

How Well Are You Mitigating Risk In Your Workplace?



We hear plenty of mixed messages about the status of the Canadian worker. According to a 2012 survey from global staffing firm Randstad Canadian's ranked first among non-European countries in employee satisfaction. However, according to a Stats Canada report Canadians are also facing more stress in their lives and the majority of workers rank themselves as highly stressed as a result of work.

Recently the HR Insider spoke to Robin Bender, President/Co-Founder of Mega Health at Work Inc., a provider of workplace wellness solutions. We asked what she was hearing about the state of the Canadian worker. She told us that *'employees are stressed like never before'* and she cited many factors as contributing to this stress. She reported that *'employees are being asked to work harder and cope with changes in the workplace while worrying about a lack of job security.'*

According to the Randstad survey the main reason Canadians ranked themselves as 'satisfied' was because of job security. Over the past few years as job security has lessened it appears stress has grown.

Impact Of A High Stress Workplace

The implications of increasing workplace stress are manifold and include:

Low morale that often results in

- Reduced workplace commitment including more absenteeism
- Increased grievances/conflicts
- Higher employee turnover
- Increased gossip and employee disagreements
- A disengaged culture

Poor mental functioning and increased health problems resulting in

- Poor decision-making
- Poor performance, more errors and lost productivity
- Increased short term and long term disability claims

The impact of high stress often impacts the financial bottom line including

- Costs associated with replacement workers
- Reduced productivity and costs associated with mistakes
- Increased litigations

According to the 2011-2012 Towers Watson 'Staying at Work' Report, in Canada the costs resulting from workplace health and stress problems have increased over the past few years. The total direct costs as a percentage of payroll rose from 7.7% to 10.4% from 2009-2011. This increase was felt across the board in both direct and indirect costs including medical coverage, workers compensation, unplanned absence and increased disability. When the respondents to the Towers Watson survey were asked to identify the top most frequent disabling condition in the workplace they cited mental/behavioral challenges.

Mistakes Employers Commonly Make

We asked Robin Bender what she has observed to be among of the biggest mistakes employer's make regarding ensuring a safe and healthy workplace. She indicated it was a lack of risk assessment and a failure to prioritize risks appropriately.

"Many employers are not analyzing their statistics and do not take the extra step to determine whether the injury/illness was caused by a workplace condition or practice." As a result "many organizations continue to operate in "reactive" modes."

3 Suggestions for a Safer and Healthier Workplace

Bender offered 3 suggestions to HR to help create safer and healthier workplaces

- Review the organization's health and safety policy statement and ensure what it states is, in fact, what is happening. Employers really need to ask and evaluate if the training is doing what it was intended to do.
- Perform the cost benefit analysis by comparing the costs of injuries versus the savings realized by having targeted programs in place. Make sure the health and safety initiatives have measureable outcomes.
- Streamline health and safety processes where you can. Having clear responsibilities mapped out by employee, supervisor and health & safety representative(s) prevents confusion and assist in information flow and frees up time for other things.

A final note from the Towers Watson report; 66% of companies with highly effective health and productivity programs reported their performance as better than their top competitors compared to only 50% of those who did not. They also reported average revenues per employee as 40% higher (an improvement of \$132,000 per employee industry adjusted) compared to those without effective programs. Next time you are considering the costs of a workplace health and safety assessment or program try doing the math yourself.

Sources/Resources

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"we build strong communities through healthy workplaces."

Stats Canada: What is stressing the stress? Main stress among workers

Towers Watson 2011-2012 Staying at Work Report

Ranstad: "Employee Satisfaction Canadians Among the Highest Ranked in the World"