

STAYING AFLOAT

How to survive and thrive in the workplace



ILLUSTRATION BY CELIA KRAMPIEN



ILLUSTRATIONS BY CELIA KRAMPIEN, DESIGNED BY BEN BARRETT-FORREST

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Table of contents

Foreword 5

1. HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Survey: How’s your life at work? 8

What can a manager do to help an unhappy employee? 11

When you’re unhappy, what motivates you to make a change?14

Is coping with work stress good enough?16

Survey says: We’re stressed (and not loving it) 18

2. WHY KNOWING HOW TO COPE MATTERS

Are we facing a coping crisis? 22

Are you struggling to cope with the stress of work and life? 25

How employees can learn to cope with stress 27

How to become a coping skills master 30

What’s your emotional IQ? 33

Do you have the coping skills to stick to your resolutions? 36

Seven factors to boost your mental resiliency 39

3. TIPS AND ACTION

Do you look forward to your workday? 43

Table of contents (continued)

Do you have the grit to reach your goals? 45

How happy are you? 47

Are you suffering from stress or anxiety? 49

Is stress putting you at risk of an addiction? 52

Are you suffering from burnout? 55

Does work stress cause you to overeat? 58

Are you addicted to work? 60

Inexpensive ways to improve mental health at your work 62

4. FOR MANAGERS AND LEADERS

Why business leaders profit from mental-health literacy 66

Can you afford to ignore employees’ mental health? 69

Do you know if your company is efficient? 72

Why should a company care about its employees’ health? 74

Four tips for employers to help staff manage stress 76

5. ADDITIONAL SURVEYS

Are you satisfied with your life? 80

Students: How stressed are you? 82

About the writers 85

Foreword

By Gillian Livingston

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There are days when my alarm goes off – far too early in the morning – and the first thing that pops into my head is the long to-do list that needs to be accomplished in the upcoming day. It can be daunting. And that’s one surefire way to get my heart racing before I’ve even lifted my head off my pillow. I know I’m not the only one who feels the stress of work and life every day. It just matters how I’m able to manage my thoughts and emotions to keep me from getting overwhelmed.

This is a constant battle for employees in today’s working world. Juggling your ever-growing work demands with the goals of your personal life – managing kids, family, friends and other personal pursuits can make every day a challenge. If your coping skills are lacking, it can be enough to send you right back under the covers when that alarm goes off.

But juggling competing priorities gets a little bit easier when you have an employer who gets it. An employer who offers flexible work hours, who will let you work remotely, who understands that you have a life beyond the 9 to 5 can make all the difference to how you feel every day, and whether

you’re confident you’ll be able to manage it all. It’s those kinds of workplaces we all want to be in – where we’re seen as people, not just staff. This is why The Globe and Mail and Morneau Shepell joined forces to create the Exceptional Workplace Award to highlight those companies that see people for people and find the best way to make their lives work, while still getting their job done and keeping their business healthy. Those workplaces see how teamwork – helping employees learn the right tools to manage their load, while at the same time keeping their workload in check – benefits everyone, and their bottom line.

We all hear the horror stories of the bullying manager who glares at you if you walk in the office at 9:01 a.m., or piles on the work on the Friday before a long weekend, or bullies his staff to ensure his numbers look good, or refuses to let staff leave early to catch their child’s school concert. And then we see how many of that manager’s staff find a way to leave when they can.

We also have the stories about the great managers who realize being flexible with their staff leads to better productivity and to more loyal and devoted

ed employees. Those managers who talk frankly with employees about the demands of the job, help them learn the tools that will help them manage their workload, and know when it's time to be flexible. Those managers also know you have other priorities in your life that should take the lead at certain times in your life. Those managers and companies know that helping employees be healthy and reduce their stress works out better for the company – and the employee – in the end.

Compiled in this e-book are a number of articles The Globe and Mail published online as part of the Your Life at Work Survey, the precursor to the Exceptional Workplace Award. These

columns talk about stress, coping skills and ways to examine your life and your skills to determine what you might want to learn or change. They also talk about ways that companies can look at health and wellness in a new light, in a business light, and that helping your employees be happy and able to manage their stresses will also help the company's bottom line.

Thank you for being involved with the Exceptional Workplace Award, and thank you for taking the time to complete the survey and assess your company's performance.

Sincerely,

Gillian Livingston
The Globe and Mail



SECTION 1

HOW IT ALL BEGAN



Survey: How's your life at work?

Take our Your Life at Work Survey and find out what's stressing you out, whether you're coping and what to do if you aren't

By Bill Howatt and Gillian Livingston

Welcome to The Globe and Mail's [Your Life at Work Survey](#), done in conjunction with Howatt HR Consulting. Click here to [take our survey](#), measure your stress levels, find out your Quality of Work Life (QWL) score and determine whether you're able to cope. The scenario below will help to explain why we are launching this survey:

Kristine, a manager at the ABC factory, walks past Jack and says, "Good night, Jack. Have a good one."

Jack puts his head down and grunts, "Ah, another exhausting shift. You managers are too demanding," and shuffles out the door, looking weary and exhausted.

Kristine then turns and notices Jill, who pleasantly meets her gaze with a big smile. Kristine repeats her goodwill gesture, "Good night, Jill. Have a good one." Jill continues to smile, head up, and says, "Thank you. And you have a wonderful night, too." She leaves the building with a bounce in her step.

Kristine wonders how it is possible that shift partners Jack and Jill have such different outlooks in the same

workplace. Kristine guesses that, on his employee engagement survey, Jack most likely reported a lack of trust between management and employees, poor communication and high work demand. She further assumes, based on her experience with Jack, that his current level of job satisfaction is low.

For Jill, Kristine predicts that she may have some concerns about management communication and at times agrees with Jack that workload demands are high. But she is convinced that Jill's job satisfaction score is higher. Kristine is interested in keeping her employees happy and cares about their health. However, she feels perplexed and can't explain the difference in attitude between Jack and Jill.

Employee engagement surveys help managers like Kristine to understand the most prominent job stressors their staff face and the current level of their engagement. A low engagement score often results in senior management demanding their managers improve these scores – but they don't say how those managers can make this happen.

How does a manager make an employee like Jack feel better about work?

Many employees may know they are unhappy, but they may not know what they need to change – or ask from their employers – to improve their life at work.

There is lots of evidence that shows there is a link between an employee's health and their productivity. But most engagement surveys simply do not provide any insight into the difference in coping skills between Jack and Jill, and how that is affecting their health. In the case of Jack, his current health risk – both physically (such as high blood pressure) and psychologically (such as addiction) – would not be assessed.

For managers like Kristine, who are truly interested in the health and well-being of their employees – knowing that the health of the staff can have an impact on the company's bottom line – there is a new tool that looks beyond solely whether an employee is engaged at work or not.

This new tool not only measures what employees are stressed by at work and whether they are engaged; it also measures employees' health and coping skills.

It also lets employees gauge how effective their coping skills are, and where they stand in comparison to other employees across Canada.

Welcome to The Globe and Mail's Your Work at Life Survey, done in conjunction with Howatt HR Consulting, led by Bill Howatt.

This survey takes a look at four themes that affect your life at work: what causes you stress; what's the effect of that stress on you and your health; how you cope or don't cope with that stress; and how do these factors influence your commitment to your job and your organization.

The four themes come together in our Quality of Work Life (QWL) Risk score: The higher your score on the risk index, the greater your risk for a slew of health-related issues.

This survey will help managers to understand the differences between employees and provide insight into how they cope with stress that not only affects employee engagement levels but also mental and physical health. And it will let employees take stock of where they stand right now and see how their life and work stress is affecting them.

There is ample literature that supports the correlation between stress and health. Employees experiencing higher levels of stress are less likely to be engaged and perform at their full potential each day at work. Just type into Google the term "presenteeism" and you'll discover what it costs employers if their staff members arrive at

work not feeling healthy and ready to work.

So who are you? Are you a Jack or are you a Jill? Do you know why? And, do you want to change?

Take our [Your Life at Work Survey](#) and see where you stand. Then check out our [infographic that tells you what your QWL score means](#).

[Watch a video](#) of Bill Howatt explaining the survey and our goals.

Employers can take our Employer version of the survey to rate their employees' stress and coping skills. Employers can also download and fill out our Cost of Doing Nothing Calculator to gauge how much it costs if their employees aren't coming to work ready to give it their all.

[Watch a video](#) of Bill Howatt explaining the survey and our goals. Click [here](#) to get a list of ways to help reduce your stress.

What can a manager do to help an unhappy employee?

The Globe's Your Life at Work Survey examines employees' coping skills and what both employees and employers can do to make life at work better

By Bill Howatt and Gillian Livingston

On her way home from work, Kristine was thinking about her last conversation with Jack and Jill. She was pondering the question: Why does Jack see the world differently than Jill?

When she got home, she read online about The Globe and Mail's national study, the [Your Life at Work Survey](#). The study's purpose is to create a conversation about what employers and employees can do to improve employees' work life. A lot of research suggests that many employees are struggling with workplace issues. Health risks are mounting for employees, and employers are experiencing lost productivity that hurts their bottom line.

Kristine knows that employers can take some responsibility for making employees like Jack happy. But some employees also need to develop better coping skills.

The next morning, Kristine asked Jack whether she could speak with him. She decided that honesty was the best approach.

"Jack, I care about you as an employee and I want to see you as happy and engaged as possible in your current role," she said.

"I have noticed that at the end of the shift, another employee, who works in the same area as you, typically is much happier than you. This employee doesn't appear stressed, but you seem down and tense. I've been asking myself why this is and what can we do to help."

Jack paused, staring at his feet. "You're talking about Jill, aren't you? I wish I knew. She really is a nice person and a joy to work with. She's always happy. I often hope her happiness would rub off on me. I can't imagine how badly I'd feel if she were not around. I'm having a hard time coping with my work, and all the people and politics of this place."

Kristine could see that Jack was becoming emotional, so she redirected the conversation.

"Jack, I read something interesting online last night. It's The Globe's

[Your Life at Work Survey](#). They have an online tool, called the Employee QWL Risk Index. You can get your own quality of work life score. Kind of like your blood pressure, the higher it is, the greater your health risk. They also have some coaching tools, along with articles for helping employees and employers think about what they can do differently.

“Would you be open to discovering what your Quality of Work Life Risk score is? Would you print it off and bring it in? This will have nothing to do with your performance results or with your job. It’s just a way for us to talk about what you can do to improve your work life and what I can do as your manager to support you. Your results will be kept confidential, I don’t want a copy. I just want to talk. What do you think, Jack?” she asked.

Jack sat still for a moment so Kristine continued.

“Here’s why I believe this. The more I’m reading about employees’ life at work, what results in employee happiness is becoming clearer to me. For example, employees like Jill have developed a set of coping skills that work for them. Those who don’t have those skills often feel chronic stress that can mean they feel less engaged in their work and, more importantly, are more likely to suffer from psychological or physical health risks.

“The body can only handle so much stress before it risks breaking. When a person is unhappy, they often look for a way to get away from that pain – by eating too much, for example. But if we work together, we can create a plan. I can only support you with the workplace issues. But if there are issues in your personal life that you need help with, we have a great employee assistance program. Experts can help you learn new skills, if that’s what’s needed.

“As your manager, I would so much enjoy seeing you happier at the end of the day. The fact is, you are a productive employee whom we value. However, if you were happier, I can’t help but believe that this would benefit you as a person, both here and at home. Jack, people are our most valuable resource, and we care about our employees.”

Jack lifted his head and looked Kristine in the eyes. “Thank you. You’re right. I have been going to the pub after work and staying there a bit longer. It’s not making things better; it’s costing me more money and creating stress with my wife. I’ll go online and do the survey. And I’ll talk to my wife about this.”

Kristine knew she had some momentum. “Okay, Jack. Bring your survey in first thing tomorrow and we’ll make a plan. Okay?”

Jack left the office with more steam

than when he came in. Kristine had made a key discovery. Most people would like to be happy if they knew or believed they could. Jack was leaving with this possibility in mind. The next step was to help him get the skills he needed to maintain this positive thinking.

When you're unhappy, what motivates you to make a change?

Employees know they are unhappy, but they don't know the steps to take to make a change for the better

By Bill Howatt

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Jack has been on track for several weeks now and continues to work on his new lifestyle habits. For the first time in years, he noticed on his morning drive that he felt okay going to work. As he pulled into his parking spot he thought to himself, "Why has it taken me so long to do something? It was not that hard to make some changes that made me feel better."

Jack was frustrated with himself and was grieving lost time and opportunities. What he was experiencing is quite normal, as grieving is a part of the change process of coming to terms with your past in order to embrace the future.

When he got to work, Jack asked his happy co-worker, Jill, why she thought it had taken him so long to take action, thinking she might have an educated view since her husband, Jim, is an employee assistance counsellor.

"Why do you think people like me, who know they are not happy, simply don't take action to feel better?" he asked her.

"I always knew I was unhappy, but for whatever reason I must have resisted change. My wife, Sally, has told me for years that I need to do something different. I'm not ashamed to say that after a few employee assistance sessions, my situation did not seem so confusing. My counsellor helped me evaluate what I want against what I was doing and to make a plan. Today I noticed for the first time in a long time that I felt okay. So I'm a bit frustrated with myself."

Jill smiled and said, "I understand,



Jack. My husband and I have talked about why people keep doing things that they know are not in their best interest over the long term.”

She said her husband had explained to her about five stages of change.

Jill went to a whiteboard and drew out the five stages. She reviewed each of them and when she got to the contemplation stage, she said that Jim has made it clear that this is a sticking point for many.

The five stages of change

1. Pre-contemplation: This stage is about avoidance, the person does not accept that there is a problem.
2. Contemplation: This stage is about acknowledgement. The person knows there is a problem and starts thinking about the pros and cons of making a change.
3. Preparation: The person starts thinking about making a change, making plans, and thinking about what their life could be like if they changed.
4. Action: The person starts to practise and engage in new behaviours.
5. Maintenance: The person has been practising new behaviours for at least six months and so new habits are being established, which means

there is less risk for relapse.

Jill said many unhappy people stay in the contemplation stage because they haven’t found the motivation to change, or they don’t believe they can change. “The root cause of this belief often is under-developed coping skills. As a result, they repeat old habits, regardless of the risk,” she said

People also have to commit to changing their old habits and starting better ones to replace them.

“People often resist change for no reason, even if it doesn’t make sense to an onlooker. Many people continue with habits that they know are not good for them – like overeating – but do so because they make them feel better at the time,” she said.

“In the early stages, the stakes are high because if the new habit doesn’t meet the person’s needs, they are at risk of relapsing to the old one,” she added.

Jack took it all in. “I certainly want to be sure I get a plan in place so that I don’t relapse to where I was. I may have a ways to go to be as happy as you, Jill, but I am a lot closer today than I was a month ago.”

“I’m glad you’ve made a change for the better, Jack,” Jill replied. “I have learned a great deal from listening to Jim over the years, and when you break it down, life is pretty simple: What we think will define what we do.”

Is coping with work stress good enough?

There's a big difference between being okay and being happy. But better coping skills can help you get there

By Bill Howatt and Gillian Livingston

A few weeks have passed since factory manager Kristine had her breakthrough with her stressed-out employee, Jack, and he appeared to be more open when talking with her.

One evening, as they were leaving work, Jack stopped to talk. "Kristine, I know I have been struggling at work and I understand that constant stress is putting my health at risk. I'm sure I can benefit by learning how to take more responsibility for my health and happiness. But I had a question. What percentage of our work force do you think is happy?"

Kristine pondered the question and told Jack that she'd have to think about her answer.

She decided to do an informal survey of her staff, so she created a survey with five choices and asked employees to estimate where they fell on the scale.

- Happy – confident and calm most days.
- Okay – content and getting through the day; aware of the

challenges and pressures and pushing hard to meet life's demands.

- Dealing with chronic stress – under pressure, feeling stressed and worried about keeping up.
- On the verge of cracking – having a difficult time coping; feeling very stressed by work and life.
- Dealing with mental disorders – have sought out help from professionals.

She asked employees to fill out her



survey anonymously. This informal survey was insightful and provided some interesting findings:

- Happy – 10 per cent
- Okay – 50 per cent
- Chronic strain – 20 per cent
- Ready to crack – 15 per cent
- Mental disorders – 10 per cent

As Kristine reflected on the results, what jumped off the page was the large percentage of employees who reported they were just okay.

When she met with Jack, they talked about what being okay means. They wondered why more employees thought they were okay but not happy. They wondered whether one factor might be the pressure of balancing life at home and at work.

Kristine thought that perhaps people who are okay spend more time focused on avoiding stress and reducing life pressures. She added that perhaps this group spends the majority of their energy just getting through the day and don't have much energy or time for personal fun. She wondered what may be preventing them from adding more happiness to their lives.

Kristine suggested to Jack that being okay may be fine, but it is not being happy. "I wonder how many employees in this position struggle with their coping skills," she said.

Our survey results so far

Here are the findings following the first month of collecting data from The Globe and Mail's [Your Life at Work Survey](#), which began February, 2014. At that point, 2,800 participants had completed the survey:

- 62 per cent reported their workplace is stressful.
- 47 per cent said there is little trust between employees and management.
- 65 per cent stated they are worriers.
- 61 per cent found they cannot leave work at work.
- 25 per cent said they cannot balance their work and personal life.
- 70 per cent said they often feel exhausted.

What became evident is that those individuals whose responses indicate that they have strong coping skills also show lower stress levels, lower health risk and higher productivity and engagement.

So perhaps one of the keys for employees who report they are just doing okay is to improve their coping skills. But to do so, they need to be motivated to take action.

The evidence so far shows that employees who are just okay are not happy. In fact, they are more at risk for experiencing stress and health-related issues.

Survey says: We're stressed (and not loving it)

The Globe's Your Life at Work Survey found workers with greater levels of stress are less able to cope, less productive and call in sick more often

By Gillian Livingston

It's official: Most of us are feeling stressed at work these days. Worse, we're having trouble coping.

More than half of workers polled by The Globe and Mail in an extensive, year-long-running [online survey](#), from February, 2014, to the end of January, 2015, said they felt overwhelmed trying to balance the heavy demands of work with their personal lives, a situation many respondents said had caused them to feel ill and miss work.

Fifty-nine per cent of the 7,300 respondents to the [Your Life at Work Survey](#), launched in February, 2014, by Globe Careers and Howatt HR Consulting, reported feeling stressed and on edge, and said they felt unable to manage the pressures of their work and private lives.

Of the respondents, 67 per cent said their current job expectations are too demanding, 60 per cent reported little trust between employees and management at their workplace, and 56 per cent said their workplace culture isn't positive.

The survey, comprising more than 80 questions, found that those who said they felt the most stressed also indicated they did not have strong coping skills to help them manage such pressure. Stressed workers said they were less engaged at work, and that they put in less effort, hurting their productivity. They also called in sick more often, or went to work feeling ill.

Stressed staff members were also more likely to deal with the pressure in harmful ways, such as overeating, drinking alcohol, gambling or using illegal drugs. They reported more health problems and were more likely to be overweight.

On the flip side, those who felt their stress was under control showed they had stronger coping skills, were more engaged in their work, felt more fulfilled, were more productive and had fewer health issues.

Bill Howatt, president of Howatt HR Consulting in Kentville, N.S., said he was surprised by the sheer number

of people who felt stressed and “were clearly struggling and were looking for answers.”

“People are looking for help to improve their coping skills,” he said in an interview.

While society emphasizes being physically fit and healthy, “we have not spent any time teaching people how to make decisions and solve problems,” he said. “We’ve not taught psychological fitness.”

Those who took the Your Life at Work Survey were given a Quality of Work Life (QWL) score that placed them in one of five categories: Those with the least amount of stress fell into the Calm category, followed by Okay; Frustrated; On the Edge; and Losing It – those who reported the highest stress levels.

In the Calm category, there were 744 respondents, and this is what their profile looked like:

- 26 per cent were senior managers or executives.
- 85 per cent had a university degree.
- 52 per cent had an annual income of \$79,000 or more.
- 96 per cent said they put 80 per cent or more effort into their job each day.
- 7 per cent said they had no job

flexibility.

- 2 per cent reported they suffered from a mental-health issue.
- 16 per cent said they called in sick more than four days a year.
- 27 per cent said they would come to work even when feeling ill more than twice a year.

In comparison, the Losing It group – the most highly stressed workers – had 1,794 respondents, and this is what their profile looked like:

- 9 per cent were senior managers or executives.
- 75 per cent had a university degree or higher.
- 40 per cent made \$79,000 or more annually.
- 52 per cent said they put in 80 per cent or more effort into their job each day.
- 24 per cent said they had no job flexibility.
- 4 per cent reported they suffered from a mental-health issue.
- 48 per cent said they called in sick more than four days a year.
- 80 per cent said they would come to work even when feeling ill more than twice a year.

This group found their work stressful, said their employers’ expectations

were too demanding, that they didn't have the tools to do their job, that they weren't a good fit for their role and that their work culture wasn't positive.

They were also more likely to say that work was having a negative impact on their family life and their health, that they had trouble leaving work at work, had difficulty sleeping and suffered from headaches. They were also more likely to say they worried a lot, and weren't able to bounce back after a tough day at work. The majority of this group said they'd leave their organization if they could and felt they did not get adequate feedback on their performance.

It's not surprising that an individual's coping skills are a major factor in their happiness and productivity, said Dr. Matthew Burnstein, a Toronto-based family physician and occupational health consultant who previously worked with Bell Aliant in Atlantic Canada.

Relentless stress wears on people, and over time can lead to an array of physical and mental-health problems, including obesity, diabetes, anxiety and depression, and that can mean higher health costs for companies, he said.

Many employers don't want to acknowledge an individual's health problems, and often wait for an employee to have a crisis before offering

services through employee assistance plans. But progressive companies and health insurers are teaching managers to recognize when an employee is struggling and to get their workers help before a problem becomes unmanageable.

"There's a movement in that direction," he said. "But at the end of the day, an individual needs to want to change their behaviour and needs to recognize that part of the responsibility falls on their shoulders to improve their coping skills."

Read Tavia Grant's story on [the issue of work, stress and mental health](#), sparked by our survey. Take The Globe's [Your Life at Work Survey](#), find the full results of the 2014 survey and look at all our resources online at tgam.ca/yourlifeatwork.

SECTION 2

WHY KNOWING HOW TO COPE MATTERS



Are we facing a coping crisis?

How well we cope with stress can affect our mental and physical health

By Bill Howatt

Do you ever worry about how effectively you're coping with your life demands?

For the vast majority of the population, the answer is yes. Typically, how a person is coping with the demands of their life and work defines the amount of stress they have. For most people, feeling stressed is viewed as a negative and something they don't want. Rarely will someone state that stress is good for them.

Coping with stress is a common challenge for many people. Stress can leave them feeling overwhelmed and powerless with no options for relief. If the stress continues, so does the risk associated with chronic stress, such as creating or exacerbating mental-health issues.

How someone copes with their daily stress load can define their mental and physical health. Mental illness is being reported as a growing problem in Canada. Are we experiencing a mental-health crisis? Perhaps a better question is: Why is mental illness on the rise here?

Genetics plays a key role in mental

illness, but mental-health can also be influenced by psychosocial life stressors triggered by problems with finances, relationships or work.

Individuals caught in a cycle of ongoing stress are at greater risk for mental-health issues. Consider the case of a worker we'll call Sam. His No. 1 stressor is work, where he has a poor relationship with his manager. Sam believes that his manager's expectations are unrealistic and as a result feels overwhelmed every day. It's common for Sam to leave work thinking about the day's events, so his work stress is having a negative impact on his feelings, physiology and his thinking even after the workday has ended.

Sam goes home each evening feeling stressed. Over time he has developed an unhealthy routine to cope. He sits in front of his TV for hours, eating junk food. As a result, this 43-year-old's health has suffered both physically and mentally.

Sam is not atypical. It's common for people to engage in unhealthy behaviour as an attempt to escape from the pain associated with stress, such

as unhealthy eating, using alcohol or drugs, gambling or other escape mechanisms. The tragedy for Sam is that he is unaware that what he has chosen to do in order to improve how he feels has resulted in his current situation.

Sam hasn't thought to address his workload issue with his manager, or let his manager know how he feels, instead keeping those thoughts to himself. He finds any stress hard to manage, but hasn't tried to find ways to improve his coping mechanisms.

It is important to point out that workplace environmental stressors can be a major cause for employee stress. Stress from work managers is real. Employers can take actions to reduce environmental stressors, such as hiring the right managers who will evaluate the workload to keep it manageable and pay attention to how their employees are handling work. Employers can also help employees like Sam develop their coping skills so they are better equipped to address issues at work with managers.

I have worked with many people like Sam in a clinical setting. My role as a professional therapist is to help people learn how to better cope with their life stressors or mental-health challenges. My main regret is that they too often fail to seek out support until there is a crisis.

What if a person like Sam got sup-

port early and had an opportunity to develop his coping skills? The skills that would give him confidence to address issues at both his work and personal life? How many Sams could be positively influenced?

Could we be experiencing a coping crisis, rather than a mental-health crisis? What is clear is that many people are struggling with stress and, if they could cope better, there would be less risk to their health.

We know that people who don't cope well with stress are more at risk for experiencing mental and physical health issues. Through the [Your Life at Work](#) Survey, done by Howatt HR Consulting and The Globe and Mail, we found that coping skills play a positive role in predicting employees' work engagement and health. The survey of more than 7,000 people found that those with better coping skills were happier with their jobs and experienced fewer physical and mental-health issues.

As a society, we teach people how to read and write but we have yet to formally teach people how to think and cope with the stress we all face in all facets of our lives. If more organizations and employees focused on improving their coping skills, this could help generate more discussion on their benefits.

This is the topic of my book, *The Coping Crisis: Discover why coping skills are*

required for a healthy and fulfilling life.
The purpose of this book is to provide workers with an introduction to coping skills and how they play a role in a person's total health. The more we focus on prevention and helping employees to develop their coping skills, the better employees will be able to manage their daily stressors.

Between February, 2014, and September, 2015, more than 12,000 people across Canada and beyond have engaged in our Your Life at Work Surveys – on work, life and family stress. Each survey provides insight on coping skills.

Are you struggling to cope with the stress of work and life?

Depression can arise when you are unable to cope with stress, and with that can come other diseases

By Bill Howatt

Sally is an average employee in a middle-management role, struggling to cope with the demands of her employer and employees. She often leaves work feeling exhausted and mentally drained. She feels depressed most days as well.

To deal with stress, Sally seeks comfort in food. Caught in the cycle of work-stress-cope-with-food, within a few years Sally put 40 pounds onto her once 110-pound, 5-foot-1 frame. She is so sapped of energy at the end of the day that her activity and fitness level is low and, at 48 years of age, she's a walking health risk.

Already, Sally has developed diabetes. During a recent medical exam, her doctor found her blood pressure was high and prescribed medication. When she told him that she has also been struggling with stress and depression, he gave her some recommendations and suggested that if nothing improved in a couple of weeks, they would explore medication for her depression.

Sally's food-coping mechanism not only leads to obesity but makes her three times more likely to develop diabetes.

Her case is typical and happens to many people. They don't realize how their lack of coping skills and resulting behaviours directly affect their quality of life.

Employees are influenced by the way they choose to cope with the demands of their job and life. Stress happens, but its effects depend on how people deal with it.

[The Heart and Stroke Foundation](#) reports that about 2.5 million Canadians were diagnosed with diabetes in 2010. It estimated that 90 to 95 per cent of people with diabetes have Type 2 diabetes. The World Health Organization suggests that 80 per cent of all diabetes cases could be avoided by ensuring people had healthier lifestyles. In addition, employees with diabetes can cost employers two to three times that of a healthy employee in drug costs alone.

The [Canadian Diabetes Association](#) says the economic burden of diabetes in Canada is expected to rise from about \$12.2-billion in 2010 to \$17-billion by 2020.

Sally's lifestyle choices are a factor in her developing diabetes. And like many diabetics, she has comorbidity, which means having one or more health disorders at the same time.

Employers cannot control how their employees think, but every employee has a role to ensure their own health and happiness. However, improving experiences at work requires the commitment of both employers and employees.

What employees think influences what they do. Our findings so far from the Howatt HR Consulting and The Globe and Mail's [Your Life at Work Survey](#) found that coping skills are a lead indicator for predicting employee productivity, engagement and health. Our study has found that workers with strong coping skills are more productive, more engaged in their work and healthier.

Employees like Sally benefit from learning how to cope with the stress of life and work so they can change their habits and eat healthy, be active and exercise, stop smoking, lose weight and reduce their reliance on medication.

For Sally's employer, the cost of do-

ing nothing to help Sally reduce her stress at work is not only the burden of health expenses. Since she has multiple health issues, she is more at risk for short-term illness claims, long-term disability claims, absenteeism and presenteeism – being at work but not performing to her potential.

Leaders should ask the tough questions and dig into the tangible and intangible costs of doing nothing to help their employees cope with stress. (See our [Cost of Doing Nothing Calculator](#).)

Health starts with self-awareness, education and choices. Take our [survey](#) today and determine your stress level and ability to cope, as this will influence both your health and your job satisfaction.

How employees can learn to cope with stress

Those feeling overwhelmed can take concrete steps to boost their ability to cope

By Gillian Livingston

Dealing with ever-increasing demands at work while juggling responsibilities at home is enough to send some employees over the edge.

While employers play a key role in helping their staff to deal with stress at work, employees must also bear some responsibility for their health, experts say. Employees need to evaluate their personal levels of stress and find ways to tone them down if they're feeling overwhelmed.

There are four pillars of health – mental, physical, financial and career – that each person needs to keep in balance, said Stephen Liptrap, executive vice-president of Toronto-based Morneau Shepell and general manager of Shepell, a global provider of EAP programs.

“We find that if two of those four areas are in negative territory, it's really going to impact the person, and they miss work and really drop down in productivity,” he said.

Another way to help manage stress is to build up your resilience so you are

better able to handle day-to-day blows and major setbacks, said Dr. Marie-Hélène Pelletier, director of workplace mental-health group benefits at Sun Life Financial.

She suggests people take concrete steps, such as exercising, eating properly and spending time in nature – away from the hustle of the city – to help them build resilience, or the “ability to bounce back.” If you have resilience, then you have more psychological wellness and then “when something hits us, we won't dip as far,”



she said.

Many company employee assistance programs have tools you can use to help you rate your health, Mr. Liptrap said. Morneau Shepell, for instance, has [online tools](#) and a smartphone app called [My EAP](#). The program takes you through a series of questions to help you find those areas of your life that are causing you stress.

In addition, you can take The Globe and Mail's [Your Life at Work Survey](#) to get your [Quality of Work Life score](#), see how you fare and [find ways to reduce your stress](#).

Once you know where you need help, such as with your finances or another area of your life, then you can use the resources provided by your company EAP to get the help you need, such as assistance from a counsellor or a financial planner.

Three steps to reduce stress

Mr. Liptrap and Ms. Pelletier offered the following three suggestions for managing day-to-day stress.

1. Learn tactics to reduce stress

If your stress level is too high and you feel you have too much to do, make a list of all your tasks, Mr. Liptrap said, especially if you're feeling overwhelmed by a large project.

"Break it into smaller chunks. That really reduces anxiety," he said. "Then

start knocking off those little tasks, one at a time."

Slowing down and taking deep belly breaths – a technique used in yoga – is a great way to calm yourself when you're feeling anxious, Ms. Pelletier said.

2. Deal immediately with a tough task

Don't put off a difficult task, such as talking to a colleague or your manager about a challenge, Ms. Pelletier said.

"We make stress worse by what we think in our head," she said. "Look at the full picture realistically; don't think of the catastrophe."

3. Know when to ask for help

If you're feeling overwhelmed and aren't sure what to do, "don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help," Mr. Liptrap said.

People shouldn't "feel bad" about reaching out to counsellors at their company's EAP, whether they're a student feeling the anxiety of exams or an employee overwhelmed by work and life, he said.

"People keep those things bottled up and then that ends up blowing up later," he said.

To build up your resilience, you need to aim to follow these seven steps on a weekly basis to help you cope for the long term, Ms. Pelletier said.

The seven steps to build resilience

1. Exercise

Doing cardio, weight training and yoga can help you build your strength and allow you to calm your breathing when you're stressed, Ms. Pelletier said.

To start, go for a half-hour walk every day, Mr. Liptrap said. "If you're feeling stressed, go for that walk at lunch."

In addition, arrange walking meetings, or use pedometers and get colleagues to compete for who can walk the most steps each week, he said.

"All of those [actions] help to reduce the stress of the individual and increase productivity," he said.

2. Eat right

"We all know what needs to be on our plate," Ms. Pelletier said. "But it's not easy." There are so many temptations to eat food that's not the most nutritious, she added.

3. Get enough sleep

Good-quality sleep is key, she says. "We need to invest in our sleep." Everything is harder if we're running low on sleep, she says.

4. Spend time with friends and family

Make an effort to spend time with your family and try to go for coffee or

lunch with a friend once a week, she said.

5. Spend time in nature

When we spend time outdoors in the quiet of nature, it gives us a reprieve from the busyness of life and allows us a chance to refocus, she said.

6. Focus on spirituality

Whether through organized religion or simply time spent contemplating life, give yourself a chance to stop and think, she said.

7. Be involved with your community

Helping others really does help us to feel better about ourselves and builds our resilience, she said.

How to become a coping skills master

You need to find where you stand now, then look for where there are gaps in your coping skills

By Bill Howatt

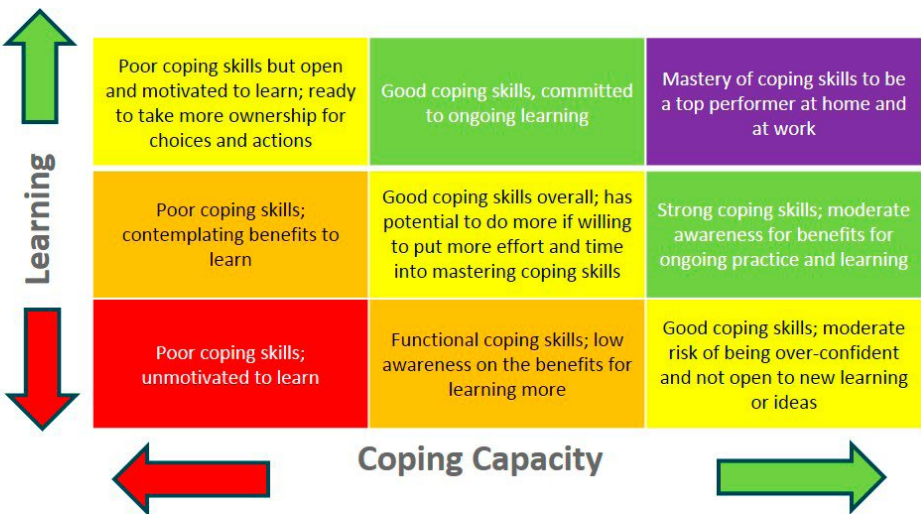
Coping skills are the skills you have at your immediate disposal to solve problems and make decisions under pressure. The better you have developed your coping skills, the better you will be able to perform under pressure, manage emotions, push through setbacks and believe in your potential. You will also be less likely to be negatively affected by environmental stressors.

Developing coping skills, which include problem solving, emotional in-

telligence and resiliency, can help you better manage your stress load. Your level of coping skills mastery can predict how effectively you will perform both at home and at work.

Learning coping skills is like acquiring any other skill; it requires attention and effort. Malcolm Gladwell, in [Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking](#), shared his research that suggests that mastering a new skill takes 10 years, and that there are no shortcuts or flukes. Since the education sys-

Learning – refers to one's motivation and openness to take responsibility for their actions and skill set.



Coping Capacity – refers to one's coping skills to be a top performer at work and at home.

tem has not yet included coping skills as core competencies students should learn, many adults have skills gaps. The good news is that coping skills can be taught through traditional classroom instruction, [online learning](#), coaching, reading, self-study, online digital coaching and mentoring.

To obtain a baseline of your coping skills, go to the [Your Life at Work Survey](#) found on The Globe and Mail website. This tool provides instant feedback on your coping skills as well as your overall quality of life score. Having insight into your coping skills is a positive first step.

Once you get your baseline, the next step is to determine where you fit in the Nine Boxes for Mastering Coping Skills Matrix. See the figure included in [this link](#). Awareness is an important first step. The next step is accountability. Developing coping skills requires motivation and a desire to learn. U.S. business consultant Jim Collins taught the world in his landmark book, [Good to Great](#), that good can be the evil to great. When evaluating yourself on the matrix, consider whether you are coping as well as you would like to in all situations in your life.

With insight on your baseline for your level of coping skills, you are now in a position to consider whether you are motivated to take action.

Employers can facilitate opportu-

nities for employees to learn coping skills, and employees can ask for support. Employers can also eliminate unnecessary environmental stressors to help employees to cope better. This interaction is a two-way accountability model where both employees and employers take responsibility for what they can directly control.

Every healthy employee has a life outside of work that will require attention and energy. Coping with work is one piece. For many, managing the demands of home and work can be challenging.

In a study conducted with The Globe and Mail with over 2,000 respondents to the [Are You Satisfied With Your Life](#) survey, there have been some interesting findings with respect to respondents' reported satisfaction with their current job function, work relationships, personal relationships, financial stability, physical health, managing demands of home and work, and engaging in community, recreation and social activities. The survey found a positive correlation between coping skills and these outcomes. These results suggest that the higher a person's coping skills, the more likely they are to be satisfied with these areas of their life.

This statistic does not tell why a person is confident. Similar to coping skills, many people are not taught how

to have a healthy and loving relationship, manage money, get along with peers at work and engage in their community.

Think about the new manager who one day is on the floor as a top performer with proven coping skills and then the next day is promoted to a frontline manager position. Within a month, the new manager is struggling, stressed out and failing. The root cause may not be a lack of coping skills; it may be that he never learned how to have a difficult conversation, run a meeting or delegate responsibility. He hadn't been taught the right skills in order to manage people – which he is now being asked to do – and this caused stress.

The ability to cope effectively with life often can be linked to a person's personal core competencies. These are the knowledge, skills and abilities you develop to effectively interact in your environment. Having developed cognitive coping skills will support your mental health and your ability to make good decisions. It will also help you understand development gaps that need your attention.

One way to evaluate yourself in several critical personal core competencies is to complete the following [worksheet](#) to rate the degree of confidence you have in each of the seven areas and then calculate your overall

average.

Improving any of these personal core competencies requires knowledge, skills and practise. Every individual's happiness will ultimately be defined by how well they manage their entire life. Developing coping skills is important, as is developing core life skills competencies that influence overall fulfillment and happiness. It's never too late to gain knowledge and learn skills that can help improve success in each of the core competencies.

In summary, get a coping skills baseline, determine how motivated you are to learn and evaluate whether there are areas of your life where you have core life skills gaps. By paying attention to these three levels and taking action, you can greatly improve your overall mental health and happiness.

What's your emotional IQ?

Being able to manage your emotions when you're under pressure can be a challenge

By Bill Howatt

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Have you ever been in what appeared to be a loving conversation that went to one that felt like hate – all within seconds? Most of us can relate to the powerful emotional swings that can happen in an intimate relationship. People who struggle in relationships often are unaware of how these types of moments sneak up on them or what they can do to prevent them.

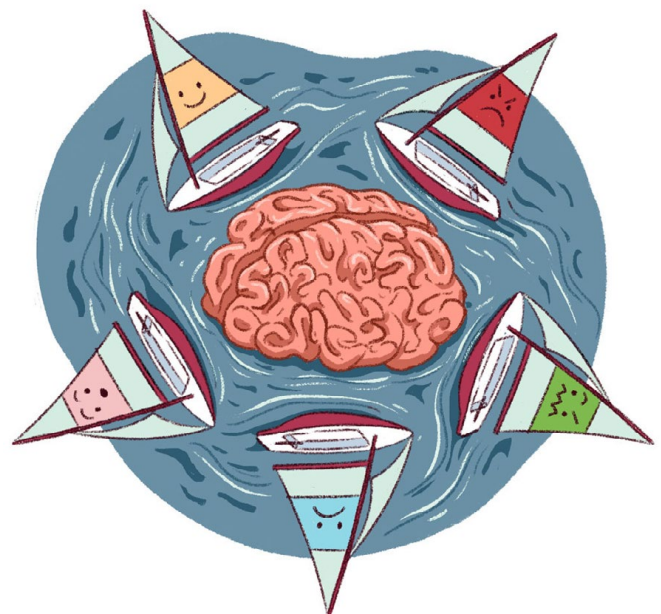
In the above example, at some level, one or both people perceived some type of threat. Whenever this happens there is a powerful survival mechanism called the [fight-or-flight response](#) that fires off. Designed to protect human beings from danger, it's automatic and often brings powerful emotions that can be perceived as being negative – which can immediately disrupt the flow of a loving relationship.

One challenge with the fight-or-flight response, as taught by Daniel Goleman in his landmark book called [Emotional Intelligence](#), is how this response can short-circuit a person's cognitive decision making. The re-

sponse results in emotional decision making that can lead to overreaction and poor decisions.

This is demonstrated by disruptive behaviours such as saying things you don't mean, making kneejerk decisions that you regret later and damaging an important relationship due to your inability to control your emotions.

At its core, emotional intelligence teaches the health benefits of paying attention to others' feelings, monitoring how your behaviour affects others'



emotions and developing the ability to manage your emotions under pressure. Mr. Goleman's work postulated that for life success, happiness and health, emotional intelligence is perhaps more important than your IQ. Watch [Mr. Goleman's introduction](#) to EQ.

In the [Your Life at Work](#) Survey by The Globe and Howatt HR Consulting, we have been exploring the effect that coping skills have on employees' overall health, engagement and productivity.

This article introduces the role of EQ and its value in developing coping skills. Many skills collectively define coping skills. One way to understand the importance of EQ is to liken it to golf putting. One of the most important and hardest golf skills to master is putting, and it is needed to score well. To score well in life, you need to be able to manage your EQ effectively.

The first step to maturing your EQ is developing self-awareness. This [EQ Quick Survey](#) provides a way to establish a benchmark as to where you are today to help you become engaged in the benefits of developing your EQ.

EQ is a trainable skill that requires self-discipline and practise. You can read helpful books like [Emotional Intelligence 2.0](#) or take courses on EQ. Following are three quick coaching tips for developing your EQ:

1. Start a daily EQ log

Track the number of hours each day you have positive feelings for yourself and others, as well as negative feelings. To learn to better manage your emotions, it's valuable to know how many hours a day, on average, you are feeling positive or negative, and the kinds of situations that trigger those emotions. The objective is to become aware of your emotions objectively with respect to how much weight you put on positive and negative emotions.

2. Evaluating your intentions

When you interact with people who you regularly feel you struggle with, ask yourself, "What are my intentions and why am I being negative?" Some people, when frustrated with another person, allow their emotions to blind them and they get caught in an automatic cycle of negativity. Breaking this cycle starts with awareness, owning your behaviour and being honest with yourself and your intentions. Ultimately, negative thinking can lead to negative feelings that can influence your mental health. The objective is to challenge your intentions and values with respect to the kind of person you want to be and how you want to treat others regardless of differences.

3. Practise breaking your negative thinking

When you feel negative about a person or situation, stop and ask yourself, “Why am I feeling this way?” Write out your response. If you don’t know, write that down and keep trying to figure it out. At the core is often some unrealistic expectation that when it is not met, you can become hard on yourself or others. A key to managing emotions is to learn how to be realistic with yourself. When in doubt, ask a trusted adviser. Acknowledging what you have that is good in life and giving yourself a break can help you learn to be kinder to yourself and others. This does not suggest that you should not set goals and expectations; the point is to not have them rule your emotions.

Do you have the coping skills to stick to your resolutions?

Changing your behaviour is hard and having the right coping skills is key to your success

By Bill Howatt

Experts have warned leaders repeatedly about the increased risk of mental-health issues within the Canadian work force and how that could hurt employees' health, engagement and productivity in the coming years.

As a result, more employers are looking at ways to support and promote employees' mental health. They recognize that promoting mental health is good – not just for employees but also their organizations, because mentally healthy and happy employees are more likely to be engaged, effective and productive at work.

Today more companies are taking steps to implement a [mental-health strategy](#) to reduce mental-health risk. Such strategies often include:

- creating a mental-health policy;
- providing managers with mental-health training;
- educating the work force on mental-health issues;
- providing employees access to

employee and family assistance programs;

- exploring what the employer can do to reduce external stressors (such as bullying or ineffective managers);
- providing employees an opportunity to self-evaluate their mental health and coping skills.

Coping skills are the tools a person has at their disposal to manage the demands they put on themselves or that originate from their environment. How effectively a person deals with such stressful demands ultimately depends on the person's ability to cope with relationships and work.

I have written on the positive benefits of coping skills in [an online article](#) and a book, *The Coping Crisis*. My motivation is to promote the benefits for employers to do what they can to reduce environmental stressors and to help employees develop their coping skills.

Many Canadian workers have never

been taught coping skills such as problem solving, decision making, emotional regulation and resiliency. Coping skills also include intrapersonal skills that support mental health and self-esteem, which are at the core of a person's ability to positively evaluate their self-worth and to believe in their ability to achieve their goals.

This article introduces a concept called "the coping skills conundrum." It starts with knowing where to begin and then determining the gap between where a person is currently and where they want to be. After 30 years of working in the area of mental health, I have learned that most individuals who are not coping well and are making poor choices realize it. They also know that they would benefit by learning new coping skills.

As taught by [Dr. William Glasser](#), most people with a difference between what they want and what they have perceive it as pain. When a person is experiencing a sensation of discomfort or pain, they look for a path to escape it and find pleasure. Pleasure comes in many forms, some of which may not always be in an individual's long-term best interest, such as drinking too much or overeating. The risk is that these types of behaviours become learned and automatic, with the sole intention of immediately making you feel better.

At the core of the coping conundrum is how a person manages their internal psychological pain while learning a new, healthy behaviour.

Let's take New Year's resolutions as an example. One common resolution is to lose weight. The science is simple: Burning more calories than you eat results in less body fat and weight.

So why do so many people fail at this resolution? It perhaps has less to do with motivation than awareness of how the mind works. A person can have a clear plan to lose weight, but the demands of life don't stop; stress and pressure continue to challenge your priorities and energy. It makes it that much harder to follow through and break bad habits.

The coping conundrum occurs in the time it takes to move from an old habit to a new one. A new habit can take somewhere from three to six months of focused determination to become automatic. If changing behaviour were simple, more people would achieve their New Year's resolutions.

It's all too common for people who are trying to change to relapse, as the brain automatically sends thoughts to revert to an old behaviour. During this period, learning a new habit is difficult.

When a person makes a choice to replace an old behaviour that was perceived to provide immediate relief

with a new behaviour that has not yet given any benefits, the test is to deal with the day-to-day challenges and to not act on old behaviours that can still feel like the right choice.

The path through the coping conundrum is guided by being aware of micro behaviours and delayed gratification. Gaining 30 pounds doesn't happen overnight; it takes many poor micro decisions. Losing the weight and experiencing the benefits follow the same path. If focused, on average a person will lose 1.5 pounds a week with a responsible diet and exercise plan, so it will take 20 weeks to lose 30 pounds, and perhaps another 20 weeks to ingrain this new lifestyle habit.

In the end, overcoming the coping conundrum requires a super decision. Accepting your situation and the consequences that come from short-term pleasure compared to long-term health is a powerful decision that can lock in a state of mind.

Creating change often requires tapping into your core value that enjoying health and happiness requires change and delayed gratification. In fact, some discomfort can be expected for several months before there are any noticeable benefits for the better. However, once you get through this gate, you will be through the coping conundrum.

Seven factors to boost your mental resiliency

Resiliency helps you bounce back and turn negative thoughts into more positive ones

By Bill Howatt

The basic premise of the term “survival of the fittest,” coined by English philosopher [Herbert Spencer](#), is that those species in nature that can adapt to their environment increase their ability to reproduce and continue to exist.

In the case of human beings, our path to the top of the food chain was made possible by our ability to think, not our physical dominance. We have evolved to be able to outthink the rest of the animal kingdom.

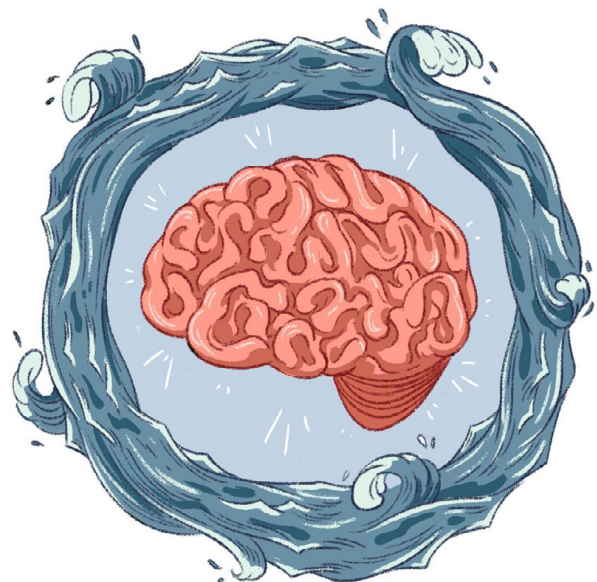
Most of us know what would happen if we picked a fight with a lion or a bear with our bare hands, but we don’t worry about fighting lions and bears every day. The big threats for many Canadians are pressure and challenges to adapt and manage the demands of work and home, along with the associated stressors.

How effectively an individual is able to cope with those challenges defines their level of success, health and happiness. We have learned from The Globe and Mail’s [Your Life at Work Sur-](#)

[vey](#) that many Canadians are stressed and struggling to cope, and the ones who report higher coping skills, on average, are healthier and happier.

One skill that can help a person cope better with life stressors is resiliency. The Latin translation for resilience is “to jump back.” [Resiliency](#) can be defined as an individual’s ability to adapt to their daily challenges that arise from difficult situations, or to bounce back.

Several factors play a role in defining your ability to be resilient. To deal



with the demands of life and stress, the more in tune you become to each of the following factors can provide guidance on what you need to explore and learn.

Personal strengths

This refers to the degree and confidence you have in personal strengths such as creativity, persistence, social intelligence and humility. It's a useful exercise to measure and evaluate your [personal strengths](#) that shape your character.

Hardiness

This refers to attributes you have developed to remain healthy under stress. The three key pieces that predict your [hardiness](#) are commitment (your dedication to achieving success), control (acceptance of what you can and cannot control) and challenge (your motivation and how much you enjoy a challenge).

Self-directed

This refers to your ability to be self-disciplined, a self-starter and organized.

Attitude

This refers to how you generally look at the world, either [positively](#) or negatively. Some researchers have found one key element for evolving your resiliency is [optimism](#).

Adaptability

This refers to your ability to be flexible and deal with [change](#).

Personal ethics

This refers to the boundaries you set for yourself, your personal code of ethics of what you will and will not do.

Problem solving and decision making

This refers to how effective you are at [breaking down a problem](#), understanding the root cause, the different options available, the risks associated with each decision and the ability to make sound decisions using good judgment.

Resiliency training gives employees the opportunity to learn new skills that help them manage the challenges that come their way, and that can help improve their mental health by reducing their stress.

Employers can take proactive actions to help employees build their resiliency. The notion being, the better employees are coping, the more likely they will be healthy, engaged and productive. Employers can:

1. Educate employees about resiliency and how the above seven micro behaviours can help promote mental health, as well as how resiliency can be improved through [training](#).

2. Provide employees an opportunity to learn how to positively influence their thinking. Teaching proven concepts used in cognitive behavioural therapy such as [Albert Ellis's A-B-C theory](#) can teach employees a set of skills that help them turn their negative thoughts into more positive ones. His theory also can help a person learn how to dispute their negative internal thoughts and re-frame their thinking from negative to positive.
3. Make a commitment to remove toxic stressors and workplace hazards (such as bullying). Stay on top of this initiative by using micro survey pulse checks – short surveys that help employers find out how their staff members are feeling at any given time. These surveys provide a feedback loop of employees' current stress level and its root causes. This kind of action promotes a learning culture that can help both employees and their organization develop resiliency.

SECTION 3

TIPS AND ACTION



Do you look forward to your workday?

A person with strong coping skills and solid self-esteem is more likely to think they'll complete tasks successfully

By Bill Howatt

The greater an employee's coping skills, the higher their productivity and engagement levels, as well as their overall physical and mental health.

That's one of the conclusions drawn from the [Your Life at Work Survey](#) that The Globe and Mail, in conjunction with Howatt HR Consulting, began in February, 2014.

These findings support the notion that coping skills have an important role in predicting and promoting employees' health and wellness. Employers cannot develop employees' coping skills, but they can remove barriers and obstacles that create unnecessary stress and strain for employees.

Via the Your Life at Work Survey, we have been focusing on certain themes that can influence employees' quality of work life. The subject of this article is self-esteem.

What is self-esteem?

It's the degree to which a person feels positive about their self-worth and value. It falls on a continuum from low to high; the higher one's self-esteem, the better they feel. Perception

of self-esteem is strongly linked to emotions that influence mood.

The influential psychologist [Albert Bandura coined the term "self-efficacy."](#) This term refers to the degree to which one believes in their ability to obtain a defined outcome, such as the confidence they have in their capacity to have a successful day at work.

For example, Jack wakes up thinking about work and all that he must face throughout the day, such as resolving a conflict with his manager, production demands and timelines. If he thinks that he will get through the day successfully, he is experiencing positive self-efficacy.

How can self-efficacy be improved?

One approach to improve your self-efficacy is to develop coping skills. A person with strong coping skills will be in a better position to scan their environment and determine what knowledge and skills will help them to be successful if they choose to stay in that environment. Decision making, problem solving and self-management skills, along with emotional intel-

ligence, are examples of the kinds of coping skills that can build an employee's confidence to figure out what to do to successfully face the challenges of their job.

One success formula for employees aligned with Dr. Bandura's thinking is: Self-Efficacy + Coping Skills = Self-Esteem.

Self-esteem is a byproduct of a person's belief in their ability to obtain a result, and the confidence that they can cope with and manage responsibilities. This ultimately defines how much value a person will attach to themselves.

Relationships, jobs, health and money are common areas where people struggle. When a person perceives a gap in their ability to obtain their desired outcomes and does not know how to cope or gain the knowledge and skills required to be successful, they are likely to struggle with self-esteem.

Dr. Bandura suggested that people can develop self-efficacy by watching people in similar situations who are successful. This provides an opportunity to learn by observing. The more confidence we have in our skills and abilities, the more likely we will develop positive self-esteem.

Here are a few tips for improving your self-esteem:

- Complete our [self-esteem screen](#), which you will find on this website from Howatt HR Consulting.
- Accept responsibility for your thinking.
- Practise smiling. Smiling positively influences mood.
- Be open to learning about yourself by taking risks and engaging in conversations that promote self-discovery.
- Find a passion, whether a hobby, sport or volunteer activity, and schedule time to enjoy it.
- Set realistic expectations. This does not mean settling for less; it means learning how to objectively adjust expectations.
- Strive to become who you want to be, not who others want you to be.
- Practise finding something positive in each day, and acknowledge your role in that.
- If you continue to feel you are failing, seek the support you need to get on track.
- Keep moving. Bodies in motion, whether through structured exercise, gardening or even walking a pet, are more likely to be healthy and happy.

Do you have the grit to reach your goals?

Grit can help you get ahead as sheer determination and focus can help you succeed

By Bill Howatt

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Every New Year's Eve as the clock turns past midnight, it triggers the dawn of a new year and a night when millions of Canadians set new goals for themselves for the upcoming year. Yes, the famed New Year's resolutions.

One of the most common resolutions focuses on health, such as quitting smoking or losing weight. Something like, "I want to lose 15 pounds." Why? "I'm not happy with the way I look," or "I know this extra weight is not good for my health." Notice the language of this goal. It says what the goal is, but fails to say how it will be implemented, measured and monitored.

Did you set one of those goals this year? If so, how are you doing now? If you failed, this article may help provide some insight and ideas so that if you repeat this resolution next year, you may be in a better position to achieve your goals.

There can be many reasons why people quit their New Year's resolutions. One is due to gaps in their coping

skills. Coping skills come in two forms: those that help a person make a decision in the moment, and those that support achieving a long-term goal.

Life for most of us is filled with time demands that challenge our priorities. Many of these challenges can tax our resources and be perceived as stressors. Whenever you are faced with a perceived stressor, such as a demanding boss, partner or parent, you have no choice but to take action.

The gap between the stressor and your response is where thinking and decision making happens. The kinds of choices you make will depend on your coping skills. Doing nothing is also an action.

Your coping skills, experiences, beliefs, expectations and values, which quickly interact to evaluate a stressor, determine what kind of emotion will be attached – whether it is positive, neutral or negative.

When a stimulus is negative, this drives a powerful emotional response, such as fear. It's these moments that

test a person's coping skills. Under pressure, the good intention to lose weight or stop smoking can quickly be forgotten. Both of these outcomes are often due to engaging in unhealthy actions to cope with stress.

Stress creates pain. Most people don't like pain; they want to get away from it. In this situation, a person may give up pursuing a goal and slip back to an old, unhealthy coping strategy to deal with the stress, such as reaching for sweets or a cigarette when they're under stress. This is not uncommon and one reason why many people's New Year's resolutions fade away.

We know coping skills can predict who will be better able to manage the stress of life and be able to stay healthy. That was one finding from the [Your Life at Work Survey](#) done by The Globe and Mail in conjunction with Howatt HR Consulting.

The relapse of personal goals is common. Another kind of coping skill that influences how quickly a person who slips up gets back on track or pushes through a painful moment to reach their goal is their level of grit.

Grit can be described as persistence, drive, will, determination, resolve and motivation to achieve a long-term goal. You only need to look at war as the ultimate incubator for developing grit to survive. This is an extreme example of how people can develop their

grit to achieve a goal when motivated.

The Your Life at Work coping skills measure focuses on helping people evaluate how they cope with stress. We have added access to a Grit scale to help you self-evaluate your current grit level. You can take the survey here at <https://www.howatthronline.com/quicksurveys/>.

There's no perfection in life. Things change and life can be hard. Coping skills can help a person not only navigate a stressful situation but also achieve their goals and life dreams. Grit helps provide insight into why some people with average talent become great. They simply out-work their peers, and through sheer drive and determination never lose their focus.

The final question for you today is: What would a bit more grit do for your life?

How happy are you?

Positive thinking and making changes in your life can make you happier and reduce your stress

By Bill Howatt

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What is happiness? It would be shortsighted to define happiness as a state of euphoria and glee. More accurately, happiness is the state of being content with your life.

People who are not happy may be surprised to know that it is common for happy people to have bad days. Happy individuals accept that life will have both positives and negatives. Everyone faces loss. There is no escaping the ups and downs of life, such as births and deaths.

Happy individuals are better able to enjoy what is good in their life and accept that not everything needs to be perfect in order for them to be content. Happiness ultimately is influenced by an individual's expectations and perceptions, including their environment and choices.

In 2013, Canada was ranked the [third happiest place to live in the world](#). It was [fifth in 2015](#). This happy ranking was determined by how citizens reported the degree of positive opportunities to experience peace, freedom,

health care, quality education and a functioning political system

The research on Canada's place in the world is a reminder that things could be worse and that living in Canada is much better than many other places around the globe. However, when a person is under stress, it is common for them to be focused on their own reality and the big picture. The Globe and Mail's Your Life at Work Survey found that 60 per cent of participants reported high levels of stress in 2014.

Happiness is influenced by an individual's life choices. Whether someone is born with the personality attributes to be happy or they learn to be happy through positive life experiences and role models, every person is capable of improving their overall happiness or level of contentment.

Happiness is a state of being content, but you don't need to be continually walking around with a smile on your face to be content. Each of us ultimately defines what we want and need to be content in our own lives.

Happiness can be simplistic. Watch any child on a playground. It doesn't take much for them to appear happy and content where they are.

Happy people are likely to be physically healthy and project hopefulness, enthusiasm and optimism, have supportive networks, and be effective at self-management. They tend to engage in positive diets and exercise, and avoid negative behaviours such as excessive alcohol use or overeating to make themselves feel better.

Researchers have found that 70 per cent to 80 per cent of [all heart attacks are due to lifestyle choices](#) and have nothing to do with genetics. This same line of research suggests that happy people are better equipped to cope with stress and make healthier choices than those who are unhappy.

The quest to improve your overall happiness is a proactive choice to help short-circuit the negative impact of life's stressors. One core of happiness is being open to appreciating what you already have in your life that is good – such as your health, job, friends, love and a safe place to live.

Perhaps more important is being clear on what you want so you know when you get it, you are in a position to [acknowledge and accept it](#).

The quick survey linked to this article, which is also part of the Your Life at Work Survey, is a [Happiness IQ](#). It

will provide a benchmark of your current level of happiness.

Happy people have a purpose when they get up in the morning. They are satisfied with their life; they have loving and caring relationships; and they feel they are in a good place.

If you find yourself feeling unhappy or not content, acknowledge this fact and decide to do something about it. Doing nothing is a choice and will likely mean you remain unhappy. An unhappy person may not know it is possible to develop skills that can help them better cope and enjoy their day-to-day life.

Take the Globe and Mail and Howatt HR Consulting's [Your Life at Work Survey](#) and find out your stress level.

Are you suffering from stress or anxiety?

Ongoing stress can make you feel anxious and make it hard to be calm

By Bill Howatt

Life can be filled with challenging situations that make you stressed. These situations can be caused by issues at home and at work, or by relationships or financial or health concerns.

Whatever the root cause of a stressful event, when something is perceived as a threat, the body's nervous system releases stress hormones to protect itself. These chemicals help prepare the body's defence system to fight or flee the danger.

However, when your body releases these chemicals again and again because of feelings of stress – and there's no immediate physical threat – this response can trigger symptoms such as anxiety.

It is quite common for people under stress to feel anxious and worried, with symptoms such as a racing heartbeat, flushed complexion, a tightening of the chest, difficulty concentrating and restlessness.

Under intensely stressful situations, a person may have symptoms similar

to some anxiety disorders. The intensity, frequency and length of time a person has anxiety will determine their risk level for developing an anxiety disorder.

One common type of anxiety disorder is [General Anxiety Disorder](#). GAD can be described as a chronic state of worry for most or all of each day. It's when a person worries about their health, relationships, money, or work for six months or more. [Symptoms](#) include muscle tension, fatigue, difficulty sleeping, edginess and restlessness.



Not all anxiety disorders are the result of an inability to cope with prolonged stress; some can be linked to genetics.

The longer a person stays in a state of anxiety, though, the greater their risk for developing a mental health condition such as GAD.

There's also a higher health risk for those people who are in a constant state of anxiety. Employees who indicated in The Globe and Mail's [Your Life at Work Survey](#) that they are chronically worried were found to have an overall health risk 11-per-cent higher than those who are not worriers. This shows that chronic worrying can have a negative impact on employees' physical and psychological health.

The [Your Life at Work Survey](#), done in conjunction with Howatt HR Consulting, has added an [anxiety screening tool](#) to the quick survey website. This mini survey will help individuals self-evaluate and become aware of their current levels of anxiety and risk for stress.

If you are chronically worried, there are a few things you can do to take charge and improve your overall quality of life:

Accept your situation:

Accept your feelings in the moment for what they are, without judgment.

Practise slow:

Try meditation or yoga to calm your anxious mind. Following these practises for at least two months or more can improve your mood and reduce your anxiety level.

Take the 60-day caffeine-free challenge:

If your body is moving too fast, it makes no sense to add more stimulation. Take caffeine out of your diet for the next 60 days. There may be some withdrawal symptoms, but they will pass in a few days.

Practise positive thoughts:

Don't dwell on the negative, and instead think about the positive things in your life and be grateful for them.

Breathe:

Stop and take a deep breath. Fill your lungs and exhale slowly. Repeat three times. This practise can help give you immediate relief from anxiety.

Burn stress chemicals:

Exercise daily for half an hour at an intensity level that gets you sweating. This will help you to release stress hormones and relax. Check with your doctor if you have not been active for some time to ensure you are healthy enough to start a new exercise program.

Log sleep:

Get six to eight hours of rest each night. Remove all stimuli such as TV, smartphones and the Internet an hour before you go to bed. Reading a peaceful and engaging story can relax your mind and set you up for a good night's sleep.

If following some of these actions doesn't give you relief, don't hesitate to ask for help. If you have tried to reduce your anxiety level and your anxiety quick survey score is high, it's important to know that talking about your thoughts with a trained professional, such as a representative from your company's employee assistance program, can help you find peace. In some cases, a family doctor may recommend medication temporarily to help you calm down.

Is stress putting you at risk of an addiction?

Stress can lead people to find ways to feel better, and that can put them at risk of addiction

By Bill Howatt

Do you know if you or someone you care about is at risk for an addiction to drugs, alcohol or gambling?

When a person becomes stressed or overwhelmed dealing with day-to-day life, it is not uncommon for them to search for ways to feel better. Many people then turn to food, alcohol, drugs or gambling as a way to boost their spirits. Addictive behaviours that involve drugs, alcohol or gambling can be perceived as being pleasurable in the early days. However, these behaviours can result in powerful addictions that can destroy a person's home and work life.

The results of our [Your Life at Work Survey](#), done by The Globe and Mail and Howatt HR Consulting, show that those with [a higher stress level](#) and a lower ability to deal with the stress of their work and life were more at risk to have an addiction problem.

The survey results show that people who were at risk for using drugs on average had a 6-per-cent higher QWL score. This is the final score of the

survey, which looks at your quality of work life, where a higher score indicates you are under more stress and strain, have less ability to cope with stress, are less engaged at work and have a higher risk of having health issues.

Those at risk of having a gambling or alcohol addiction had a 4-per-cent higher QWL score.

More than 7,000 people have taken the survey since it was launched in February, 2014.

The study results have found that people who report that they have high coping skills on average also report low levels of involvement in drug, alcohol and gambling activities, as well as low levels of stress and health risk.

Studies show that an addiction to drugs, alcohol or gambling hurts not only individuals but also the economy. Here are some facts about addiction:

The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse estimates the [total societal cost of substance abuse in Canada](#) is

\$39.8-billion. That's about \$1,267 for every Canadian. That includes the cost to health care, the justice system and its indirect impact on productivity.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health reported that [20 per cent of people with mental-health disorders](#), which includes anxiety, depression and schizophrenia, also have a substance abuse problem.

The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse reports that people [driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs](#) continues to be a major safety problem in Canada. In fact, nearly as many people died in car crashes in 2010 because of drugs (34.2 per cent) as those drinking and driving (39.1 per cent).

The Uniform Crime Reporting survey reported that there continues to be [an increase in the number of drinking and driving incidents](#), 90,277 in 2011 – 3,000 more than in 2010.

ProblemGambling.ca said in a 2009 report that gaming in Canada is the largest entertainment industry. It's about the same size as the movie, TV, record and professional sports industries combined, supporting over 135,000 jobs. It's a \$15-billion industry that has resulted in about 3.2 per cent of Canadians having [moderate to severe gambling problems](#).

[The National Treatment Indicators Report 2011-2012](#) found that 4.4 per cent of Canadians meet the criteria for

substance use disorders and only 0.4 per cent of this population obtained treatment from publicly funded programs.

The gap in the percentage of the population with potential addictive issues actually seeking professional support suggests there may be some barriers to getting help. One may be the lack of exposure to drug, alcohol and gaming risk tools to help people to self-evaluate their risk.

Self-awareness is a positive first step, so screening tools can help people understand their level of risk and provide the information they require to decide to make a change.

Contrary to stereotypes, many people with addictive issues do not live on skid row. A significant percentage of people at risk for drug, alcohol or gambling addictions in the early stages often attempt to maintain their family and work responsibilities.

The grim reality is the higher the frequency, duration and intensity of the behaviour, the higher the probability these people will lose their family, work, relationships, health, finances and even their freedom.

We have added a [drug, alcohol and gambling](#) (DAGS) screening tool to the Your Life at Work Survey quick survey website.

One can also complete the [Your Life at Work Survey](#) to find your Quality of

Work Life Risk Index, or QWL, score.

If you feel you may have a problem, there are many ways to get help. Every Canadian province or territory has professional addictive services that can assist individuals to evaluate their level of risk in more detail. Company employee assistance programs also can provide access to professionals for additional screening and treatment planning. Your family doctor can also be a valuable resource.

Are you suffering from burnout?

Chronic stress can result in workers being burned out, and lacking the zest they once had for their job

By Bill Howatt

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Jack started his new job full of passion, but over a period of time he started to feel the effects of the constant grind, stress and pressure. His inspiration and excitement declined sharply. As his passion waned, he realized that he was no longer enjoying his job and started to associate pain with work. Jack was headed toward burnout.

Burnout is a psychological term that describes the negative outcome associated with chronic job stress. This relates to employees developing symptoms such as mental and physical exhaustion and losing interest in their job.

[Herbert Freudenberger](#) first coined the term “burnout.” While experts have yet to agree on a definite diagnosis, there is agreement that [common symptoms are associated with a person experiencing burnout](#): emotional exhaustion, a negative view of their job, seeing their work as frustrating and a decline in job performance.

The degree of risk for burnout depends on where employees fall on a

stress continuum with respect to their perception of the frequency, duration and intensity of their stress. Employees experiencing burnout typically report a significant decline in their motivation to come to work, increased levels of concern about their capability to do their job and feeling that there is less purpose in their work.

Burnout doesn’t happen overnight; it occurs over a period of time when constant stress depletes an employee’s resources. It’s not uncommon for employees who get burned out to have once been engaged and excited about their job.



More employers are becoming aware of burnout and accepting that it is real; it's not artificial or made up. This condition, though not a psychiatric condition, still can weaken an employee and put them at risk for chronic health conditions or mental-health issues such as depression.

The root cause of burnout is often linked to an employee's lack of skills to cope with or manage external stress. These include lack of time for family or friends because of constant work demands, chronic tension interacting with a manager, a gap in their job fit, lack of control over their schedule or workload, and unclear job expectations and authority.

Symptoms typically associated with burnout include:

- a decrease in the quality of their work;
- a decline in their personal relationships in the workplace;
- chronic fatigue;
- increased absenteeism;
- a pessimistic view of their workplace;
- an increase in incidents of forgetfulness;
- a decrease in ability to concentrate and solve problems;
- a decreased interest in doing

quality work;

- an increase in emotional symptoms such as being short-tempered, impatient, frustrated, moody;
- an increase in physical symptoms such as shortness of breath, dizziness, headaches, chest pain, loss of appetite, insomnia, and gastrointestinal pain;
- an increase in psychological symptoms such as anxiety, addiction, depression, and anger.

Burnout is expensive for employers because it saps employees' productivity, results in increased incidents of presenteeism (coming to work feeling unwell and accomplishing little) that can result in higher employee turnover, accidents, and insurance and benefits costs.

Employees who get caught in the burnout spiral often lose their sense of hope that things could ever get better, and this adds to their existing psychological burden. If they don't find relief or get help to halt this downward spiral, they are at a greater risk for developing conditions associated with burnout. These include both physical and mental-health issues that increase the complexity of getting back on a healthy track.

There are proven treatments to help

a person cope with stress. Developing coping skills is critical for curbing risk for burnout.

[The Globe and Mail and Howatt HR Consulting's Your Life at Work Survey](#) provides employees an opportunity to evaluate their current level of stress and its impact on their health. Our [survey](#) has found that employees who report strong skills to cope with stress and the demands of their life and job also report being healthier and more engaged in their work. The findings also suggest a direct correlation between workers' productivity and their coping skills.

We have added a [mini survey on burnout](#) on the quick survey website. It will allow you to self-evaluate your current level of risk. If you find that you are at risk, there are resources that can help you understand your situation and find a plan to get better, such as your employee assistance provider, personal doctor and Mental Health Commission of Canada's [Mental Health First Aid](#) initiatives.

Does work stress cause you to overeat?

If stress gives you the munchies even when you're not hungry, you may have a food addiction

By Bill Howatt

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When we talk about the health of Canadians, a growing concern is the increasing number of people who are overweight.

Employment and Social Development Canada reported in 2011 that [37 per cent of Canadian adults were overweight](#) and 25 per cent were rated obese. That's an increase from 2005 when the agency's research showed 35 per cent were overweight and 24 per cent obese. While genetics can play a role, lifestyle choices with respect to what we eat and how much we exercise are a major contributor.

One factor that's not getting much attention, however, is the role of food addiction, which some people can develop from a habit of using food to help them cope with stress.

Everyone reacts when under stress, but the behaviour they choose to use to cope ultimately impacts their overall health.

WebMD reports that [food can trigger the same reward](#) and pleasure centre of the brain as powerful drugs like cocaine and heroin. They suggest that foods that are high in sugar, salt and fat trigger the brain chemical dopa-

mine, which improves our mood.

Once you experience this sensation that triggers the brain's pleasure-reward system, there's the potential that you may start to use food as a way to make yourself feel better.

As with any chemical addiction, the problem is that the person's body will adjust and the pleasurable feeling will decrease, leaving them to think that the only way to get the feeling is to increase their intake of the drug – or in this case, food – to make them feel better.

And, as we all know, the major consequence of taking in more calories



than you burn is an increase in body fat and weight.

The [Food Addicts Anonymous](#) website reports that a person who is experiencing a food addiction will commonly report having uncontrollable cravings for food – even when they aren't hungry – that result in eating foods high in carbohydrates, sugar and flour that metabolize fast and turn into sugar in the bloodstream.

The website explains that it is common for a person with a food addiction to experience decreases in their quality of life with respect to physical and emotional health.

In time, food addiction will result in a person putting on extra body fat that can increase their risk of physical health issues, such as heart disease, respiratory problems and diabetes.

As well, food addicts often aren't physically active, and that can decrease their energy and have a negative impact on their self-image and self-esteem, leading to depression or other mental-health concerns.

The Globe and Mail's [Your Life at Work Survey](#), done in conjunction with Howatt HR Consulting, examines how employees and employers can improve employees' quality of life at work. Our findings so far suggest that both employees and employers have a role in facilitating a quality workplace, particularly by helping employees boost their coping skills.

Employers can improve employee productivity, engagement and health by putting in place thoughtful human resources policies and embracing the Mental Health Commission of Canada's 13 psychological health and safety factors that are part of the [National Standard on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#).

They can also appoint competent managers, keep workloads at manageable levels, actively promote a positive workplace culture and support employees by providing programs to help them learn new skills such as decision making and problem solving to cope with stresses at work.

We have added a [food addiction quick survey](#), which will indicate whether you are at risk for a food addiction. The quick surveys allow employees to self-evaluate their current health and behaviour. There are also surveys on [work addiction and depression](#). The goal is to help workers become more aware of their state of mind and help motivate them, and give them the tools they need to improve their quality of work life.

Similar to other types of addiction, a first step to recovery is self-awareness. If you score high on the food addiction survey and it suggests that you are at risk, you will need to decide whether you are ready and motivated to take control of your eating either on your own or with the help of a professional.

Are you addicted to work?

Working hard is one thing, but some people have a desire to work all the time

By Bill Howatt

Working long hours is generally viewed as sign of a productive and hard-working individual. For these people, putting in a 50-hour work week is common.

However, when this becomes the norm and the person develops an internal compulsion to work longer hours – regardless of the consequences to themselves, their family or friends – then this person may have an addiction to work.

Work addiction is real. Statistics Canada reported that almost one-third of employed Canadians aged 19 to 64 (31 per cent) identify themselves as [workaholics](#). In fact, this percentage has not changed since the agency first began collecting these data in 1992.

Like drug addictions, people addicted to work develop negative habits to keep their high. The work addict's high comes from the adrenalin rush they get from their work. A person with a work addiction is internally driven to focus on their work for long periods of time. It is common for the work addict to have obsessive compulsive tendencies about work, and often the person uses work to escape from the world

outside of work.

In the early stages of work addiction the person starts to rationalize their need for working such long hours.

As their addiction progresses to the middle stage, their work schedule becomes all-encompassing and begins to control them. As a result, the person starts to experience consequences that hurt their personal relationships, their compulsion for work intensifies and it is their top priority for most of their waking hours.

In this stage it is common for the person to start to experience symptoms such as a decrease in fitness level, and changes in their body weight (either up or down).

If the symptoms become chronic, the person will move into the late stage where there are physical changes such as developing ulcers, rising blood pressure and headaches. In this stage the person is also increasing their mental-health risk due to intense emotional symptoms such as anxiety, depression and guilt that can result in feeling hopeless and trapped. This addiction cycle – like most all addictions – can end badly.

Many employers don't know how to tell the difference between a hard-working employee and a work addict. As result, many work addicts get rewarded. When a work addict experiences positive feedback from their employer, this "badge of honour" fuels the work addict's internal dialogue to push himself harder – whatever the cost.

It is common for work addicts to be defined by employers as being a valuable and top performer. This success can lead to career advancement and pay increases – again fuelling their addiction.

What is not obvious to many employers is what many work addicts live with:

- They use work to avoid dealing with personal relationships, such as marriage issues or a death in the family.
- They live in a constant state of fear of failure.
- They have inconsistent sleep patterns, and they often stay up late to finish work.
- They are overly concerned about rejection due to low self-esteem.
- They stay at the office for long hours even when it is not necessary – they will make up tasks in order to stay at work.
- They have high levels of anxiety

when dealing with authority and they will compromise themselves to gain approval and acceptance.

- They take substances to increase their performance and decrease their need for sleep.
- They are perfectionists and often unnecessarily redo work to make it perfect.
- They only feel a sense of power and control when they are working.
- They cannot turn their mind off from work to relax and enjoy the rest of their life.

The solution for a work addict starts with awareness and recognition that there is a problem. Next, the person needs to be motivated to take control of their work addiction. Once the person is ready for change, they can begin their journey toward regaining control.

To move beyond a work addiction, the person must learn how to create a healthy schedule that includes both their home and work lives.

One approach is to remove the reward for working long hours. Employers can help by setting a reasonable work schedule and monitoring it. The end goal is for the person to learn how to enjoy life outside of work.

Do you potentially have a work addiction? Take our quick survey on [work addiction](#).

Inexpensive ways to improve mental health at your work

It needn't cost a lot to make small changes that can result in big dividends

By Gillian Livingston

There's more talk than ever about mental health in the workplace, owing largely to Bell Canada's "Let's Talk" campaign, now in its fourth year. But talk is cheap. It's harder to get a slice of the company budget for mental-health programs when it's difficult to prove the return on investment.

So, where do you start? There are a number of changes a company can make without having to invest a huge amount of time or money, Lucie Dutil, vice-president of human resources at Bell Canada, told an audience of corporate executives.

"We all know we want to do something," she said, acknowledging that initiatives to improve mental health are not often at the top of a company's packed to-do list.

"The impact of mental health on your workplace is very significant and it's hard to measure," Ms. Dutil said, making it challenging to convince top brass to put scarce dollars toward these initiatives.

Mental-health issues, such as stress,

anxiety and depression, are the No. 1 cause of workplace disability claims, according to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, which estimates that 10 to 25 per cent of those claims could be avoided with the right care early on.

Three years ago, Bell Canada implemented a mental-health training program for leaders. Since then, the company's employee assistance program (EAP) usage is up significantly and relapses in mental-health disability cases are down.

Human resources leaders don't need to wait for their company to fund a big mental-health improvement project in order to get started, Ms. Dutil said.

The first step is to leverage whatever resources are already in place in order to help any staff who may be suffering, she said. That includes looking at your company's EAP to see what services it includes, such as counselling or other programs that can help you, your company's managers and staff.

Companies should also organize and

centralize all the information they have regarding mental health in the workplace. Often that's best done on an internal website so that managers and staff know they have one place to go to find the resources available to them, she said.

HR can also examine what other companies do to manage mental-health issues in their workplace, and then create a plan that works for your firm, Ms. Dutil said. But don't expect change to occur overnight, she warned.

"A change in culture takes time and not everything needs to be done at once," she said.

Companies should also ensure managers know the signs that staff are struggling to cope with the stress of work and life. It also helps if there's a designated group within the company to assess any disability claims and help arrange a back-to-work plan for anyone on leave, she said.

In addition, companies can enroll managers in the recently launched workplace mental-health training program developed by Queen's University's faculty of health sciences. It follows the federal government's National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, released in 2013.

"We want to see people's creativity at work and for that they need to be well

— both physically and mentally," said Bill Morneau, former executive chairman of EAP provider and conference host Morneau Shepell, who is now Canada's Finance Minister.

But stress in the workplace is not always bad, said sports psychologist Saul Marks, who consults with Canada's Olympic athletes. Anxiety is part of being at the top of your sport, so the question is how to cope with it and how to use it to fuel your performance rather than hinder it, he said.

At work, there can be times of excessive work or stress, when employees need to overreach, he said.

"Sometimes that's expected from employees," he said. "They need to be warned that this will be tough."

The key is for companies to balance those periods of heavy stress with periods of recovery, Dr. Marks said.

Too much stress can lead to depression and disability claims, he said, and that hurts employees and affects a company's bottom line.

Managers need to watch their employees to see how they're coping with their levels of stress. Pronounced fatigue, insomnia, a lack of concentration, anxiety, mood swings, irritability and escalating personal conflicts are all signs that an employee is under more stress than she can manage, he said.

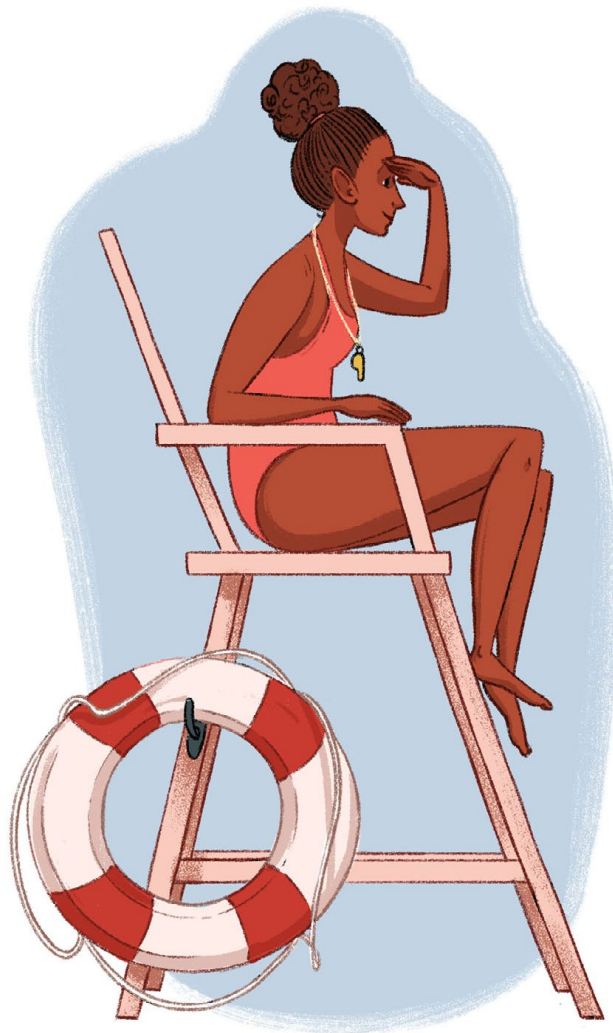
Sometimes managers need to step

in, he said, and lessen someone's workload, set more realistic goals, get employees to leave work earlier, and keep communication lines open so employees can let managers know how they're managing. Companies also need to encourage healthy coping mechanisms such as proper nutrition and hydration, as well as exercise and relaxation techniques such as yoga and meditation.

And there needs to be a clear message from all levels of the company that speaking up when they're feeling too stressed is completely acceptable, Dr. Marks said.

SECTION 4

FOR MANAGERS AND LEADERS



Why business leaders profit from mental-health literacy

Mental-health issues left unchecked can influence the frequency, intensity and duration of performance issues

By Bill Howatt

The task of business leaders is to guide their organizations to achieve a defined set of objectives. Many human resources leaders now use metrics such as “lost time” and “short-term disability claims” in order to get the attention of business leaders and to make the business case that mental-health issues can affect their organization’s performance.

Intellectually, most business leaders get the math, and they understand why mental health matters. What’s missing is a simple explanation for why and how mental health directly affects revenue. They need more than a set of metrics.

Business leaders who expand their mental-health literacy can gain insight into the root causes of mental-health issues, as well as where a given mental-health problem falls on the continuum from “stressed” to “mentally ill.” Without this understanding, business leaders can make the false assumption that there is nothing they can do except figure out how to pay for it – and

draw the false conclusion that a mental-health issue equals mental illness.

Indeed, not all mental-health issues are created equal. Consider the following examples:

Jack was a happy employee until his wife left him. He became emotionally overwhelmed – he stopped sleeping and eating, withdrew from friends and family, felt ashamed and became depressed.

Jill grew up in a home with critical parents. From an early age, all she could recall was being told that she was never good enough. Her approach to life was to worry about failing. Jill was assigned to a new manager, who she felt was overly judgmental. Now, when asked to do a task she used to find simple, she is anxious to the point of panic, afraid of failing. As a result of this pressure, she is constantly tense, short with peers and jumpy. She misses work more than she ever has.

Joe was diagnosed as being bipolar at the age of 24. He returned to work

after a stay in hospital, where it was determined that treatment would allow him to perform his functions at work. He understood that a normal life required him to adhere to his medication because he has a mental illness.

Each of these employees could end up on psychotropic drugs, but if we look at their cases through a mental-health lens, they are completely different: Jack's was a situational life event that negatively affected his mental health; Jill's psychosocial experiences shaped her belief system; Joe's mental illness is organic and facilitated a chemical imbalance.

Where an employee falls on the mental-health continuum defines his or her current state of mind. Every employee's job is designed to support one or more functions, and each function's success is dependent on specific key performance behaviours that will predict results. Employees can move along the mental-health continuum progressively or suddenly – their location and their ability to cope will affect their performance. Mental-health issues left unchecked can influence the frequency, intensity and duration of performance issues and the cost to the employer.

An employee who is living with low but chronic levels of job stress is carrying 10 extra metaphoric pounds of burden. However, without an aware-

ness of what is happening and why, this same person can move along the continuum from low to high risk. As the mental-health burden grows, so do the symptoms, health risk and complexity – it's easier to deal with 10 pounds of extra weight than with 50 pounds. And the sooner it is dealt with, the less risk for serious health issues.

Like actual obesity, mental-health issues aren't always genetic. Lifestyle, including exercise and diet, can predict risk. Physical education and health classes are designed to increase a student's physical literacy, but there is no broad, consistent workplace approach to teaching employees how to cope with work-life challenges and conflict, as there is with physical education.

[Research](#) by The Globe and Mail and Howatt HR Consulting, through our [Your Life at Work Survey](#), shows that people who lack coping skills are at greater risk for mental-health issues. Exercise and diet aren't always factors, but in many cases, they can explain the "why."

Business leaders with better mental-health literacy are in a better position to see mental health as a condition that falls on a continuum. It's normal for people to move back and forth on this continuum, as they do with physical fitness. Most of us can relate: We understand that when we lose focus

on our daily health habits, we can put on extra pounds, but we know that the cure is to lose this weight.

Dealing with mental-health issues is more complex than just developing coping skills, but for many, these issues do not have to be permanent. They are treatable and coping skills can be taught.

Business leaders who increase their mental-health literacy are less likely to assume that there are no solutions. They are more likely to challenge human resources leaders to explain why and how mental health is affecting their organization. No longer will simple metrics be sufficient – they will want to see evidence of an integrated HR strategy that includes selection, onboarding, performance management, training and development, respectful workplace culture, rewards, engagement and mental-health strategies, all working together to support mental health that has a positive effect on employees' key performance behaviours.

Mental health is each employee's responsibility. But mental-health literacy helps business leaders cast a critical eye on what they can do to support their employees. And it helps business leaders understand how and why coping skills directly affect business results. In the end, a business's success is dependent on what employees think and then do – in that order.

Can you afford to ignore employees' mental health?

There are financial and legal reasons why employers need to take a close look at their workplace environment and atmosphere

By Bill Howatt and Gillian Livingston

The topic of mental health and the workplace is increasingly becoming the focus of conversation in the corner offices of Canada's businesses.

Why? Because ignoring employees' mental health and well-being is costly – in lost productivity, higher benefit and disability costs, and increased retention expenses. And employers face the potential of higher legal costs if employees' physical and psychological work environment causes their health to suffer.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada states that about [30 per cent of short- and long-term disability claims](#) in the country are attributed to mental-health problems and illnesses. The overall economic burden caused by mental illness in Canada totals about \$51-billion each year, and a staggering \$20-billion of that stems from workplace losses.

A [study by the MHCC](#) estimated that the cumulative cost of mental health over the next 30 years is expected to be more than \$2.3-trillion.

These statistics have led to an awakening at the executive levels. "They realize they really have to do something," said Claudine Ducharme, partner at Morneau Shepell in Montreal, and co-lead of the firm's national health consulting division.

Mental health is the top reason for workers to be on short-term disability leave, and the cost of chronic illnesses is also rising. "Now senior leaders are concerned about the negative impact of health on their bottom line," Ms. Ducharme said.



The [impact of this issue](#) on the Canadian economy is one of the reasons the MHCC worked to create the [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#).

“It’s a guide an organization can use to develop and continuously improve their work environment,” explained Ms. Ducharme, who was on the committee that created the voluntary standard that was released in January, 2013, the world’s first such standard.

Included in the standard are 13 psychological health and safety (PHS) factors, which outline key areas where organizations can improve their workplace environment and their policies in order to reduce stress on workers and help keep them healthier.

The 13 factors deal with typical workplace and company culture issues, including psychological support, competencies and protection; leadership; respect; employee development; recognition and rewards; influence and inclusion; workload; engagement; work-life balance; and physical safety.

Many companies are not fully aware of how much the mental-health issues of their work force are costing them, said Charles Bruce, chief executive of the Nova Scotia Public Service Long-Term Disability Plan Trust Fund, who also helped create the MHCC standard.

“Organizations that do not pay attention to [the mental health of their

employees] will have triggers” such as higher absenteeism, lower employee engagement scores, lower productivity and higher rates of accidents, he said. “The argument I have again and again is, what happens if you don’t do it?”

But addressing gaps in your workplace culture and policies can be a daunting task for some companies. “It is such a mammoth issue,” he said “Organizations feel they don’t have the time, money, or resources” to tackle this challenge.

There are legal as well as financial reasons that should encourage companies to improve their workplace environment and policies by following the MHCC standard, said Kelly VanBuskirk, an employment lawyer with Lawson Creamer in Saint John, N.B.

Employers who don’t foster a psychologically safe workplace, ignore the mental health of their employees, or fail to accommodate those with a mental-health issue such as depression risk potential lawsuits, he said.

“We all know that depression can be extremely debilitating for an employee,” he said, and human-rights tribunals are awarding higher damages against companies who don’t fully accommodate employees with mental-health issues. “That’s a pretty clear risk.

“Employers who inflict or are negligent in allowing the infliction of

mental distress or some type of mental disability caused by harassment or bullying, those employees are now finding more creative claims to make in the courts – distinct and apart from human-rights legislation,” he said.

By following the standard, employers will be more cognizant of the psychological impact of their workplace and can take steps to improve it, and that “does provide you at least with a stronger defence against liability,” said Mr. VanBuskirk.

The Globe and Mail and Howatt HR Consulting’s [Your Life at Work Survey](#) and related articles focus on stress in the workplace and how it is a contributing factor that is negatively impacting employees’ quality of life at work. The survey has found that employees with strong coping skills are more able to manage their stress, and that improves their productivity and health.

Included in the series is a [tool](#), created by Howatt HR Consulting, to lead a company through [the 13 factors of the mental-health standard](#), and show how employers can better support and justify the effort, time and resources required to slow down the current trends of mental-health risk in Canadian workplaces.

This tool can help an organization establish a benchmark as to how the company is progressing with each of the 13 factors. While it does not replace

the input and value of gathering information from employees, it does help introduce the kinds of behaviours and expectations that will help decision makers examine opportunities and gaps and ask the questions that will assist its successful implementation.

The 13 factors can be thought of as a set of best practises. One of the national leaders on 13 factors is [Guarding Minds at Work](#), which provides a free set of comprehensive tools to help employers. The developers have been deeply involved in the research and collaboration that went into framing the 13 factors.

Other tools as part of the [Your Life at Work Survey](#) include the [Cost of Doing Nothing Calculator](#), which gives decision makers a benchmark on the tangible and intangible costs their company is facing due to high employee stress. There’s also a tool for [employers to self-evaluate their current organizational effectiveness](#) and help them find ways to improve employees’ quality of work life. You can also find out the cost of having unproductive employees using this [online worksheet](#).

Do you know if your company is efficient?

This tool can give you a benchmark in order to improve your company's efficiency

By Bill Howatt

Leaders have so many challenges in today's competitive business environment, including hiring, training, and managing operations and budgets while needing to retain a productive and healthy work force.

In addition, increasing risks and costs associated with employee mental and physical health are gaining more attention. Challenges in the general health of the population and new legislation are bringing this topic to the forefront for many executives.

Martin Shain, author of [Tracking the Perfect Legal Storm](#), provides a compelling discussion on how changes in legislation and legal trends are increasing pressure for employers to address employee health in order to maintain a psychologically safe workplace.

"From a time no more than 10 years ago, when only egregious acts of harassment and bullying resulting in catastrophic psychological harm could give rise to legal actions for mental injury, we have arrived at a point where even the negligent and chronic inflic-

tion of excessive work demands can be the subject of such claims under certain conditions," he writes in his report.

As a result, Howatt HR Consulting, in conjunction with The Globe and Mail's [Your Life at Work Survey](#), has created the [Organizational Effectiveness Benchmark](#), an online tool designed to start conversations among executives with the aim of improving how efficiently their company operates and how they manage their talent.

This tool originates from Howatt HR Consulting's TalOp, an organizational development methodology to help improve a company's efficiency. It focuses on removing confusion, improving job fit, operations workflow and policies, and helping managers be more effective.

It also provides leaders with a snapshot of their organization's current effectiveness by assessing executives' perception of their organization across five levels: strategic, people/process, culture, management and employee

health. The results generated indicate the possibility of risk and untapped potential at a company.

Employers and managers can use the results to examine the company's strengths and weaknesses with their leadership teams. The more measurable outcomes a company can obtain, the better the chance employers will reduce employee stress and enhance productivity, engagement and health.

When reviewing their results, leaders should pick one or two main points and then determine the most probable root cause of the problems and possible solutions. Leaders can then decide what they can and will do.

Once the online benchmark survey is completed, leaders get a report and can download an e-book titled *Taking the Guesswork out of Management*.

This tool is an addition to The Globe and Mail's [Your Life at Work Survey](#), done in conjunction with Howatt HR Consulting. The survey gives employees a tool to self-evaluate their current stress, coping skills, health and engagement.

Results from the ongoing survey continue to find that employees' level of productivity is influenced by their ability to cope with workplace stress. The lower employees' coping skills, the greater their risk for not working to their full potential and for reporting lower engagement levels and higher

health risks.

The good news is that employers can help employees improve their coping skills through coaching, mentoring, and classroom and online workshops. The strategies can teach resilience, problem solving, decision making and managing emotions. Success, though, is dependent on employees' motivation and willingness to learn and practise the skills and tools they are taught.

However, before leaders spend even a dollar on any action plan, they need to know what the potential return on investment – and the impact and benefit to their organization's balance sheet – will be. And they need to make it clear to everyone how success will be measured.

Since corporate decisions are influenced by money, leaders can use our [Cost of Doing Nothing](#) spreadsheet to estimate how much it's hurting their bottom line to not help improve the health and well-being of their employees.

Why should a company care about its employees' health?

If you think the well-being of your employees doesn't have a real impact on your bottom line, think again

By Bill Howatt and Gillian Livingston

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We know that many factors – including sales and costs, but also leadership, productivity and employee engagement – have an impact on an organization's ability to achieve its full potential.

Those at the top tend to focus on tangible factors, such as sales and costs, because they are definable and measurable. But what if this logic is flawed?

Companies formulate their budgets based on tangible variables that are used to predict financial risks and opportunities. But using the same formula with employees will fail; people are far more complex than finances. Determining the value of people requires factoring in tangibles such as sick days, as well as intangibles such as the amount of effort employees are putting into their jobs.

Most leaders understand that if their staff members are not managed effectively, it could hurt the company's bottom line. The issues leaders need to pay attention to can include employee

benefits, short- and long-term disability, mental-health issues, absenteeism, presenteeism – where the employee shows up for work but does the job poorly or with no energy or enthusiasm – conflict, harassment, bullying, and employee retention and engagement.

How do you estimate the cost to your company if these issues are not addressed? What's the cost of having an employee do 70 per cent of their job? What if you let stress rise to catastrophic levels and allow workplace bullying to run rampant? Is there a corresponding cost to a corporation?

There is. Howatt HR Consulting has a valuable tool called the [Cost of Doing Nothing Calculator](#).

This interactive spreadsheet gives leaders the power to estimate the costs associated with factors such as presenteeism and disability claims, to show companies what the cost is to them if they ignore the health and welfare of their staff at work. The calculator can indicate where a company should take

action to reduce costs and mitigate risks, and to improve productivity.

The following hypothetical case study shows how this calculator works.

Let's say a company with 500 employees has been operating profitably on the outskirts of a Canadian city for 30 years. However, over the past five years, managers have been noting a higher turnover rate, among other staff issues.

The company's chief operating officer can use the Cost of Doing Nothing Calculator to estimate the benchmark cost for both tangible and intangible human capital factors. As the COO makes entries in the calculator, he can see how and why total costs are rising.

The tangible costs are definable and logical, like a typical budget line item. It's the intangible costs that make the COO shake his head. He can now see the cost of having a work force that wastes too much time gossiping and not dedicating more of their effort toward their job.

He can see that the cost of doing nothing and ignoring these issues is too great. His company is losing \$3.8-million a year by failing to improve the health and attitude of its staff.

Some leaders may object to spending money on human capital because it is considered a soft cost, or there is no budget for it. However, in the vast

majority of organizations, the cost of doing nothing to support its staff are high. The [Cost of Doing Nothing Calculator](#) can help leaders realize what human capital issues are costing their organization.

It will help them understand that spending time on people's health and happiness can result in a significant return on investment through improved productivity and fewer disability cases.

Click on the title to take our [Your Life at Work Survey](#) and see how you are balancing the stress of life and work.

In addition, employers can take the [employer version](#) of the Your Life at Work Survey to rate their perception of their employees' stress and coping skills.

Click [here](#) to get a list of ways to help reduce your stress.

Four tips for employers to help staff manage stress

As more workers seek help coping with problems at work and home, an employee assistance provider offers some timely advice

By Gillian Livingston

There has been a “staggering” increase in the number of calls made to its employee assistance programs over the past four years, says an executive with a company that provides such programs to employers.

Stephen Liptrap, executive vice-president of Toronto-based Morneau Shepell and general manager of Shepell, a global provider of EAP programs, says there has been a 50-per-cent increase in usage of its programs since 2010. Employees are calling for help to deal with a variety of stressful situations, everything from coping with increasing workloads to help finding daycare spots to financial planning assistance.

People are simply under more pressure today than ever before, Mr. Liptrap said, adding: “Stress levels in this world are just going to get more complex.”

More people are juggling caring for their aging parents and young children, they’re always on call with work because of mobile technology, and the financial crisis has left many with their

finances in disarray, so many have turned to whatever resources are at their disposal to help them cope, Mr. Liptrap said.

“I’m not surprised [more people are using their company’s EAP programs] and I have a real hard time not thinking that’s going to increase,” he said.

A distracted and stressed employee is not going to be the most productive employee. The Globe and Mail’s [Your Life at Work Survey](#), to which more than 7,000 Canadians have responded so far, found that workers with strong coping skills – those who felt able to deal well with the stress of their life and work – also consider themselves productive employees, putting in 80 per cent or more effort into their work every day.

However, those who reported that they were less productive – putting in 70 per cent or less effort into their work every day – were far less likely to say they had strong coping skills.

Our survey found that 3 per cent of respondents said their stress has hit

the “losing it” level, 39 per cent said they are “frustrated,” 49 per cent consider themselves “OK,” and 9 per cent say they are “happy.”

So what can an employer do to help its employees cope with the stress of work and life? Mr. Liptrap offered the following suggestions:

1. Make people aware of their benefits

People need to know that “they can pick up the phone and get help” through their employee assistance plan, he said. They also need to know that most plans are available to the worker’s spouse and children if they are also facing issues for which they need professional help.

Many assistance plans offer a variety of ways to contact them. Aside from a 1-800 phone line, most can be reached by text message, online chat or e-mail. That helps workers in open-concept offices who have little privacy for conversations while at work. They can go online and have a quick chat session with a counsellor to explain their problem and arrange a time for an appointment later, Mr. Liptrap said. Or they can get an answer to a quick question without having to draw attention to themselves. Morneau Shepell also has an app anyone can download called My EAP, available via device app downloading sites.

2. Teach managers to help

Managers are in a tough bind. They may see clearly that an employee is struggling, but need them to be productive and may not want to address a potentially personal issue with a staff member at work.

Many EAP programs have counsellors who can give advice to managers when they see that a staff member is struggling, helping them to approach a worker in an appropriate way, and can recommend resources to help out the colleague.

3. Create a resilient organization

If you help your employees learn the coping skills they need to manage work and stress, then you can prevent some staff members from feeling overwhelmed, Mr. Liptrap said.

“How can you reach out in advance to organizations and teach them to be more resilient?” he asked. “How do you make it easier to cope?” Many EAPs have started to offer resiliency training, Mr. Liptrap said.

Resiliency training teaches employees strategies to help them deal with change, manage the integration of their work and life, and manage their time better. The courses also promote healthful eating and exercise.

“Putting that together makes them more resilient,” Mr. Liptrap said.

Some practical strategies include teaching staff to check e-mail infrequently so they're not sidetracked, and limiting multitasking so workers focus on one thing at a time instead of splitting their attention, which can make them less efficient, more anxious and stressed.

Employers can also encourage staff to get more exercise. Many employers are integrating exercise into the day, some by giving out pedometers and then running contests to see which department took the most steps each week.

4. Reach out at key times

Stress often results from key milestones in a worker's life: moving up at work, getting married, having kids, finding daycare, dealing with teenagers, handling finances, buying a house, dealing with a divorce, managing elder care, or dealing with a death or illness in the family.

Morneau Shepell has created information packages based on key events in people's lives that can be mailed to the home of an employee in advance of, for example, a child being born.

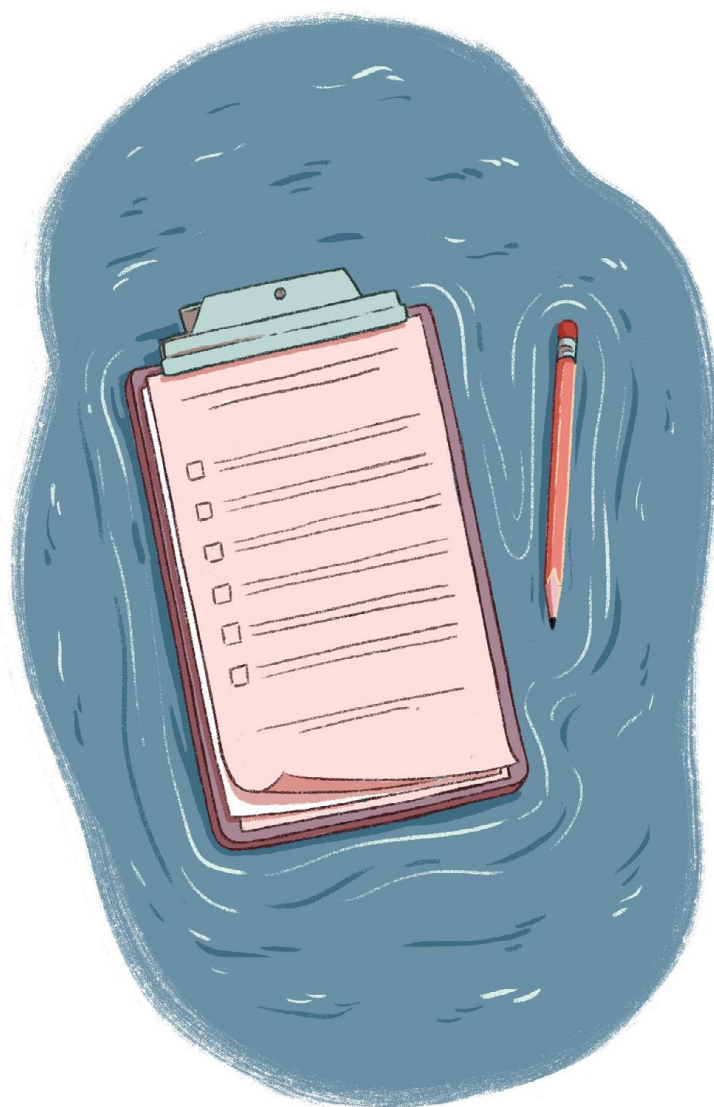
"You can sort of head off someone needing to call an EAP," by providing them with information to help them manage the change in their lives.

The key is to help workers manage so that their stress levels don't cause

them health issues, which hurts both them and their employer, Mr. Liptrap said. There is a cost to these programs, but if the program prevents a worker from being off work, "that pays for it," he said.

SECTION 5

ADDITIONAL SURVEYS DONE BY THE GLOBE AND MAIL AND HOWATT HR



Are you satisfied with your life?

Take our Quality of Life Survey and see where you're at

By Bill Howatt

Welcome to The Globe and Mail's [Quality of Life Survey](#), presented in conjunction with Howatt HR Consulting. Click here to [take our survey](#), measure your life stress levels, find out your Quality of Life score and determine how well you are coping with life overall.

How much life stress are you experiencing today?

When we refer to life stress, we are talking about life beyond just the workplace and its associated demands. Many people who are not working in a traditional workplace (such as stay-at-home parents) have plenty of stress.

Life stress can originate from many sources, such as finances, balancing the demands of home and work, raising a family, caring for a family member, being unable to find time for yourself, or to enjoy the benefits of supportive friendships, and dealing with the challenges of keeping a loving relationship intact.

The stress of struggling to pay bills or managing debt negatively impacts many individuals in Canada. In fact, nearly 63,000 consumers [faced bankruptcy](#) in 2015.

Another stress is divorce. In Canada,

it is estimated that [70,000 people get divorced each year](#), and 33 per cent of first marriages end in divorce.

The Globe and Mail's [Your Life at Work Survey](#) focuses on employees and the stresses they face in their work life. The goal is to provide an opportunity to self-evaluate stress, coping, engagement and health levels. The sum of the four scales defines the employee's Quality of Work Life score.

To add to this conversation, the [Quality of Life Survey](#) takes a more global look at life satisfaction. Each of us has a defined amount of energy to manage all the demands of life. How much we use for work, for example, determines how much we have left for home.

This survey has four scales to help you examine your overall life satisfaction. The stress scale examines common life stressors that many face on a daily basis. The engagement scale indicates how engaged and active you are and your current level of fulfillment in these activities. The impact of stress scale measures how life stressors are impacting your overall quality of life, and the coping scale measures how

effectively you are coping with stress. The sum of these four scales defines your Quality of Life Risk Index.

Similar to the [Your Life at Work Survey](#), once you complete this survey you will see your score.

We anticipate that some will compare their Quality of Work Life scores to their Quality of Life scores. This may uncover insights and perspectives that may help make decisions to improve your overall life satisfaction. The first step for change is awareness.

Similar to what we have done since February, 2014, with the Your Life at Work Survey, the findings from this survey will spark ideas for articles and ideas that can be shared regarding how to improve your overall life satisfaction.

A person's satisfaction with their life influences their happiness both at home and at work. When an individual does not feel satisfied, they often start to search for alternatives that may not always be in their best interest in order to cope with life's challenges. They may seek relief through overeating, the Internet, video games, drugs or alcohol. All of these have one purpose: to provide an escape from life so you don't have to solve your problems.

The first step a person can take is to get their own benchmark of where they are now. If the results are not where you want to be, you can contin-

ue on the same track or start to make changes and look for alternatives. Behavioural change starts with awareness; happiness and peace come from action.

Students: How stressed are you?

Take the Quality of Student Life Survey to find out

By Bill Howatt

Welcome to The Globe and Mail's [Quality of Student Life Survey](#), presented in conjunction with Howatt HR Consulting. Click here to [take our survey](#), measure the degree of stress you are reporting as a student, find out your Quality of Student Life (QSL) score and determine how well you are coping.

Students in high school, college and university: How much stress do you have today?

While most people think about stress in a workplace environment, students also face their own stresses: to choose the right pathway for their future career, to do well at their courses, to deal with peer pressure, financial pressures, and taking care of everything by themselves – often for the first time far from home and their usual support systems.

It can be daunting, and some students just find it too hard to cope with everything life is throwing at them all at once.

Research suggests that young adults' risk for chronic disease and mental-health issues continues to rise. The World Health Organization has reported that [chronic disease and disability](#)

is a growing concern in adolescents. What some may not know is that 70 per cent of young adults living with mental-health problems can [trace them back to childhood](#).

One of the most tragic byproducts of stress or mental-health disease in adolescents is the prevalence of suicide. It is estimated that [suicide accounts for 24 per cent of all deaths](#) among 15-to-24-year-olds, compared to 16 per cent among those 25 to 44 years old. .

Reducing risks associated with chronic stress starts with self-awareness. The [Quality of Student Life Survey](#) (QSL) helps students to self-



evaluate their levels of stress, coping, engagement and health and provides real-time feedback. If a student's score is far higher than desired, then that student has the option to take action, such as asking for coaching, counselling, mentoring or other supports to help manage the stresses of their current situation.

The QSL was first launched and tested with students at [St. Francis Xavier University](#) in Antigonish, N.S. The stress and engagement scales were developed with the support of senior students Ginny Anderson, Stewart Barclay, Erin Ford, Marissa MacNeil and Jillian Marchand. This group oversaw the promotion and launch of the QSL, analysis and reporting of results as part of a project for [Dr. Mark Fuller](#), an associate professor in strategic management at the Schwartz School of Business at St. Francis Xavier University.

The QSL adopted the same methodology used in both the [Your Life at Work Survey](#) and [Quality of Life Survey](#), both done in conjunction with The Globe and Mail and Howatt HR Consulting. Before launching, the students had to have the survey and methodology approved by the university's internal review board.

Group leader Stewart Barclay shared his view of the importance of tools like the QSL survey to engage students

and help them become aware of how their choices and behaviours impact them both positively and negatively. He explained that when his group presented the results, they were well received and senior leaders were open to discover what students are thinking and doing.

Senior leaders now have useful information for planning and action. Mr. Barclay explains, "Many students, unfortunately, perhaps through helicopter parenting have not been prepared to deal with life stress or failure. If you have never been trained to cope with stress, you will never learn how to cope appropriately. Students who have been overly sheltered and do not know how to fail often end up adopting negative coping strategies, or worse. We learned through the QSL first-hand how important coping skills are for students' success."

The QSL also captured how some students were abusing alcohol and that information was relayed to senior leadership at the university. Universities involved in QSL studies have the ability to not only capture data about the harmful actions some students are taking, but also to evaluate the relationships between coping skills and at-risk behaviour such as excessive drinking or drugs. The St. Francis Xavier University study revealed that coping skills are a lead indicator that

can help predict which students may be at risk for poor health and lack of engagement and therefore may need additional help or support.

One key competency that the study found was the value of inserting coping skills such as resiliency and problem solving into students' developmental learning journey.

Students can take the QSL Survey by going to this link: <https://www.how-atthronline.com/QSL/>. Once you've completed the survey, there is a free e-book with ideas to help students develop and improve their coping skills.

Bill A. Howatt



Bill Howatt, Chief Research and Development Officer for Workforce Productivity, Morneau Shepell, has over 25 years' experience in strategic HR,

mental health and addictions, and leadership. He has published numerous books and articles, such as: *The Coping Crisis*, *Pathways to Coping*, *TalOp®: Taking the Guesswork Out of Management*, the *Howatt HR Elements Series*, the *Wiley Series on Addictions*, *Human Services Counselor's Toolbox*, *The Addiction Counselor's Desk Reference*, and *The Addiction Counsellor's Toolbox*. He is the author of *Beyond*

Engagement: The Employee Care Advantage and the creator of the *Quality of Work Life (QWL)* methodology and survey. He is the co-author of behavioural engineering, a strategy aligned to the QWL to provide guidance on how to lead employees to facilitate behavioral change.

He is a regular contributor to *The Globe and Mail* and is the driver behind the *Your Life at Work* initiative, where there is a mini version of the QWL that has been explored by over 10,000 Canadians.

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Gillian Livingston



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The Canadian Press as a reporter for news, business, markets and Ontario politics. She joined *The Globe and Mail*

as a copy editor with the *Report on Business* in November, 2007, and was *Careers Editor* from January, 2013, to January, 2015, where she worked with Bill Howatt to launch the *Your Life at Work Survey*. She led the launch of the *Employee Recommended Workplace Award*, created by *The Globe and Mail* and *Morneau Shepell*, which focuses on workplace wellness. She is currently the *Deputy Editor of Globe Investor*.

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