficiency, risk management and productivity of an organization rest with senior leaders. Investing in the promotion of mental wellness and the prevention of mental illness has been shown to contribute to effective cost management of absenteeism, grievances, disability, re-training and turnover. Not to mention improved productivity, retention, recruitment and engagement.

This article examines how senior leaders can best leverage their influence to create a thriving, psychologically healthy workplace culture, using best practices gleaned from organizations implementing the National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.

## **AWARENESS**

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) recently released findings of its

three-year case study project, which followed 40 Canadian organizations as they implemented the Standard.

Given that management and leadership support is among the 13 psychosocial factors that can positively influence employee mental health, it isn't surprising that the MHCC case study found engaged and effective leadership to be among the most important best practices among organizations implementing the Standard.

Awareness for senior leaders starts with becoming educated on the difference between mental health and mental illness, and understanding why focusing on the promotion of mental health and the prevention of mental illness is good business practice. By doing so, they will be more committed and engaged in leading the mental health conversation.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

The first element of adopting the Standard requires the creation of a Psychological Health and Safety Management System (PHSMS) with five key elements:

commitment; leadership and participation; planning; implementation, evaluation and corrective action; and management review. Given that resources must be allocated to the PHSMS, leadership buy-in is crucial from the outset. Similarly, leaders must commit to following progress and results. For example, a CEO regularly asking questions can help ensure senior leaders and middle managers are giving mental health the attention required.

The case study found that just as leadership support is essential to success, its absence is a hindrance. Further, it is equally difficult to secure the allocation of resources when senior leaders are distracted or ambivalent.

Effective leadership requires more than incidental and overt endorsement. Engagement, monitoring and accountability are hallmarks of the leaders of those organizations making the greatest strides.

## **ACTION**

As a dearth of leadership support was identified as a barrier to implementation of the Standard, there are key actions senior leaders can take to make workplace mental health a priority.

### **1. Be a champion, or delegate one.**

Whether it's a member of the senior executive, or an individual empowered to act on their behalf, organizations making the most progress have a champion who participates in meetings, events

and training programs. This person is then able to inform and influence senior leaders.

**2. Communicate.** Employees must understand that mental health and wellness is tied to the overarching purpose, goals, visions and values of the organization. This message is most effective when communicated by a senior leader.

**3. Allocate resources.** To be effectively implemented, the Standard requires an investment of time and resources. Senior leaders are in the best position to create a dedicated position, specify a budget and establish a standing committee responsible for mental health and wellness. Time and funds must be set aside, and senior leaders have a key role to play in monitoring implementation workload, progress and concerns.

### **4. Be a transformational leader.**

Transformational leadership provides a new vision and has a positive impact in specific ways:

a. A transformational leader is seen as a role model who doesn't just "talk the talk," but lives by it as well. An example given by one organization is a CEO who blogged about his personal experiences with mental illness, opening the door for conversations across the organization.



b. Transformational leadership challenges others to generate ideas. This was born out in one case study organization, where every employee was invited to a daily or weekly huddle, often attended by senior leadership. The result is an enriched understanding by senior leaders about employees' daily demands, and helps to shape the allocation of resources and set priority areas.

c. A transformational leader has the ability to inspire others. In some cases it's as simple as employees feeling empowered because they know mental health is a priority of the CEO, and they therefore feel "protected" or "validated."

d. Genuine concern for the needs of employees is a hallmark of transformational leadership. One case study organization had a CEO with an open door policy, so people felt empowered to raise issues and were comfortable in the knowledge that their concerns wouldn't just be heard, but also acted upon.

e. The degree to which employees trust their senior leaders will ultimately determine what they will believe. Some employees are naturally skeptical, and will require senior leaders to consistently and frequently communicate their commitment to mental health in both words, and deeds.

*Bill Howatt is the chief research and development officer of work force productivity with Morneau Shepell in Toronto.*

*Louise Bradley is CEO and President of the Mental Health Commission of Canada.*

# Halting bullies key to a respectful workplace

Managers need to know how to respond and employees need to feel safe to get help when bullies act

**BILL HOWATT**

**H**ave you ever felt you have been **bullied** or harassed at work? Have you observed a colleague being bullied or harassed?

Many organizations are starting to understand the link between a respectful workplace and employees' mental health. In Canada, employee absence due to bullying and harassment is estimated to cost \$12-billion per year, according to Statistics Canada.

One **study** suggested that 35 per cent of employees said they have been bullied at work and 17 per cent quit their jobs because of bullying. Another **study** suggested that 15 per cent have witnessed bullying, and **45 per cent** of people bullied suffer from stress-related problems.

In 2014, The Globe and Howatt HR launched the **Your Life at Work Survey** that's still online today and is a tool that helps to measure individuals' quality of work life. In support of the study, we ran articles on topics such as **respectful workplace and bullying** and how that impacts an employee's mental health. We included

a short risk survey on this topic.

For the bullying survey there were 821 participants. Here are some findings from this survey:

- The average score was 23, which falls in the Moderate Risk category. At this level, it's suggested to act immediately to better understand your rights as an employee, and to find a safe support system to make an action plan to deal with current risks at your workplace.
- Thirty-eight per cent of respondents fell in the Red Zone, which was high risk; 31 per cent in the Moderate Risk category; 20 per cent were in the Low Risk category; and 12 per cent of respondents said bullying was not an issue for them. The purpose was to indicate to participants their current degree of risk and to provide recommendations for action.
- Each of the 15 survey items had four possible responses: Not at all; It happened

once; It has happened and it hurt; and It often feels like this is my daily reality.

The top three items with the highest risk scores were: “I have had at least one person at work trying to sabotage me;” “I believe I have been bullied by one or more peers;” and “I have spent energy to avoid one person out of fear.”

This survey is meant to educate on the degree of risk from overt and covert bullying. It doesn't measure the risk of other types of bullying, such as via online and e-mail, which can be just as negative.

### AWARENESS

With advances in legislation such as Ontario's [Bill 168](#) that focuses on bullying and [Bill 132](#) that addresses sexual violence and organizational policies, every employee and employer – regardless of size, sector and industry – is advised to know what constitutes bullying and harassment. This can help create the degree of civility that prevents a [toxic workplace](#) that breeds unacceptable social standards and behaviours that can damage employees' psychological health.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Experiencing or observing bullying or harassment can be damaging to a person's mental health, and is not to be taken lightly by a victim or an employer. Stopping bullying and harassment requires employees and employers to work together to enforce a no-tolerance policy. Only through a

two-way accountability system can a culture achieve its full potential to be a psychologically safe workplace.

### ACTION

Victims of bullying need to have the knowledge and skills to cope with bullying and to advocate for themselves in order to prevail. Employers must consider a respectful workplace as a core day-to-day objective and be committed to enforcing policies, procedures, and promoting effective, respectful workplace training and leaders' training to prevent, confront and discipline bullies and harassers.

### EMPLOYEE COACHING FOR INCREASING SELF-ADVOCACY:

- Learn the different types of bullying and harassment, to prevent rationalizing inappropriate behaviour as being okay. Take your respectful workplace training seriously and understand your organization's procedures for finding a resolution. Some employees are not aware how some forms of overt or covert behaviours are not appropriate in the workplace and will not be tolerated. Complete the [bullying quick survey](#) that demonstrates some of these.
- Be prepared. Every employee's and leader's role is to stop unwanted and inappropriate behaviour to themselves and others. Being prepared and having a support

system ready in case you observe or are a victim of bullying or harassment can give you confidence to go through the process required to confront an offender. As well, it can be helpful to understand how a company's employee and family assistance programs can support employees' mental health through the entire reporting and resolution process.

#### EMPLOYER COACHING FOR CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE WORKPLACE:

- Evaluate the impact of respectful workplace training on employees' ability to self-advocate. Don't assume that having a policy is enough. Respectful workplace training is critical for teaching the different types of bullying and harassment that can happen in the workplace. Survey employees using a formal survey and focus groups to discover and understand employees' confidence to confront bullying and harassment, and the degree they trust that their employer cares about their psychological and physical health and safety.
- Provide all leaders with the training they need to confront bullies and harassers who are on the fringe of or are actively bullying or harassing an employee. The end goal is to ensure that every leader has the knowledge, skills and a **plan** to confront at-risk behaviours. Leaders can leverage EFAP managers and support

lines to get coaching on how to deal with a situation of bullying or harassment in the workplace.

*Bill Howatt is the chief research and development officer of work force productivity with Morneau Shepell in Toronto*

# Discover the link between productivity and resilience

Leadership can help their employees be more resilient

**BILL HOWATT**

**D**oes your organization's success really depend on its people?

If the answer is truly yes – than leaders need to ask themselves this: what is your organization actively doing to protect your work force's physical and psychological health? And are you reaching every employee?

Here's an example of why companies need to pay attention to the resilience of their work force.

Consider the following example. Company ABC has 1,000 employees it expects will come to work every day to do their best work, and, when asked, the company's leadership felt that it would be pleased with employees doing their best work 80 per cent of the time they are on the job.

But stop and think for a moment what that means. That can be translated into meaning that there is one full day each week where employees are not really working.

Many employees come to work feeling unwell either physically or mentally and then are unable to perform at their highest

level. This presenteeism – being at work but not able to perform well – can have a major impact on a company's productivity.

Company ABC may be lucky on any given day to have 800 employees actively engaged and contributing to the top and bottom line. This loss of productivity costs and can be what makes company leadership highly motivated to figure out how to help their staff become a more resilient work force in order to increase productivity and cut lost time costs, which includes sick days, short-term disability, long-term disability and Worker's Compensation Board claims.

The first step for leaders is to understand what resiliency is, and the key differences between **resiliency** and **coping skills**. Leaders also need to know what the link is between resiliency and health, engagement and productivity as well learn about practical steps the company can take that can positively impact employees' resiliency.

Resiliency is how you are able to manage your daily energy reserves amid the various stressors that affect you while at work or on the home front. It's the ability to know

when you need to stop and boost your reserves so you can stay in control, push through setbacks toward a solution. The fuel that recharges resiliency levels comes from mental and physical health, work and life (family, social supports, physical fitness, financial health, among others).

Coping skills are the skills you have at your immediate disposal to solve problems and make decisions under pressure.

A resilient work force is developed through a two-way accountability framework – there are things that both employees and employers must own and do. A work force will flourish when all employees and the employer are working in a partnership with a common goal and both are motivated to take responsibility for what they can control.

Resiliency is not a skill that employees are born with. But it is a skillset that can be taught that is primarily influenced by behavioural choices. Resiliency can help employees keep up with the daily demands put on them both at home and at work. There is no guarantee a resilient employee may not breakdown or have a mental health issue, it is more of an insurance policy to help mitigate risk.

Consider resiliency as an outcome of some action like charging your cell phone. The more energy and time put into charging the phone, the longer it can last and persevere.

The resiliency of a work force will depend on how actively involved each employee

and the employer are with their intentions to promote total health every day in both big and small ways.

### TOTAL HEALTH IS DEFINED BY FOUR PILLARS:

**Physical:** physical activity, nutrition, sleep, risk factors such as smoking;

**Mental:** general mental health, burnout risk, coping skills;

**Work:** psychological and physical safety, workplace experience, leadership;

**Life:** financial, relationships and work-life balance or blending.

### WHAT LEADERS CAN DO:

- Engage all employees in the conversation on resiliency and total health by providing employees the opportunity to complete a **total health assessment**. One of the biggest barriers to promoting total health is a lack of awareness on both the employee and employer part with respect to how total health is impacting the workforce's health, engagement and productivity.
- Support employees who have gaps in resiliency and **coping skills** to give them opportunities to develop these skills.

- Become knowledgeable on the **cost of doing nothing** and how resiliency can positively impact work force productivity.
- Align total health strategy and programs to create an evidence-based framework

that measures program impact and links total health resiliency initiatives to financial results.



# How to engage the introverts and extroverts at your workplace

Workplaces are designed for extroverts, so it's important to ensure introverts aren't left behind

**BILL HOWATT**

**A**re you an extrovert or introvert, and how does this impact you in the workplace?

Extroverts thrive on stimuli, as this is how they stay charged, where introverts gain energy through solitude and quiet.

It really doesn't matter what you are as much as that you're aware of your preferred trait and how it influences your behaviour in the workplace.

**Susan Cain**, author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, reports that introverts make up one-third of the work force. She explains that introverts like Gandhi have made significant contributions to society, but a barrier for introverts today is that the work world has been designed for extroverts. As a result, many introverts don't reach their full potential. That's a loss for both the individuals and their organizations.

The workplace has created a bias for extroverts to thrive because of the high emphasis put on constant collaboration, team meetings, planning meetings and constant communications. One [study](#) found that 96

per cent of managers are extroverts, and 65 per cent of senior leaders believe that being an introvert is a liability. Adam Grant and his colleagues challenged this thinking by [reporting](#) that an introvert leader with vocal teams does well because of their tendency to listen better and appear more open to suggestions, compared to an extrovert leader who may feel threatened and challenged.

This micro skill raises your awareness of introverts versus extroverts in the workplace that can benefit you and the people you work with. Introverts and extroverts can flourish in the workplace when there's awareness and respect for their differences.

## **AWARENESS**

Most of us tend to have a clear dominance when it comes to being either an introvert or an extrovert. Introverts after a long day of work can't wait to have time alone or a thoughtful, quiet conversation with a trusted friend. At end of the same day an extrovert looks to engage with a group of friends for a social activity. Extroverts tend to crave



stimulation while introverts become tired and crave time to be alone, so they can recharge their energy from the inside out. To assist in evaluating what percentage you're an extrovert versus an introvert, take a few minutes to complete this [Introvert versus Extrovert Quick Survey](#).

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Our actions impact both ourselves and others. Accepting the fact that not everyone wants the same thing positions us to have more empathy and compassion for our differences. Without knowing that you're an extrovert can be frustrating when an introvert doesn't want to be with you every moment, or excited to talk with you.

Instead of personalizing the world through what you want, it can be helpful to understand what mentally charges extroverts and introverts. Openly talking about your dominant trait and what helps charge your battery to do your best work is helpful for both your manager and peers. Each of us has one brain and, depending on the blend of extrovert versus introvert defines the approaches we take to charge our brain and position ourselves to perform to our optimal potential.

### ACTION

Knowing your dominance can help you make decisions that best promote your brain health and ability to keep your batteries charged to keep up with the demands of work and home.

### TIPS FOR SUPPORTING INTROVERTS AND EXTROVERTS

By engaging in conversations with introverts and extroverts you can make good choices, suspend judgement, and create opportunities for yourself and your peers to play to your strengths and reach your full potential.

**Supporting introverts** Allow them time to work alone; encourage them to speak first in meetings to get their ideas out; provide them some one-on-one meetings versus group meetings to give them new information or even to teach (they often benefit more from one-on-one coaching versus classroom instruction); give them time to observe and learn before dumping them into new situations; give them time and choices on how they can respond to you (such as in writing or in person after they have collected their thoughts) versus demanding them to answer on the spot; give them notice before asking them to change; and honour their privacy.

**Supporting extroverts** Provide feedback in real time; put them into collaborative work situations so their thinking can evolve; put them in situations where there's opportunity for conversation and, when possible, to meet new people; recognize and acknowledge their energy and enthusiasm; let them move fast once they have a defined action plan; provide them with lots of engagement and teamwork to keep things

exciting for them so they don't get bored or under-stimulated; and provide them with lots of feedback on how they're doing.

Introverts and extroverts can provide different perspectives and insights that are beneficial for employers. The more each employee is aware of their dominance and what they need to be successful, the more likely they will be able to reach their full potential.



CHAPTER SIX

AWARD  
RESULTS

# Is your company an outstanding employer?

Winners to be decided by the results of an employee survey that shines a light on employers that are working collaboratively with their employees to facilitate health and engagement

**BILL HOWATT AND GILLIAN LIVINGSTON**

The new **Employee Recommended Workplace Award** aims to recognize outstanding employers. The award is a joint venture between The Globe and Mail and Morneau Shepell, Canada's largest human resources organization, which has deep expertise in measuring **total health**.

Winners will be decided solely by the results of a unique employee survey that shines a light on employers that are working collaboratively with their employees to facilitate total health and engagement.

With rising **mental health** issues and chronic disease in Canada's workplaces there is value in rethinking the impact employers can have on influencing employees' engagement and total health, which can lead to healthier, happier workers who are less stressed and more productive.

The focus of the Employee Recommended Workplace Award is a methodology that recognizes total health in four key pillars – work, life, physical and mental health.

Employer awards are meant to show

future and current employees that the workplace is based on trust and promotes work-life blending. That it's a place where employees are treated fairly and well, and the employer cares about and does good work in the community.

Employee engagement is big business in North America. It's estimated that US\$720-million is spent on it annually in the United States, and it's the most popular human resources measurement of employee productivity.

Our Employee Recommended Workplace Award is partly based on the **Your Life at Work Survey** The Globe and Mail and Howatt HR launched in February, 2014.

One interesting trend in the **Your Life at Work** research is that a highly engaged employee may not always be a healthy one, which sounds counter intuitive. Three highly engaged employee categories were noted: highly engaged and high health; highly engaged and moderate health; and highly engaged and low health. This is further evidence of the value for employers to

look beyond engagement to consider the impact of health as a driver of work force productivity.

A highly engaged employee who works long, demanding hours and doesn't know how to cope or take care of his health is an employee who is at risk to burn out. This is one instance where high engagement doesn't lead to high productivity.

In addition, our study found that employees who reported the highest level of productivity on a daily basis through the *Your life at work* survey also had the highest levels of coping skills, engagement and health. They were successfully managing their daily stress loads and were positively supported by their employers, friends and family.

While the shadow side of highly engaged employees is often overlooked, there's a growing trend where employers are focusing more energy and time on engaging employees, not only in their work but also in their health.

Why? Because 87 per cent of Canadians will be directly affected by *chronic disease* or a major illness within their lifetime. Physical and mental illnesses are major problems and cost Canadian taxpayers and employers billions of dollars each year. However, many chronic diseases can be prevented through better *lifestyle choices*.

Our new Employee Recommended Workplace Award process is simple. An employer signs up via an online registration site, and then follows easy instructions to

get staff involved.

Every employee of the organizations that register will be asked to complete a simple 15-minute online survey. Upon completion of the survey, employees get their results instantly, coupled with immediate coaching for what they can do to improve their total health. The employees' survey results will determine the award winners.

Employers also complete an online questionnaire detailing their current workplace health programs. Data from this survey will be used to examine and create a generic set of profiles outlining the difference between winners of the award and those that are not successful. Once the award has closed and surveys are complete, employers will get their own unique report detailing in aggregate where their strengths and weaknesses lie.

There will be a national award for small-, medium- and large-sized companies. In addition, other awards will be separated by geographic region.

All employers who participate will have access to an annual employer report that will share aggregated insights while maintaining confidentiality as to what employers who achieve this award are doing to facilitate employees' total health, engagement and productivity.

*Bill Howatt is the chief research and development officer of work force productivity with Morneau Shepell in Toronto. He is also the president of Howatt HR Consulting and founder of*

*TalOp, in Kentville, N.S.*

*Gillian Livingston is currently the deputy editor with Globe Investor and the co-ordinator of the Employee Recommended Workplace Award.*

*Gillian Livingston and Bill Howatt are the co-creators of the Employee Recommended Workplace Award.*

# Employee Recommended Workplace Award finalists announced

Thirty-two companies earn new distinction

GILLIAN LIVINGSTON

Contenders are nominated in categories based on the size and type of their organizations, and recognize employers with the highest standards in well-being

Thirty-two Canadian companies have earned the distinction of being named an Employee Recommended Workplace in the first year of the awards developed by Morneau Shepell and The Globe and Mail.

Of those 32, nine companies will be named winners at an award ceremony on June 21, hosted at The Globe's new headquarters in Toronto. Contenders are nominated in categories based on the size and type of their organizations, and recognize employers with the highest standards in workplace well-being.

"The Globe is pleased to congratulate the finalists for excellence in achieving a healthy, engaged and productive work force. We look forward to announcing the top category winners in the new Globe and Mail Centre in June," said Phillip Crawley, The Globe's publisher and chief executive officer.

The award aims to recognize companies that have prioritized the health and

well-being of their employees. Employees of each organization completed a short confidential survey that included questions based on each person's physical and mental health, as well as aspects of their work and home life. Each employee was given a score based on their responses and a company's total score was compiled from their employees' aggregate results.

"These workplaces and award winners are selected solely on the basis of the scores from their employee surveys. In short, employees determine the organizations that rise to the top and are recognized as Employee Recommended Workplaces," the companies said in a release.

The awards ceremony will be held following a human resources summit: [Solving Workplace Challenges in the Modern Economy](#).

"Research shows that healthy employees are more engaged and productive, and that translates into better business results," said Bill Howatt, chief research and development officer of work-force productivity at Morneau Shepell. "The Employee Recommended Workplace Award survey

provides the key metrics organizations need for benchmarking and measuring their progress in achieving better health, engagement and productivity.”

The full list of finalists can be found in the table below.



# Sensitivity grows for workplace mental illness

Companies awakening to the effects on employees – and their own operations

GUY DIXON

Every week, half a million workers in Canada call in sick because of mental health problems.

This can run the gamut from anxiety and depression that workers carry with them from their lives outside work to conditions caused or worsened by the workplace.

Then there's the problem of "presenteeism." The opposite of absenteeism, it's when people show up for work but, because of mental health problems, are not fully engaged in the job at hand. This gets in the way of productivity.

Yet managers and workplace experts aren't just talking about mental health for purely business reasons.

In a survey of companies, "one of the key pieces of information that came out is that employers have a strong interest in doing the right thing. Nobody wants to come to work and make their staff miserable," said Louise Bradley, chief executive officer of the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

Yet, even in the most cut-throat business terms, removing stigma and creating a more empathetic workplace allows for more effective, individual solutions, Ms.

Bradley said.

For instance, no two workers would recover exactly the same from a physical injury, say, an accident requiring back surgery. Similarly, no two workers recover in the same way from mental trauma.

What this then requires is a more individualized approach and more accommodating policies for helping the employee return to work. The person with the back injury may need an ergonomic chair. But "if I have depression, very few places have an accommodation policy for that. And yet we know that the longer somebody is off work, the less chance that they will actually return in a timely way, if at all," Ms. Bradley said.

So, without accommodating policies, without greater acceptance in the workplace, employers may lose workers and will certainly lose productivity, say mental health professionals.

Klick Inc., a health industry marketing, digital and business partnership company, which has a number of policies in place geared to mental well-being, approaches this on three levels: company culture, programming for employees and wellness

facilities. “From a culture perspective, one of our core values is empathy,” said Glen Webster, senior vice-president of finance. (Klick spreads its human resources functions across the senior management team.) This means a culture in which the company will even, in extraordinary conditions, assist an employee logistically or financially when facing a problem causing enormous stress, such as the mental effects of a major physical health problem.

Programming for employees includes talks on mental health issues such as depression, which helps to create a dialogue and reduce stigma, as well as providing events such as a massage day, a meditation club and other wellness programs. The company also provides facilities such as a meditation room.

“We were surprised by employees’ hunger for this type of programming, and so we’ve continued to increase it,” Mr. Webster said. Klick is a prize winner of this year’s Employee Recommended Workplace Award, acknowledging the company’s commitment to health and wellness.

The idea is to create acceptance and to normalize the care of mental health in the workplace, the place where many people spend the majority of their waking hours. “It helps us go further down the road to achieving parity with physical illness, which is nevertheless still not the case in Canada right now,” Ms. Bradley said.

*Guy Dixon is a Globe reporter.*

# The winning formulas for workplace wellness

Award-winning companies describe the culture they've created to keep staff engaged and healthy

GUY DIXON

Health and wellness can be many things to many people, and individuals will always have a preference over what works for them.

But for an employer, ensuring staff have the mental and physical capacity to perform to the best of their abilities with smiles on their faces can reap rewards far beyond the bottom line.

There are many things that make up an ideal workplace, though. The nine winners of the inaugural Employee Recommended Workplace Award ([www.employeerecommended.com](http://www.employeerecommended.com)), which recognizes companies that prioritize the health and wellness of their staff, describe the one thing that helps their company stand out from the rest.

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## FAMILY FIRST

“As a theoretical physics institute, we’re trying to create a fantastic environment for the world’s top scientists and their families.

“So we’ve got a room for kids to hang out. We have an extremely family-friendly

facility here. This building is full of blackboards, because everybody writes on blackboards. It’s not uncommon to see blackboards full of math on the top section and down at the bottom doodles of cats or fish because we have a lot of events where we have families come into the building. For example, every week there’s something called family night in our restaurant.”

*Michael Duschenes, managing director and chief operating officer, Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, Waterloo, Ont.*

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## FULL ENGAGEMENT

“The most important thing for us is that the health and wellness program has an important impact in our community because we work on the program with the staff but also with students.

“Students don’t make one action and personnel the other action. They all make moves together on the same things. That’s very original.

“And it’s received well because the

program came from them, not from me or the direction team, so it's implanted within the mentality of our culture within Cégep Garneau.”

*Denise Trudeau, executive director, Cégep Garneau, Quebec City*

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### IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

“The No. 1 thing is communication with the people. When I was at a conference this weekend there was a sign up that said whenever information is missing, people fill in the blanks. So when they don't know what's going on, most people fear the worst.

“It can be something as simple as when there are visitors to the office, we send out an e-mail to let everybody know who it is because in today's culture, you see someone new walk through the building, you think: Is the company being sold, are we going to be out of a job? People never know.

“So then when we have visitors they see everybody smiling and most people will say hi to them because they know who they are.”

*Scott Foster, director of sales and marketing, NEBS PAYweb and Payce payroll companies, Cambridge, Ont.*

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### WHOLE-PERSON DEVELOPMENT

“People are leading busy lives. We're in the client service business, so we're basically

on 24/7.

“Our whole-person development program was designed to equip staff with a toolkit that they could draw from for sources of energy when things get stressful.

“We've done an eight-week course in mindfulness, we've done work around energy management, which incorporates nutrition, healthy snacking, water consumption, getting good sleep.

“It's a whole person development program built around mind, body and spirit content.”

*Sarah Liverance, partner, Sklar Wilton & Associates Ltd., Toronto*

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### EMPATHIZE

“It's our employee-centric culture and how we've embodied our core value of empathy in how we think about and treat our people.

“For example, we had an employee that had been going through some serious health issues and was also moving house. We took that as an opportunity to show our empathy and caring for their health and wellness by organizing a moving company to help them through that life experience.

“We have a Klick Experience Team whose job it is to proactively help nurture and grow culture and engagement at Klick through events and celebrations, and their job is to try and find those surprise and delight moments wherever they may exist.”

*Glen Webster, senior vice-president of finance, Klick Inc., Toronto*

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### **PROMOTE PHYSICAL WELLNESS**

“For us wellness is everyday, it’s part of what we do here at our offices and we don’t think of it as wellness programming, it really is how we do our work.

“We have informal meetings on the treadmill. We put gyms in our corporate office, and because it’s such a normal thing to pop upstairs and go for a walk or a run or participate in a class, it just sort of becomes a place where we do business. You talk about work while you’re there, you talk about other things, too, but for us the lines are blurred a little bit and it really is part of the culture.”

*Colleen McCarville, vice-president, human resources, Killam Apartment Real Estate Investment Trust, Halifax*

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### **CELEBRATE PEOPLE**

“We celebrate people’s milestones, if it’s a birthday, et cetera. So people will e-mail them, or if they’re in the same office, will stop by and say happy birthday or happy anniversary or good luck with this event that’s happening, that type of thing.

“We make sure we have pot lucks or socials that are happening here and there throughout the year. Everybody can come and share life, that type of thing.

That culture is nourished here at the office or throughout our offices and it keeps growing.”

*Danny Soucy, executive director, New Brunswick Association for Community Living, Fredericton*

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### **BE OPEN TO NEW IDEAS**

“Don’t assume that you know what’s best. Not too long ago an employee introduced a meditation program that is now run on Skype for employees working offsite to join – this idea did not come from the management team but was a creative solution identified and launched by an individual employee.”

*Alastair Macdonald, senior vice-president, human resources, Nestlé Canada Inc., Toronto*

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### **BE WIDE-RANGING**

“Our wellness education sessions, wellness fairs, annual health checks, healthy catered food, employee benefit programs that support active living and weight management, benefits that focus on preventative health care programs, an active health and safety committee, all contribute to employee health and wellness. Not all employees participate in every aspect of our health and wellness program but we believe there is something that everyone can benefit from.”

*Sheila Kendall, vice-president, human resources,*

*L.V. Lomas, Brampton, Ont.*

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## HOW WE CHOSE THE WINNERS

Companies are discovering that paying attention to the wellness of their workforce can help their bottom line. Executives are learning that their employees' personal lives don't get left at the door to the office, and those issues can have an impact on an employee's productivity levels and overall focus at work.

The Employee Recommended Workplace Award, jointly created by The Globe and Mail and Morneau Shepell, recognizes companies for excellence in achieving a healthy, engaged and productive workforce. And it's an award based entirely on feedback from employees.

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## HERE'S HOW THE AWARD WORKS.

A company's employees take a survey based on four pillars: work, life, mental health and physical health. Each employee gets a score based on their responses, and the aggregate of a company's employee responses determine that organization's score. The company with the top score is the Grand Prize winner in their category. It's a very unique award that's purely statistically based and in which employees determine if their company wins.

Those companies that meet a minimum statistical threshold earn the distinction of being awarded the Employee

Recommended Workplace Award Badge and are considered finalists.

This is no small feat. It means those companies were in the top percentile of our participants and have a workplace that prioritizes the health and wellness of their staff.

Of our 32 finalists, there are nine Grand Prize winners. These are companies that had the top scores based on their company size and in their category of business.

In addition to the employee surveys, each organization completed an employer questionnaire in which companies outlined some of their key operating principles and the wellness programs they offered.

Several themes came to the fore in the questionnaires from our winners.

Most winners have a focus on mental health with training programs for their managers and a strategy to implement a mental health strategy.

They place importance on one-on-one manager and employee chats; they have regular employee engagement surveys and staff turnover is low.

These companies have zero tolerance policies regarding harassment and bullying and ensure their culture makes employees comfortable with reporting any negative incidents.

They are companies with flexible work options for their staff, such as flexible hours, job sharing and telecommuting.

These companies also offer an array of health and wellness programs that focus on

areas such as healthy eating and physical activity.

Although the first year of the award has come to a close, organizations can register now for the second year of the Employee Recommended Workplace Award by going to the award website at [employeerecommended.com](http://employeerecommended.com).

--Gillian Livingston

*Paul Attfield is a Globe reporter.*

*Gillian Livingston is the co-creator of the award from The Globe, along with Bill Howatt from Morneau Shepell.*

# Winners see award as ‘validation that we’re doing the right thing’

Nine companies win top prize at the inaugural Employee Recommended Workplace Award ceremony

PAUL ATTFIELD

At many award shows, writing a winning submission has almost turned into a scientific process.

That was never going to be the case at the very first Employee Recommended Workplace Awards, held in Toronto.

“We thought, why don’t we go right to the people who can tell the story, directly to employees and ask their opinion on whether their work force is thriving?” said Randal Phillips, executive vice-president and chief client officer for Morneau Shepell, which is co-creator of the award with The Globe and Mail, and sponsored the inaugural event.

There were 32 finalists from across Canada that earned the distinction of being called an Employee Recommended Workplace based on the results of a survey taken by their employees that was based on four pillars of health: physical health, mental health, health in the workplace, and life health.

From those finalists, nine companies were celebrated for coming out on top based on their size and type of business.

“It shows we have an environment where

people know that we are there for them, to support them throughout their work life and that’s our ultimate goal,” said Sheri Keffer, director of people and culture for Waterloo, Ont.-based Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics. The institute won the mid-sized company category in the not-for-profit/government sector.

“We all benefit from the programs we do and being recognized by the employees is the best recognition.”

That attitude was echoed by the representative team at Sklar Wilton & Associates, a Toronto-based consumer insights company. Already named by Great Places to Work as Canada’s best workplace in the small business category for 2017, Sklar Wilton very much puts its employees at the forefront of its consideration in everything it does. In winning the Employee Recommended Workplace Award for being the top small employer in the private company category, its focus has clearly paid off.

“We knew intuitively this was the right thing to do because people are what we’re all about,” said Sarah Liverance, partner



at Sklar Wilton. “We’re not manufacturing widgets or anything like that. People are all we have and their intellectual power and their energy. So it was validation that we’re doing the right thing.”

For some companies, putting employees first is something they have always believed in, long before awards came into the picture. For those companies, that strategy also brings its own rewards, above and beyond improving employee satisfaction and production.

“[It] just really shows our employees how much they mean to us and how it means to Lomas to win the award because we really take pride in how we treat our employees and how our [staff] turnover is so incredibly low,” said Candace Steinhaur, manager for human resources at L.V. Lomas. The Brampton, Ont.-based ingredients supplier won as the top mid-sized firm in the private sector category.

For some of the bigger companies, putting in place wide-reaching programs that can positively impact every member of staff isn’t always the simplest task. But for any company, big or small, taking the time to do so can have a marked impact on everything from the bottom line to the reputation of the business.

For Nestlé Canada Inc., which took home the award for top large employer in the public company sector, putting an emphasis on workplace wellness is important, because health and wellness issues affect the individuals, their families, and ultimately,

their work.

“Our executives, leaders, managers make a point to be available, to listen, to encourage new ideas and we want to continue to foster that ongoing relationship with our company to ensure that we grow forward,” said Carl Jafrabad, director of compensation, pension and benefits at Nestlé Canada.

“Nestlé’s been around for 150 years. We hope to be around for at least another 150 and this constant evolution keeps us moving forward.”

*Paul Attfield is a Globe reporter.*

# At work, drop the word ‘millennial,’ and ditch the job title too

The millennial label stereotypes workers, and it’s skills and not job titles that are most important now

GUY DIXON

**I**t seems there are many no-no’s when it comes to talking about millennials and baby boomers at work.

Specialists in workplace trends even suggest dropping the overused “millennial” label, in particular, from the discussion altogether.

And while we’re at it, they suggest dropping job titles too, or at least refrain from overemphasizing job titles on résumés, since many of those titles belie how rapidly job roles and functions are changing.

That was the broad message from two recent panel discussions, one on millennials, one on boomers, held during the The Globe and Mail’s Human Resources summit: Solving Workplace Challenges in the Modern Economy, where the 2017 Employee Recommended Workplace Awards, which recognizes companies that put the health and wellness of their employees first, were presented. The award was co-created by The Globe and human resources consulting firm Morneau Shepell.

Despite the different needs of both age groups (boomers looking to transition into

later stages of their careers and to find a sense of legacy in their work; millennials seeking new ways to find careers having purpose and meaning), there are nevertheless many trends that cross generations.

For one, there’s the attitude of just saying no to the status quo regarding job titles. Companies hire based on what they anticipate they’ll need five years from now, but “the reality is that none of those skill sets will ever make any sense on a résumé,” said Dave Wilkin, founder of the career networking service TenThousandCoffees.com, speaking at the panel on millennials.

In other words, titles and formal résumés can be meaningless. It’s what employees can do that’s more important, since jobs are changing so rapidly.

“Anybody who looks at their parents and says, ‘What should I do when I grow up,’ will never get an accurate response, because the jobs that existed five years ago don’t exist today,” he said.

That’s of course an exaggeration. But “what that means is that we need people to be creators and not managers,” he said. It

means figuring out “how can the next generation actually create their own opportunities, be it creating their own companies, or actually creating opportunities inside their organizations,” he argued.

The stereotype is that younger people are more nimble and tech savvy and therefore have technical skills that employers need. That may be true, but it’s an assumption that only goes so far. As Mary Barroll, president of the job listing service Talent Egg, said, employers “believe they can teach technical skills, but they can’t teach character.”

Employers are looking for signs of leadership, she said. “They are looking less for a person who fits a particular slot, but really it’s more about the person.”

Similarly, Jacqueline Foley, chief marketing officer at executive search firm Odgers Berndtson Canada who also helps run the CEO for a Day program, allowing students to meet and shadow chief executives for one day, noted that the real job interview comes not when candidates are being formally interviewed. It comes “when we have lunch or a social function afterward, and all the partners come in, and we’re all just chitchatting. And that’s when you really see how they interact with people.”

Work and career building (or career transitioning later in life) is about the experience of work and being able to handle many different functions, they suggested.

The panel on baby boomers stressed this even more for older workers.

“A big part of it is separating your title from your skills, and it’s actually advice you can give to any age group,” said Eileen Dooley, vice-president at VF Career Management. “When I take a look at a résumé, for example, I always ask, ‘What on here are you good at, but that you don’t want to do any more?’”

Her advice for those entering a new, later stage of career is, “Only focus on what you want to do, and that you’re good at.” (This of course assumes a certain amount of economic viability, that doing what you want pays enough.)

Another key element is knowledge transfer. Younger workers need the institutional knowledge and wisdom of older workers. Older workers seek legacy, although here too is another no-no, argued Lisa Taylor, chief executive officer of Challenge Factory, a consultancy and analytical firm focusing on the aging work force.

Ms. Taylor feels that knowledge transfer is too rigid. It implies the passing down of know-how in a formalized, possibly antiquated way. Instead, she said it should be more of a translation of knowledge, imparting knowledge in ways more relevant to current needs – in other words, forgetting the generational divide and any sense of stiff mentorship for more of freer-flowing mentorship/reverse-mentorship interaction.

“As an organization, you either have a culture of collaboration, or you don’t. If that person is resisting collaborating or

sharing information, chances are that's a pattern that has existed over the course of their career. And it's either something fostered within the culture of the organization, or it isn't," she said.

Some of this resistance can come from how older workers are treated. "We know in Canada that training for older workers starts to decline at age 49. That's very, very young. We know that subtle cues start to be given through organizations, that it's kind of time for them to start thinking of moving somewhere, not here," Ms. Taylor said.

But that's a flawed approach. All workers, young and old, former employees and retired ones, inevitably remain brand ambassadors for the remainder of their lives. So, companies should make that a positive relationship, as much as possible. Here, once again, it's about the experience one has at work, regardless of generation, job title and skill set.

Vanessa Cohen, senior vice-president in the technology practice of Environics Communications, put it succinctly for both millennials and boomers: It used to be about promotions and titles. Now it's about who you are and what you want to be.

*Guy Dixon is a Globe reporter.*

# Creating a mental health first-aid kit

Talking about mental health, training and peer support can help bring issues into the open, panel experts say

GUY DIXON

Most corporate offices have a first-aid kit somewhere, stocked with Band-Aids. Most also have policies readily in place allowing time off for physical ailments and will spring for ergonomic seats or standing desks for people in physical discomfort.

But where's the first-aid kit for mental health emergencies? And what would that even look like?

Lisa Couperthwaite, a clinical psychologist at Toronto's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, noted that a kit in this sense consists of training for employees in how to help someone experiencing a mental health issue. We, in effect, are the Band-Aids.

"With mental health first aid, it's much more about the interpersonal interaction between people and the informal support that our colleagues provide," she said, speaking at a panel discussion on mental health issues in the workplace sponsored by The University of New Brunswick. The panel was part of The Globe and Mail's Human Resources summit: Solving Workplace Challenges in the Modern Economy held June 21. The

summit also hosted the presentation of the 2017 Employee Recommended Workplace Awards, which recognizes companies that put the health and wellness of their employees first, which was co-created by The Globe and human resources consulting firm Morneau Shepell.

"A lot of the interventions that we use to respond to people who are having a mental health issue are the same things that we can use to build resiliency and build collaboration. [They] really can help the bottom line for the organization," she said.

"It's not just good for the person with the mental health issue. It's good for the entire culture, organization and competitiveness, performance, all of that," she added.

For instance, a mental health incident can arise during an intensely stressful moment at work. It's an everyday occupational mental hazard in any office and, in fact, often adds purpose and meaning to work. Yet, people may respond very differently to stress.

"There's a threat response," Dr. Couperthwaite said. "There's also a challenge response where people really rise to the challenge, and they are at their best in

terms of performance. There's also tend-and-befriend responses, reaching out to one another and being supportive and creative in that culture.

"Then there's also the blah," she says, imagining an employee who has a deflated response to stress. "Those are the employees we really need to worry about."

This can make a first-aid response more nuanced, since someone experiencing severe problems may not be showing overt signs, but become withdrawn. That's where training can perhaps help colleagues to recognize this in others and offer support, Dr. Couperthwaite indicated.

The aim, in the end, is to make supporting mental health issues as normal as physical ones. To try to help that, Louise Bradley, president and chief executive officer of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, noted the psychological safety standard released by her organization in collaboration with the Canadian Standards Association.

It is like the occupational health and safety standard, but for psychological issues. In addition to providing voluntary guidelines and resources for companies, it notes training programs such as Mental Health First Aid. (All of which can be found on the Mental Health Commission of Canada's website.)

"This is something that is really concrete and is available to small, medium and large businesses and organizations," she said. In fact, the standard has been downloaded in

15 different countries, she noted. "The magnitude and response have been far greater than any of us ever thought."

However, panelist Bill Howett, chief research and development officer of work force productivity at Morneau Shepell, added that one of the biggest barriers in all of this is people not even knowing that they have a mental health issue.

Opening up a dialogue in the workplace can help identify problems, not in terms of self diagnosis, but in how individuals respond to difficult circumstances.

So, it's not about people asking themselves, Do I have depression or anxiety? "It's about how they are actually processing their workplace, how they are actually processing their experience with their peers, how they're dealing with their financial health, how they're dealing with mental health," Mr. Howatt said.

For companies, "a mental-health strategy doesn't mean a policy, some training, an EAP [employee assistance program] and checking the box." It's about integrating mental health into the company's human resources strategy, making the process more "organic," he added.

This isn't to say that mental health policies in the workplace somehow abrogate an employee's responsibilities for their own health, he insisted. Instead, it opens up the conversation. It better addresses how to handle change and potential problems, before they occur.

"Every employee owns their own mental

health and every employee owns their career. But my thesis is that we forgot to teach many people how to problem solve and deal with the challenges of their life,” he said.

*Guy Dixon is a Globe reporter.*

# Medium-sized companies get top health scores in benchmark report

The report is based on scores from companies that took part in the 2017 Employee Recommended Workplace Award

**BILL HOWATT AND SEAN CIANFLONE**

*This article highlights some findings from the total health benchmarks from the 2017 Employee Recommended Workplace Award. These benchmarks include aspects of mental health, physical health, workplace experience and life. Readers interested in additional benchmarks can purchase the benchmark report in The Globe and Mail DataStore. The Globe and Mail and Morneau Shepell created the Employee Recommended Workplace Award to honour companies that put the health and well-being of their employees first. Register your company for 2018 at [www.employeerecommended.com](http://www.employeerecommended.com).*

**T**he 2017 Employee Recommended Workplace Award Benchmark report shows that medium-sized companies (100 to 499 employees) have the highest scores for total health, followed by small companies (40 to 99 employees) and then large companies (500 or more employees).

The report, which uses aggregated data from organizations that participated in the 2017 Employee Recommended Workplace Award, gives benchmarks for

the total health index and each of the four total health pillars (physical health, mental health, workplace experience and life health) that were included in the award employee survey.

The Employee Recommended Workplace Award was created in a partnership between The Globe and Mail and Morneau Shepell to identify employers across Canada that excel in supporting employee health and wellbeing.

The goal of the report is to provide organizational leaders with a set of benchmark norms that can offer insight on trends across the four pillars, as well as findings as to what is having a positive impact on the total health of their employees. This insight will be helpful for Employee Recommended Workplace Award participants, which can benchmark themselves against peer-size organizations using their scores from their Employer Report, as well as for organizations looking for overall trend insights based on their size.



## AWARENESS

The value of benchmarks is deeply entrenched in awareness. Using aggregated data gathered, we provide a range of values describing what constitutes below-average, average and above-average performers. Organizations can observe how they're doing on different scales against the group norms, or see trends among different groups within work forces.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

The benchmarks provide employers direction on how they're doing against their peers or point out trends in total health that are impacting employees' mental health. Total health success is dependent on both employees and employers taking accountability for what they can control. Employers can offer programs to their staff, but the success of these programs is dependent on employees' use of the programs and their perceptions of its effectiveness. It's helpful for employers to see what programs are generally impacting positively employees' total health.

## ACTION

Organizations that participated in the 2017 Employee Recommended Workplace Award have access to their own data from their Employer Report and can compare it with the benchmarks in order to see where they fall against their peers. This information can be a motivator to act, with informed insight as to which areas to focus

on in order to improve the overall total health of their employees.

Organizations that did not participate in the 2017 Employee Recommended Workplace Award can use the benchmark findings to gain insight into emerging trends at comparably-sized organizations as they look at the total health of their organizations. More and more organizations are understanding that what employees think impacts what they do in and out of work, and that the choices they make impact their overall health and wellbeing. We can't separate employees from their day-to-day lives outside of work.

Employers are beginning to understand that employees' choices and perceptions ultimately define their health, engagement and productivity at work. Productivity must go through health; without it, there's no way to guarantee long-term sustainability.

Several interesting trends emerged from the first set of ERWA findings for 2017. Following is a high-level overview.

**Risk behaviours** Employees with a greater number of healthy behaviours and fewer at-risk behaviours (such as smoking) reported higher total health index scores. Additionally, large companies reported the greatest number of at-risk behaviours.

**Leadership trust** Employees of medium-sized companies have the greatest levels of trust in senior leadership; the lowest levels

were observed in large companies.

**Respectful workplace** Around 25 per cent of employees reported that they felt they had been treated unfairly at work.

**Programming** – Companies offering addiction support programming report significantly higher life pillar scores (due to better relationship and financial health).

As well, companies offering healthy eating programs reported significantly higher physical health pillar scores. Companies that offered addiction support programming (such as smoking cessation) had significantly higher life pillar scores than those that did not.

The Employee Recommended Workplace Award survey asks employees who participated in core company programs what they felt was the impact of the program on them. This measure can help employers evaluate which organizational programs employees are participating in and are positively impacting employee's total health.

The Employee Recommended Workplace Award benchmark report provides various total health benchmarks to understand how small, medium, large, private, public and government organizations across Canada are doing in each of the four pillars (physical, mental, work and life) and overall total health index.

Not only can the benchmarking help an organization drive strategy, it can also be a key piece to retaining and attracting top

talent.

With the growing demand for comprehensive health and wellness strategies, the Employee Recommended Workplace Award has been designed for employers that are supporting employees beyond their basic health needs to foster a respectful, engaging and productive workplace.

To see additional details, you can purchase the 2017 Employee Recommended Workplace Award Benchmark Report at [The Globe and Mail DataStore](#).

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