

Keep on Working



BY STUART McAULAY



As we continue to learn about mental

illness and reflect upon some of the implications discussed in my previous articles, it has, we hope, become more apparent that this issue is more than just somebody else's problem. Those struggling with distorted thinking patterns leading to, or prolonging, depression and anxiety need the encouragement to seek the proper balance of support, lifestyle change, and possibly medication to get back on track. Even though this condition is becoming more common, it also has a high rate of successful recovery with proper direction and ongoing therapy. Those who are responsible for, or are simply aware of, those suffering in silence must educate themselves through individual or corporate training models as adopted by those companies who sincerely wish to invest in the lives of their workforce. Mental illness on various levels is a reality that has the potential to either bring us into community or sadly allow us to fall by the wayside.

Recovery from these conditions is very possible with a proactive attitude from both the company and the employee. Every situation may be different, but adopting patience and persistence can go a long

way in fostering the wellbeing of those involved in this process. Education in mental illness is essential, especially for those who cannot appreciate the real effects of having a mood disorder and an inability to perform to their potential due to distorted thinking patterns. Recognizing and acknowledging the symptoms of depression in the earlier stages helps both parties initiate the best course of action. This is not unlike the concern for other common issues like addiction or noticeable deterioration of physical health and abilities. There has to be more of an ongoing interest beyond simply getting yourself checked out or taking a week off.

Maintaining steady employment through ongoing support or accommodation strategies is absolutely essential to the emotional self sufficiency of those just trying to weather the storm while making their way back to a normal healthy routine. In fact, a high percentage of those who have battled major depressive episodes will recover and be more productive again. I have been through the entire spectrum of trying to fit in, to giving up, to remaining hopeful and ultimately being persistent, seeing

that I somehow had to keep going. It's a very tough road to travel alone and the more people involved who care about you – even if they don't really understand your condition – the speedier your recovery will be.

Companies that are willing to invest in their people can start by researching the ground work laid by other companies who are currently leading in the area of mental health and wellbeing strategies. First steps could include an overall commitment to learning and implementing corporate policy based upon the Canadian Human Rights Act addressing people with disabilities and the Occupational Health and Safety act (OHS) as a baseline. Both the employer and the employee must be prepared to discuss any mental health issues with an open mind and a willingness to work together towards a pathway to recovery. This will ultimately result in a win-win situation and will go beyond merely filling a role to performing a job assignment. A newfound mutual respect will enable a greater sense of collective accomplishment and potential for greater awareness and productivity into the future. The innovative mentalhealthworks.ca website is available to employees and managers alike as an initiative of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) by explaining many of the current issues we have covered, including a managers guide to mental health accomodation in the workplace called Working it Out.

Positive social connection and reliable support networks are essential to recovery, especially when the tendency for people with depression is to withdraw. A caring word or two must be initiated by those in positions of responsibility and influence. A "Psychological Health and Safety" (PHS) system for the workplace is also being developed in an effort to further extend beyond current OHS legislation in an effort to better define the psychological effects on the worker from within the workplace. This would include reporting and investigative steps to evaluate a person's state of wellbeing in much the same way as we audit processes and procedures for quality standards. These guidelines are still being developed, and in some cases being implemented as a voluntary means of promoting a positive leadership model by using the resources that encourage a more balanced psychological mindset for our workers.

Employers can also offer the flexibility for troubled employees to make doctor appointments, engage in cognitive therapy sessions or work modified shifts coordinating with these appointments. A trusted accountability partner within the workplace may be necessary to help with progress reports, periodic assessments of the working environment, or simple observation and availability to talk when necessary. These are all simple strategies that could be made possible in many work situations. Working in a different capacity within the company for a period of time may offer a welcome change of focus or a break from certain demanding tasks that normally accompany the regular position of that employee. Look at what needs to be accomplished and determine viable options for other ways of getting the work done. Work environment options may play a significant role throughout the accommodation process in an attempt to find creative solutions.



Toll-Free **1-877-954-0668** • Phone **250-954-0668**
Fax **250-954-0667**



1020 Virginia Road - PO Box 128, Coombs, BC V0R 1M0

E-mail pacificheli@bcsupernet.com www.aerosmithheli.com

Your Full Service Heli-Port on beautiful Central Vancouver Island

Located near Qualicum Beach Airport
GPS Coordinates: 49°18'25 124°24'48

**General and Major Maintenance,
Repairs and Modifications,
Dynamic Component Repair and Overhaul of:
Bell 206 A/B/L and MDHC 500 components**

**Parts Sales, Vibration Analysis,
Salvage, Pre-purchase Inspections and Consulting**

- Complete Re-furbishing, Paint and Interiors
- Aircraft Leasing
- Fuel Sales
- Component Rentals & Exchanges





Join us at the
FAA Production
Studios for "LIVE"
Aviation Seminars!
Watch our Satellite
Broadcasts on ATN,
GETN and The Dish
Network. View our Recorded
and "LIVE" Streaming
over the Internet.

For Broadcast Schedule
Information go to:
www.faa-productionstudios.com

Programs are made possible
through the cooperative effort of
The National Aviation Safety Foundation
www.nationalaviationsafetyfoundation.org and the
Federal Aviation Administration - www.faa.gov

The employee must accept the fact that these are temporary solutions to the bigger picture, which is recovery, and that special circumstances are the result of the employer believing in you enough to invest in your long-term stay with the organization. Be honest about your progress and get to know your limits while focusing on one-day-at-a-time until the situation starts to improve. Both your physical and mental health remain your top priorities to allow you to perform both in your personal AND professional life, so remember to maintain that perspective. Always rise above the perception of weakness when your condition is really an irrational state of mind that has taken control, for whatever reason, until you are able to build up your resilience and gain back control of your rational thinking and participation in your life as you would prefer it to be. It will happen as long as something is being done to improve the situation as it relates to each person. Some conditions may only require an open discussion and the possibility that there may be a bad day once in a while that will be understood when it happens. Sometimes sick leave is necessary where a period is required to simply de-stress or adjust to medication and to prepare coping strategies with recovery options.

In more involved arrangements, employees may be subject to an accommodation agreement to ensure that the right to accommodation is not abused in fairness to the employer. This further

represents an acceptable means for the employer to see a commitment from the employee to help him or herself to move forward with the healing process. Managers handling such situations will need to gain a true appreciation of the soft skills necessary to deal with sensitive issues sometimes beyond the common leadership required to keep company operations moving forward for everyone.

I have experienced situations where nothing was ever discussed, and I held myself in the game working way below my potential until I reached a point where I needed sick leave in order to deal with some "personal issues". It was granted and left at that. I have also had the privilege of working with others who, while it took some courage to explain the situation, allowed a certain trust level to be established and I was able to explain a difficult condition and have it make sense, and come across as a legitimate concern. I definitely have confidence, though, that these things have improved through self-education, as I have since gone as far as discussing my personal issues with other staff, thereby easing the burden of living with the shame or embarrassment of not being able to control my thoughts and perceptions the way a normal person does. I have also come to learn that a normal person is someone who has to contend with his or her own personal issues.

The idea of a community of people simply supporting one of their own is a

necessary ingredient to having a productive, capable workforce. This may sound like the kind of stuff that only more compassionate people will embrace, leaving many of us to continue being part of the same old problem rather than part of the necessary solution. Anyone can be an encourager, even if it is simply through resisting the temptation to spread hurtful ideas or even offering a word or two in politeness while quietly acknowledging that you support them in some way. Some people are more cut out to be good listeners and are likely to respond with regular encouragement and accountability.

I continue to work on improving this area of my life and have learned to see these types of setbacks as part of the greater picture and part of who I am. I also realize that I can either do nothing or I can venture outside of my comfort zone and do something to help shape my future for the better and appreciate those who have become part of that process. The exercise of sorting through the complexity of mental illness is not just a simple act of positive thinking, but working it through may continue to be a challenge in patience and hope. I have found that the key to recovery is through the ongoing support of friends and family, including the work community, wherever possible. I encourage anyone who can relate to anything touched upon in this series to keep learning, keep an open mind, and to maintain the courage to keep on working. ■



AirMaintenance UPDATE

The Magazine for Aircraft Maintenance Professionals



We invite you to write an article covering your field of expertise. By contributing to AMU, you educate readers, and make them aware of your business, experience and talents.

To view our editorial guidelines please visit www.amumagazine.com