
LEARNING WORKS FOR ALL OF US

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Welcome! Here is the first issue of our newsletter.

Our goal is to provide a forum to share information, ask questions, debrief troublesome issues and work toward harmonious, productive workplaces.

If you have a success story to share, a problem to present or simply some thoughts on today's issues, please forward them to us via e-mail and we'll put them in the September issue. With all our creativity we can have some great online discussions.

Here are our thoughts on workplace issues we've encountered in recent projects. Let us know what you think.

Betty, Jane and Louise

Healthy, Productive Workplaces

There are many parallels between a healthy, productive individual and a healthy, productive workplace. In both cases all of the systems are functioning well. In the human body, this may mean the circulatory system, the muscular-skeletal system, the organs and the fascia are free of injury and other debilitating conditions. In a healthy workplace, leadership is effective, communication flows freely in many directions, clear mechanisms are in place to deal with workplace conflict and employees work well together.

When people are not feeling well, they go to a doctor or other health care practitioner for help. They may have a headache, indigestion, insomnia or a pain in their side. These are the symptoms that were persistent and alarming enough to prompt the person to seek professional advice. What, then, are the symptoms of an unhealthy workplace? In our experience, they are one or more of the following:

- grievances, harassment complaints or other complaints about one individual or a group of individuals
- high staff turnover
- increased stress leave, sick leave or accidents
- decreased productivity
- polarized work groups
- high levels of gossip and rumours.

Just as a health care practitioner consults with the patient to get to the heart of the problem, a similar process must be followed in order to determine the root causes of the troubled workplace. Organizations can conduct employee satisfaction surveys, exit interviews for employees leaving the organization or hire outside consultants to assess the workplace. Often the single harassment complaint or grievance is merely the tip of the iceberg regarding a much larger problem.

As we know, some lifestyle choices such as smoking, lack of exercise and eating rich, fatty foods put you at greater risk for certain diseases. What about the workplace? Are there behaviours in an organization that put the employees and the organization itself at risk?

Most factors that contribute to an unhealthy workplace are those things that create high levels of uncertainty and anxiety amongst the employees such as:

- disrespectful leaders
- unclear roles and responsibilities
- difficult individuals or groups who intimidate or bully others
- unclear policies and processes for dealing with conflict
- frequent changes at the leadership level
- organizational change without consulting the employees most affected by that change
- downsizing resulting in loss of job security
- lack of information sharing within any one area or level and from one area or level to another
- a rigid hierarchy with divisions of power

How, then, do you create and maintain a healthy, productive workplace? As a human being, you might change your lifestyle, take medication or have surgery. In the workplace, there are steps you can take to transform your organization from a troubled, dysfunctional unit to a healthy, functioning organism.

Effective Leadership

We believe you have to start at the top. That is, the leaders of the organization (the CEO, President, managers, supervisors and union representatives) must have sufficient education and training to be effective in their positions. They must have enough self awareness to know the impact of their behaviour on others and to be able to respond appropriately to feedback. A healthy organization is led by people modelling appropriate respectful behaviour. And, when leaders are made aware of problem groups or individuals, they take appropriate action in a timely manner. This is easier to do when the organization has clear policies and procedures.

Clear Roles and Responsibilities

People throughout the organization must be clear on their roles and responsibilities (detailed job descriptions) and undergo performance evaluations on a regular basis so that they know where they stand. This not only allows management to consult with employees to bring their work up to the expected standard but also provides a forum to acknowledge employees who are doing a good job.

Clear Communication

And finally, clear lines of communication and information sharing need to be set up and maintained. If you are planning on changing your organization, include the employees in the change process. Ensure that as much information as possible is shared with employees especially during times of uncertainty. Have regular meetings within departments and at different levels of management to bring people up-to-date on any relevant information and to provide employees with the opportunity to resolve issues before they become unwieldy problems.

As in the human body, a little care and attention can go a long way to keeping your workplace healthy and productive.

Web Launch

Many thanks to all of you who came to the launch of our new web site on June 17th and thanks to those of you who've given us feedback on the site.

If any of you haven't yet had an opportunity to visit:

www.learning-works.ca

please check it out. We'd appreciate receiving your comments.

Breakfast Meetings

For those of you in the Vancouver area, our upcoming breakfast meetings are on the following dates:

- July 30, 2002
- September 19, 2002

This is a time for us to meet and share ideas. Please join us at 8:00 a.m. on the above dates at:

*LearningWorks
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Interesting Resources

For those of you interested in leadership development, Margaret Wheatley has some excellent articles at the following web site:

<http://www.margaretwheatley.com/writing.html>



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“You must be the change you wish to see.”

– Ghandi