



# EAP NEWSLETTER

*Managing Employee Health  
and Performance*

## An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure

Employee assistance programs (EAPs) have evolved since they were first introduced 25 years ago. From web-based counselling to information on wellness and lifestyle issues, improvements to EAPs reflect the changes in the world in which we live.

Not only have EAPs evolved, but so too have the human resources (HR) professionals responsible for choosing the right program. No longer satisfied with reactive solutions for employees in crises, HR professionals are now more focused on the capacity of an EAP

to prevent crises and on the effects that a proactive approach to addressing employee issues has on an organization's bottom line.

In short, HR professionals require solutions that help employees before, during and after a crisis and want to be able to measure the return on the investment made in the EAP.

The costs are staggering. The Canadian economy loses billions of dollars each year due to mental illness in the workplace. A high percentage of workers experience health problems caused by stress, anxiety and major depression. As a result, they take a significant number of sick days off work. Employer costs are compounded by the need to hire replacement staff to fill the void.

Ownership changes, real and perceived threats of job loss, and the inability to achieve work-life balance are factors that contribute to increased incidents of stress, anxiety and depression.

EAPs have been traditionally viewed as a means of addressing employee issues after the fact. Perceived as a luxury, these programs have not been given the same recognition as other benefits such as dental and vision care, and short- and long-term disability.

The irony is that in addition to standard counselling services, EAPs offer preventive resources that can help employees address issues before they escalate and impact performance.

From education on healthy lifestyle choices to work-life services that help individuals manage legal, financial, family and other daily concerns, today's EAPs provide a range of resources to keep employees healthy and functioning at the level to which they are accustomed.

The responsibility of HR professionals is to ensure that employees know their options and that EAP resources are used to their fullest potential.

Communication is key, both within the workplace and externally with EAP representatives.

EAP providers must be constantly aware of emerging trends in the world of work, including those that are specific to their client organizations. It's their responsibility to share this knowledge and adapt their programs, ensuring that they meet the unique needs of each workplace.

Making certain that employees know the range of services available to address their needs before, during and after a crisis will have a dramatic and measurable impact on the ultimate success of a program.

HR professionals who recognize that they have a role to play, and who partner with their EAP provider to fulfill this role, will see returns on their EAP investment that they can take to the bank.

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## Employee Recognition: An Effective Preventive Tool

Occupational health program—just hearing the phrase brings to mind a host of issues frequently addressed in the workplace, including smoking cessation programs, work-place safety, obesity, stress management, etc. The list of prevention activities is as long as it is diverse. But what about employee recognition? Recognition practices have been regarded as a means of preventing absenteeism caused by mental health problems. Despite their benefits, employee recognition practices are still rarely implemented, although there are many reasons why they should be put at the top of the list.

According to the ERI Model (Effort Reward Imbalance Model), developed by Dr. Martin Shain of Toronto's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, a balance is required between effort and recognition. The mental and physical health of employees is at stake. The contemporary business world is experiencing many major changes to which employees must adapt. This requires more effort on the part of employees, giving rise to an even greater need for recognition.

Employee recognition produces several positive effects for businesses. The results justify integrating employee recognition in the workplace—an improved work environment, greater employee commitment to the organization, lower staff turnover and enhanced productivity and performance.

But what precisely should be recognized? To meet their inherent need for recognition, employees need to see their strengths and skills being valued at every level and feel that others are really interested in them. Managers must therefore recognize their employees at every level—as human beings, the way in which they apply their skills, their efforts and the results produced.

Following a few principles will ensure

that employees appreciate the recognition they are given. First, praise should be given frequently and in a timely manner. Recognition should not be reserved only for exceptional achievements; employees should also be praised for their day-to-day duties. Praising small achievements accelerates the process of learning about success. All employees are entitled to recognition, including management and senior staff. A manager who receives praise will give praise. Recognition should be specific and sincere, and should take into account the employee's preferences. Achieving the desired effect involves adapting the way in which recognition is given to the employee and by clearly explaining the reasons for which recognition and praise are being given.

The principles noted above may appear simple, but like everything else, may be difficult to implement. The biggest difficulty is one all too familiar to managers: the lack of time. Other difficulties include, lack of awareness of the work accomplished, the desire to be fair, as well as the ego and leadership style of some managers. To support managers and to help them become aware of their role in the prevention of mental health problems, numerous training programs are available, such as those offered by the Mental Illness Foundation.

In Canada, the social cost of mental health problems ranges between \$13-14 billion including \$8-10 billion in absenteeism.<sup>1</sup> The number of workers who describe their work environment as a major source of stress is on the rise. In 2001, this statistic was 50% compared with 39% in an earlier study in 1997.<sup>2</sup> Emotional distress and mental illness account for 20-30% of all employee absenteeism and industrial accidents, and for the first time ever, in 1998, mental or emotional



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problems at work exceeded physical causes as the primary reason for worker absenteeism.<sup>3</sup>

Employee recognition is one of the most effective and low cost means of prevention. The ability to respect and listen to others is essential. *Audi alteram partem*. Listen to others. Remember, in order to give praise to employees, you need to get to know them first.

### Resources

Mental Illness Foundation, <http://www.fnm-mif.ca/en>, 514 529-5354, extension 230.

Chair in Occupational Health and Safety Management at Université Laval, <http://cgsst.fsa.ulaval.ca/reconnaissance/eng/default.asp>

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, [http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs\\_pol/opepubs/TB\\_O/5QG1-2E.asp](http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs_pol/opepubs/TB_O/5QG1-2E.asp)

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2. ACSM/COMPAS. (2001) Canadian Mental Health Survey. Extract from Ordre des psychologues du Québec. (2002) *La vie au travail : un monde en transformation*. Santé mentale au travail symposium. Montréal, p.11.
3. World Health Organization — News Release of World Health Day 2001 Dedicated to Mental Health (April 7, 2001) Statistics provided by Homewood Centre for Organizational Health, 1999.

## Are Canadians Cool with Health?

Canadians are a resilient bunch! They are determined to keep all the balls in the air as they juggle work, home and other obligations—without taking time to breathe.

Trying to have it all is costing individuals their health and organizations their productivity. The primary reason for this juggling act is money, according to the third edition of Desjardins Financial Security's Health Survey.

EAP Newsletter consulted Alain Thauvette, Senior Vice President of Group and Business Insurance at Desjardins Financial Security, for insight into the money chase, technology impact and business solutions to reduce stress, anxiety and depression.

### What impact does employees' quest for the dollar have on the workplace?

Canadians who are strapped for cash don't take time out. Forty-four percent of Canadians said that money issues at home were their main stressor. This situation is easily transferred to the workplace. Close to four in 10 workers (37%) said loss of income was the primary reason they didn't take time off for mental or physical health issues.

So, these workers come to work, in some cases in mind and body only—not in spirit. This is presenteeism, a large contributor to productivity costs.

### How common are mental health issues in Canada?

Half of the general Canadian population (51%) knew someone who is or has been touched by mental illness, or are affected by it personally. In the past two years, 21% of workers have experienced physical health problems caused by stress, anxiety or depression. Approximately one in five of these workers experienced fatigue, sleeping problems, anxiety or depression.

Depression in the workplace and at home is going to increase. The World Health Organization predicts that over the next 20 years depression—not all mental illness, just depression—will be the second largest health burden on earth; number two after cardiovascular disease.

### How well are Canadians balancing home, work and wellness?

Canadian workers are not striking a balance. Employees tend to put on a brave face and go to work. A surprising 62% of workers who suffered from physical problems caused by stress, anxiety or depression tried their best to maintain normal work schedules.

Although they got through the workday, their personal lives suffered. Outside of work, most (59%) could not keep up their usual pace and needed more rest. They sacrificed time with family and friends, groups that people generally go to for support; 86% depend on family and 85% rely on friends to get them through tough times.

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**Alain Thauvette**  
Senior Vice President  
Group and Business Insurance  
Desjardins Financial Security

### Is technology helping employees balance their lives and increase leisure time?

Technology, once touted as a tool to increase leisure time, is now blurring the line between work and downtime, according to survey respondents. Three out of five workers (62%) say their employer can contact them any time through personal digital assistants, cell phones and laptops.

Of this group, 83% say this technology has either maintained (54%) or increased (29%) stress levels. Only 17% said technology reduced stress.

### Are there solutions?

Nearly six in 10 (57%) of workers believe employers, trade unions or associations should offer more support to workers experiencing mental health problems.

One way is through EAPs, which one in two respondents said are offered in their workplace. One in three (32%) had a preventive program for disability management. Among those with access to an EAP, approximately one in five (22%) used it. Surprisingly, 8% of surveyed workers did not know if their employer offered an EAP. There is definitely room for improving communication and promoting wellness programs that benefit the employee and the workplace.

Download survey results at [www.desjardinsfinancialsecurity.com/webcast](http://www.desjardinsfinancialsecurity.com/webcast)

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