

The  
**SOLUTION** *source*  
Thunder Bay Counselling Centre Newsletter  
By Colleen Ginter, Clinical Counsellor at Thunder Bay Counselling Centre  
*For You & Your Family*

Spring 2011

## WELCOME BACK Navigating the World of Returning from Sick Leave



So you have braved it through a period of sick leave experiencing so many conflicting thoughts and emotions and your physician has now given you the go ahead to return to work. What now? The thoughts of going back to work, for some, can be like jumping into a cold and murky sea of shark-infested water.

Getting back to work can be a shock to our systems but we can ease into that transition. Many workers returning to work experience a myriad of challenging thoughts and emotions. Our Spring 2011 Newsletter will focus on the challenges and opportunities of returning to work after sick leave.

### Unresolved Guilt

For many of us, our work is part of who we are, our identity. When we need to take time off, we are often challenged with feelings of guilt, shame, feeling incompetent and helpless. If you have needed to be off work and are still struggling with these feelings, returning to work can be additionally difficult. Sharing these feelings with someone who is supportive and validating can help you resolve these issues. Returning to work feeling this way may seriously undermine your return to work process. ■

### Have A Plan

Having a plan of action for returning to work can contribute greatly to your experience and success of recovery. There are a number of steps that you can take to return to work with a feeling of confidence.

First, make sure that you check with your Human Resources personnel for direction as to the Return To Work Policies of your employer. Many employers require a letter from your physician that gives the ok for you to return to work. Additionally, return to work recommendations may be required. Your doctor might suggest a modified work plan and that can mean many different scenarios. Be sure in your own mind that you are clear about exactly what this means. For example, taking on too much all at once may be overwhelming and you may have setbacks. That's not something you want when you might already be feeling challenged, even questioning yourself. Can I still do this work? Have I lost my skills?

You may find that it will take you time to fully carry out the requirements of your position both mentally and physically. It is advisable to discuss your return to work plan before your first day back. ■

### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

That First Day Back	02
Creative Selfishness	02
Self Care at Work Inventory	04

## That First Day Back

Take a deep breath! The first day back to work might be an exciting one but it also may be overwhelming! First, make an appointment with your supervisor or Human Resources contact and discuss your return to work plan so you are both clear about what this will look like. This should also include opportunities to reflect back to your supervisor about how you think you are doing and how you are feeling.

Did you miss out on training that is now required to fulfill the requirements of your position? If so, don't be afraid to ask that you access this training.

You may require accommodations in the workplace as well and it would be proactive to have a discussion with your physician and counselor (if you have one).

For example:

### Responsibilities:

- Taking extra time to complete a task
- Changing the process or the way you carry out a duty

### Modified hours:

- This may be a very individual plan
- This could mean working three days a week for a period of time (if you are a full-time employee)
- Flexing your hours such as working half days
- Taking scheduled breaks

### Physical Environment:

- Are there any changes you need in order to maintain your well-being? (work space, special equipment) ■

## Follow Up Support

Will you have support and validation as you navigate the next weeks and months? What will this support look like? What do you need to know that you are being successful? Recognize if you are struggling. If you find yourself becoming overly frustrated, angry, depressed or agitated then have a plan to overcome these challenges. Be gentle and compassionate with yourself. Are you expecting too much of yourself? Allow yourself some breathing space, talk to a supportive co-worker, take a walk, take a break, use some relaxation strategies. ■

## While They Are Healing

### To Reach Out or Not To Reach Out?

Sometimes co-workers don't know what to say or do when they hear their co-worker is going on sick leave. If you are unsure as to your co-worker's preference, it's best to have a discussion with your manager if she hasn't already shared that with the workplace. Best practice would of course be mindful and sensitive to the individual's current preferences. Sometimes an employee on sick leave will need and want contact and at other times they will need time to be alone.

So what to do when you call or visit? The most important message might be that you are supportive of their very brave decision to take care of themselves, but that they are also valued as a co-worker and that they are in your thoughts. Let them lead the way in the conversation, the art of listening can be very helpful at this time.

Sometimes just being present in the moment, perhaps in silence, is what is needed. That's okay. Your co-worker will feel the connection of your being with them in the moment even in their suffering. The gift of time is a precious one.

Take your direction from your co-worker. Perhaps there are some very practical ways you can be helpful. Running errands, picking up medication, picking up a child from school, finding out opportunities for community support both formal and informal. Perhaps it might be easier on your co-worker if she could detail a general list of things needing to be done. Sometimes its hard to ask when you are not feeling well! ■

## Creative Selfishness

*(Informed by The Woman's Comfort Book)*

### What Is It?

Creative selfishness is behaviour that allows you to care for yourself without feeling guilty. Creative selfishness is taking the time to live your life with respect for you!

### When To Do It

If the idea of taking time for yourself is so foreign you needed someone to explain the concept to you.

When the idea of saying no to someone makes you cringe. Say YES to yourself!!

### Be Patient

Don't let your inner critic stomp all over you if you can't immediately embrace the idea of taking time off. Be patient and compassionate with yourself. Be courageous! It might take a bit of courage to embrace the idea of being ok with caring for yourself.

## Good For Employees Good for Employers

Intuitively, we know that having healthy and productive employees in our workplaces is the best case scenario for everyone involved. As an employee, work is part of our identity and, besides paying the bills, being gainfully employed offers a sense of pride and accomplishment. From an employer's perspective, having healthy employees who are at work and contributing is the key to success.

There are several key benefits to accommodating those who are not present at work due to illness or injury, including:

- Lower staff replacement costs (e.g., hiring and training)
- Increased productivity
- Positive employee relations

Accommodation strategies need to evolve to survive.

*By Victoria Jollimore  
Director, Halifax Group Life and Disability, Manulife  
Financial ■*

## Mindfulness and Self-Care at Work (CH Clinician's Network)

When you awaken, express gratitude for having a home...your health...your work...

- Say "thank you" and "you're welcome" often.
- When caught up in a stressful situation, ask yourself: "What is the most important thing right now?"
- Practice "seeing" from more than one point of view.
- Be willing to say, "I don't know".
- Ask for help or support when you need it.
- Try substituting water or fruit juice for carbonated beverages. Monitor your intake of alcohol, caffeine, salt and sugar.
- Take mini-stretch breaks several times a day, feeling what you are doing while you are doing it.
- Create a personal mission statement related to your work.
- Identify ways in which your work serves you in various dimensions of personal growth.
- Take a deep renewing breath before picking up the phone, responding to an email, opening a letter.
- Place photographs/postcards of the faces of people who inspire you in your workspace.

- Take a daily five-minute walk outside of your work setting.
- Keep a "wit and wisdom" file.
- Do one thing at a time.
- Be silent...even if only for a few moments.
- Forgive.
- Do something unrelated to work every week that feels nurturing, just for you. Be creative. Try something new.
- Create a rhythm of action and contemplation in your workday.
- Rejuvenate with more sleep when needed.

## More Self Care Strategies at Work (Compassion Fatigue Solutions)

- leave your office and enjoy your lunch break
- screen your calls and prioritize them
- learn to say no
- carpool
- go for a walk
- have movie time for release, maybe at a staff meeting
- hold a staff fun day e.g. drumming day
- never miss lunch/don't eat at your desk/don't work during lunch
- have a pot luck lunch with your team
- stretch every day
- pack a cooler with healthy foods, drinks, snacks
- meditate with a bell/chime to remind you of time
- put a stretch reminder on your work computer
- music for work during down time/breaks
- lunch time yoga or after work
- watch a movie at lunch
- share what you are grateful for at staff meeting
- deal with confrontations one-on-one
- look at alternative ways to debrief (drawing, dance, etc)
- social field trips (i.e. white water rafting, Friday bbq or potluck)
- dancing
- watch or listen to comedy (Ellen, Loreta Laroche, youtube)
- have a memory box full of happy memories
- journaling
- fill 5 pages with what angers you about your life, when you are done, put them in a sealed envelope and then shred it
- bring fresh flowers to your desk ■

## Self Care at Work Inventory

(Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)

*Fewer than 10 "yes" answers and more than eight "no" answers indicate violation of standards of self-care.*

Yes No

- y n Do I take a lunch break every day and do something unrelated to work?
- y n Do I work reasonable hours?
- y n Do I schedule breathing room every day so I can step back and reevaluate my priorities?
- y n Is my office free of clutter?
- y n Do I have adequate lighting and clean air?
- y n Do I delegate work to free my time and empower others?
- y n Do my family/friends honour my work time? If no, have I asked them?
- y n Do I have blocks of uninterrupted time without distractions and interruptions?
- y n Do I have a "Do not disturb" sign?
- y n Have I scheduled specific times for returning phone calls and checking email?
- y n Have I stopped taking on more than I can handle?
- y n Do I drink enough water when I am at work?
- y n Do I have comfortable shoes/slippers at my office/
- y n Do I schedule time off from work (sick leave and/or vacation time) to take care of myself?
- y n Do I have someone to talk with about my professional life?
- y n Do I have creature comforts that make my office pleasant? (music, aroma, artwork)
- y n Do I say "yes" to commitments that I later regret?

**fseap** Now we're talking.

### Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)

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face-to-face intelligent friendly collaborative credible responsive specialized EAP partnership / cooperation

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### March 8, 2011 100th Anniversary of International Women's Day.

This year, our agency in partnership with **Maplegate, Centre Victoria pour Femmes** and **Mississauga Women's Shelter** hopes to raise awareness of **International Women's Day** by bringing our celebration to the women of East Algoma.

We are hoping that this anniversary will make the women of past proud, the women of current inspired, and the women of future envisioned. Women have made great strides in equality, yet there is much to be achieved, specifically in the area of Violence Against Women.

**Listen to Moose FM for more details or contact our agency at 848-2585.**

We hope you will join us at our office (9 Oakland Boulevard, Elliot Lake) on March 8th at 7PM as we celebrate the 100th Anniversary of International Women's Day. Concurrent celebrations to be held at 7PM in Spanish, Serpent River First Nation, Algoma Mills, and Blind River.

**For more information call 705 848-2585**