

Career leaks

CAREER NEWS
YOU NEED TO KNOW

'Blueprint' to promote mental health

LINDA WHITE

Mental health problems account for more than one third of disability claims and two-thirds of disability costs across the country but a "made-in-Canada" toolkit designed to help employers promote mental health at work appears to be working.

Employees living with depression who work in an organization using the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace are missing five fewer days each year from work, an Ipsos poll found.

The Standard is a set of voluntary guidelines, tools and resources intended to guide organizations in promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm at work. It's billed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) as the "first of its kind in the world."

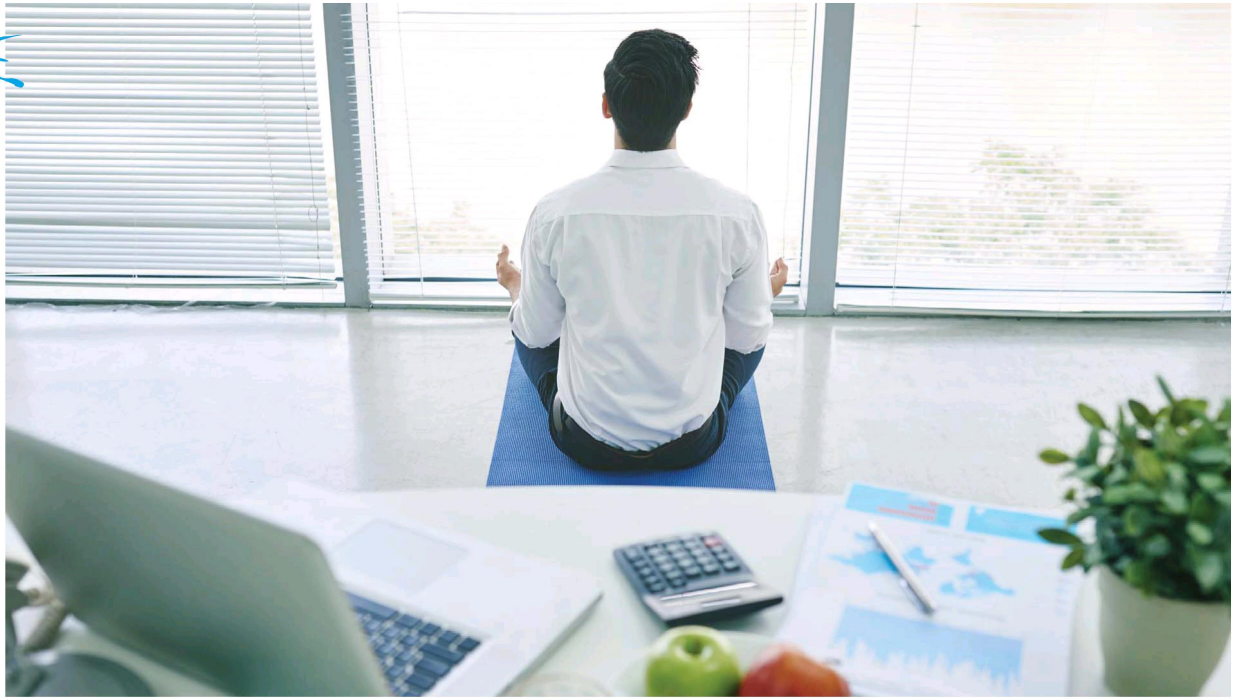
The MHCC recently released the findings of its three-year Case Study Research Project that tracked 40 Canadian organizations from various industries and sectors as they successfully implemented the standard. **Key findings:**

91% of the organizations implemented the standard because it's "the right thing to do". Other reasons: "to protect the psychological health of employees" (**84%**) and "increase employee engagement" (**72%**).

78% implemented respectful workplace policies and educational initiatives.

70% provided early intervention through employee and family assistance programs and services addressing mental health.

MHCC board chair Michael Wilson credited participating organizations with leading by example. "Through their efforts a shift is happening ... we now have a blueprint for successful implementation of the world's first workplace psychological health and safety standard."



GETTY

PROMOTING MINDFULNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

LINDA WHITE

SPECIAL TO POSTMEDIA NETWORK

With one million Canadians missing work every day because of stress-related illness, Canada Mental Health Week is an opportunity to raise awareness and promote positive mental health in the workplace – including learning how to cope through mindfulness.

The ancient wisdom tradition is a trending topic proven by research to improve mental health. "On its most basic level, we can understand mindfulness as present-moment awareness," says Dr. Geoff Soloway. He has a PhD in mindfulness and is chief training officer at MindWell-U in B.C.

"It's our ability to be aware of ourselves and our surroundings in the present moment, which is in contrast to being caught up in our thoughts. While they may be thoughts of the present moment, we're unaware of our surroundings and our thoughts in that moment. Mindfulness is our ability to stay grounded and connected to our bodies, our emotions, our thoughts and to sounds and people around us." Why is mindfulness impor-

tant? "We're learning that mindfulness is a practice that helps us cope with our daily stresses and manage stress," Soloway says. "It brings us back to a greater state of balance and in a state of balance we're able to experience more joy, connect with people, do better work and make better decisions."

MindWell-U designed an online 30 Day Mindfulness Challenge to make mindfulness more accessible to people in the workplace. At the core of the challenge is "Take 5." "We describe it as a 'mindfulness in action practice' because it's something you can do wherever you are – at the workplace, in a meeting, walking down the street," says Soloway.

"It's different from needing to sit in a quiet room for 20 minutes with the lights off." Here's how:

Notice the cue. Use cues in your environment – such as having a cup of coffee – to remind you to Take 5.

Notice something new. Respond to your cue by noticing something you haven't paid attention to before.

Notice your body. Drop your attention into your feet. Press

your feet into the floor as you lift and lengthen the spine.

Notice the breath. Begin with one complete breath. Then deepen and lengthen the breath. Finally, take five breaths in this way.

Notice now. Respond to what is in the present moment with a sense of openness, non-judgement and patience. Now you're ready to take a wise step forward.

You can practise mindfulness in situations in which you might be driven by emotion, such as a difficult conversation with a colleague. "It can bring you out of that flight or fight response and bring your prefrontal cortex back on line. That's the CEO of your brain so it can make a much better decision," says Soloway.

"It's very much a skillset that helps to solve the problem. We go straight to the solution – these are the skills we can build to promote resiliency, collaboration, productivity. That's something everybody wants. Everybody goes into the workplace wanting to feel fulfilled, to have meaningful conversations and to feel good. People feel good when they're productive."

MILLENNIALS AND DEPRESSION

Some 20% of millennials report 'on-the-job depression' compared to 16% of Gen Xers and baby boomers. Screen time may be a contributing factor because it means millennials aren't spending time doing things that build resiliency, Dr. Geoff Soloway suggests.

Screen time also impacts how we pay attention and what we're paying to, in turn impacting our brain's wiring and how we respond to stress. Parents who spend a lot of time on screens may also be a problem. "Are they giving (kids) presence attention? We know it's really important for child development and human development to have that secure attachment."

FREE MATERIALS

In conjunction with the Mental Health Commission of Canada (mentalhealthcommission.ca), MindWell-U (mindwellu.com/mentalhealth) is making materials from its 30 Day Mindfulness Challenge available to businesses at no cost during Canada Mental Health Week (May 1 to 7) to support their mental health initiatives. The challenge is proven to reduce stress, increase resilience and improve performance.