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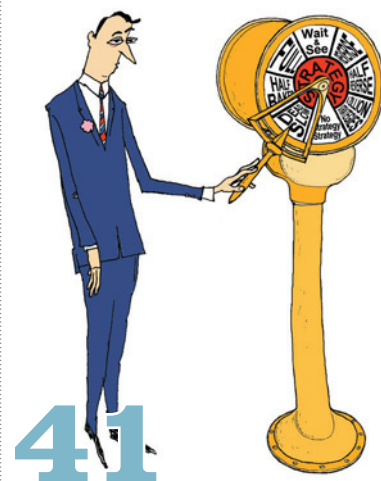
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## ZIV ELIRAZ

Ziv Eliraz is the founder and CEO of Zao, the company redefining social hiring. Prior to Zao, Eliraz lead the U.S. team of Infolinks and was responsible for all the revenue streams of the company. Previously, he was VP of strategic alliances for Amobee, where he was part of the team that built Amobee from scratch to being the #1 mobile operator ad network. Earlier in his career, Eliraz was an executive at both internet and mobile tech companies, a corporate and M&A attorney at one of Israel's largest and most distinguished law firms, and, most importantly, a self-taught programmer with a passion for building new stuff that leverages computing power and creativity to solve real world problems. He discusses referral sources on page 13.



## PAUL GLOVER

With his distinctive, direct and oft-humorous approach, “recovering attorney” and long-time business and executive coach Paul Glover bares his knuckles to present 76 strategies and tips to thrive in the knowledge economy in his new book, *WorkQuake*, published by Round Table Companies. The blogger for FastCompany.com coined the term *WorkQuake* of the Knowledge Economy to capture his unique insights and tools to implement organizational change in the knowledge economy. Chicago-based, Glover's writing has been featured in *The Business Edge*, *Vistage*, *Manufacturing.net* and *Food Manufacturing*. He advises on detoxing your workplace on page 19.



## ADAM SORENSEN

Adam Sorensen, global remuneration professional (GRP), leads the WorldatWork global rewards practice. Sorensen has more than 15 years' experience working in global human resources. Prior to joining WorldatWork, he was global work/life manager at Intel Corporation, where his contributions helped the company earn recognition as one of *Fortune's* “100 Best Places to Work” and *Working Mother* magazine's “100 Best Companies.” Sorensen was recognized in 2006 as one of the “Top 10 Men in Work-Life” by *Work/Life Matters* magazine. Sorensen also served on the strategy council for the Alliance for Work-Life Progress. He is also a published author. He discusses using “carve outs” in pay-for-performance programs, on page 26.



## SHANNON POSER

Shannon Poser is director of learning and development for ERA Real Estate, responsible for developing training products and services for ERA franchisees as well overseeing the delivery of all live, virtual, and self-paced training. His team also manages all aspects of ERA's learning management system. Prior to joining ERA, Poser led the education group at CIT Small Business Lending, where he transitioned the learning department from a paper-based to an electronic-based program; he also built and launched the first e-learning courses for the SBL group sales group. In addition, Poser has also been a training professional in the telecommunications, and airline industries. Poser has our last word, on page 54.



# Do your workplace investigations **MEASURE UP?**

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## CHANGING TIMES

**A**vid readers of the HRP 360° e-newsletter probably get a chuckle from some of the archived material included in many of the issues. September's issue featured a Manpower ad from 1967, pleading with employers not to "steal our White Glove Girls"—the temp workers the agency sent to help with a company's typing, stenography and other clerical duties. The ad featured a pert, Barbara Eden look-alike, complete with the requisite white gloves.

While our pop culture has picked up on our nostalgia for the "good old days"—witness the popularity of TV's *Mad Men*—there's no doubt we've come a long way since then. Do any companies still have typing pools anymore? The nature of work is changing and must change if our economy is going to survive. But, the future is a bit scary.

That's why employers and HR professionals must continue to move forward to attract the best talent. As writer Lynn Fraser discovered, to compete successfully means looking at your whole corporate package, not just simply at monetary compensation. But, when spending those dollars has to make sense, consultant Adam Sorensen offers some sage advice on pay for performance.

And, as those who might remember the days of the White Glove Girls experience some of the stressors of being either parents or children of elderly, frail parents or need to deal with their own health challenges, we dispatched writer Suzanne Bowness to look at the issue of mental health in the workplace. Other columnists offer insights into caregiving, workplace bullying, return to work, and more.

As always, you can contact me directly at [lblake@naylor.com](mailto:lblake@naylor.com), or post on our Facebook page, at [www.facebook.com/#!/HRProfessionalMag](http://www.facebook.com/#!/HRProfessionalMag).

Cheers,



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# LEADERSHIP MATTERS

BY DAPHNE FITZGERALD, CHRP, SHRP

## SMALL BUSINESS HR

**T**his year, the Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA) did some outreach to Ontario small business on the value HR can bring to their organizations.

It's often a tough sell. For many small businesses, HR resides with the owner, office manager or accountant—typically people with no formal HR training. They hire and fire, do the payroll, settle workplace disputes and comply with employment regulations while juggling a million other tasks. HR is yet another hat they wear in the day-to-day operations of the business and hiring a bona fide professional to do the job is, in their minds, a cost they don't need or don't think they can afford.

And all is well until they find themselves in the middle of a labour dispute, on the wrong side of an employment standard or saddled with a wrongful dismissal claim. Many small business leaders also struggle with the same talent management issues that the big guys face—trying to fill key positions, struggling to retain top talent and developing strategies for creating and maintaining an engaged and productive workforce.

HRPA talked to a number of HR consultant members on their dealings with small business and they told us their first contact with a new small business client is almost always to deal with an emergency.

“That, unfortunately, is when many entrepreneurs first start considering the importance of HR,” says Fiorella Callochchia, a former Toronto HR consultant (and now a Human Capital Specialist with Deloitte). “And after I help them through their HR crisis, they then want me to train managers and set up their basic HR infrastructure. They realize success requires a way to bring people into the company, hire and onboard, assess performance, recognize people and pay them properly and know how and when to move people up or out.”

### Success stories

HRPA also talked to some small businesses that have benefited from adding an HR function.

Two businesses that grew their HR departments internally were Precision Biologic, a Halifax-based medical diagnostics manufacturer, and Summerhill Group, a Toronto environmental consulting organization that designs information campaigns for clients like Home Depot.

Precision Biologic tapped an administrative employee to take on the HR role. She developed a standardized hiring process, wrote an employee handbook and developed HR initiatives around leadership and culture development, workplace wellness and performance management. Since creating the position, the firm's CEO, Jennifer Mills, says their retention rates have improved, they have better hires and their performance management system has allowed employees to connect more effectively with the firm's objectives.

At Summerhill Group, the firm's field rep recruiter turned her HR talents to the head office staff and implemented several successful initiatives, including a new employee onboarding program, employee opinion polling and a mentoring program to pair mentors with mentees outside their job function for personal development.

At both companies, the decision to take HR more seriously has resulted in spots on the Great Place to Work Institute Canada's Best Workplaces list.

As I write this column, we're in the middle of Small Business Month in Canada, which reminds us that many of the same issues face all organizations, no matter what the size. All organizations can benefit from HR counsel and strategy. **HR**



## Employers Less Optimistic About Growth/Salaries for 2013

Respondents to Morneau Shepell's recent annual Compensation Survey ([www.morneaushepell.com](http://www.morneaushepell.com)) appear to be less optimistic than last year in terms of growth and profitability in their organizations, especially in Alberta.

The overall expected average increase of 2.6% is twice the inflation rate of the Consumer Price Index, which at the time the survey was conducted was 1.3%. However, a rise in inflation in Canada is likely in the short run, given current volatility in the petroleum industry, and expected increases in food prices due to the worst drought the United States has seen in 50 years.

According to survey respondents, for sponsors of defined benefit pension plans, the key priority is to rein in escalating pension costs. Although interest rates are at historical lows, these sponsors are implementing liability-driven investing strategies. And as a response to exploding pension costs, employers are looking

into all available alternatives to modify pension cost sharing and risk.

Survey respondents again identified cost control and disability management as their top priorities for 2013 for their benefits programs. Faced with continuous cost increases and higher utilization rates of expensive drugs, employers are seeking the help of outside consultants to implement cost-control strategies without reducing access to medical therapies for employees.



According to the survey, for 2013, the key human resource priorities for employers are the same as last year—talent acquisition and employee retention—especially in the context of an aging population.

## Research on Team Effectiveness

Research conducted by former McMaster University Ph.D. student Anthony Celani investigated the influence of collectivistic group norms, informal rules and expectations that encourage group members to value group membership and collective responsibility, on team effectiveness.

This research shows that collectivistic group norms positively influence team confidence perceptions which, in turn, positively influence team performance. It is argued that teams with higher levels of collectivistic group norms will have team members who better demonstrate proper collectivistic behaviour to each other, which will provide them with greater motivation to perform team tasks well.

These findings have several implications for business practitioners. First, training must be specifically designed to promote collectivistic group behaviour which will positively influence team member adoption of collectivistic behaviour and team performance. Second, appropriate team tasks, such as those requiring higher levels of interdependence and interaction among team members, should be selected in order for team members to better foster the emergence of collectivistic group norms.

Third, teams should spend time prior to task performance to create expectations that facilitate team-member performance of collectivistic behaviour. These behaviours include placing greater priority on the achievement of team goals, working closely with team members on team tasks, placing team-member needs above individual needs during task performance, relying on teammates to perform their parts of the team task, performing one's own duties in fulfillment of the team's overall goals, demonstrating concern for the team's performance, and accepting responsibility for the team's outcomes. Teams should also socialize new team members to perform these collectivistic behaviours.

Finally, team leaders should manage team confidence perceptions by helping team members recognize and acknowledge how collectivistic behaviour contributes to team effectiveness. Ways to do this are verbal persuasion and providing feedback and coaching to team members.

Anthony Celani was the recipient of the Human Resources Research Institute-2011 Ph.D. Dissertation Award.

# Referrals: Transform Employees and Contacts into Super-Recruiters

BY ZIV ELIRAZ

When you need to ramp up your workforce, it's best to get leads on potential candidates from people who understand your industry and know your company's culture. Employees can be an excellent source for candidate referrals, but if you operate a traditional referral program, you'll probably have a low participation rate.

Here are some tips to super-charge your referral program:

**Cast a wider net with a new question:** In the traditional employee referral programs, employers ask employees to recommend people they know. Change the question by asking employees who they and their friends would recommend. This approach casts a wider net and lets all employees participate.

**Harvest social media data to find likely candidates:** With the help of well-designed social recruiting tools that automatically match job descriptions with employee skills, you can give employees and other recruiting program participants the power to forward recommendations from their social networks in just a few clicks. A system that makes referrals easy also boosts employee participation rates.

**Expand your referral program beyond employees:** Trusted contacts like former employees, vendors, suppliers and partners can also be a reliable source of candidate referrals, so why not include them in your referral program—even in your incentive plan?



Another great way to get more qualified candidate leads is to build a referral program that allows employees to share incentive payments with friends who bring in candidates who are ultimately hired.

**Make your referral program a game:** In a traditional program, only referrers whose recommendations result in a hire receive an incentive. By “gamifying” the program—introducing an element of competition by recognizing individual or department referral volume and rewarding those who make an effort—everyone has an incentive to become involved and everyone who participates gets a shot at a reward.

As an HR professional, you need to ensure that your company has a pool of qualified candidates so that managers make the best hiring decisions. By broadening participation and introducing new elements to engage employees and other relevant contacts, you can improve your referral program results and hire well—fast.

## Internship Funding Available for New Graduates

New wage subsidies are available through Environmental Careers Organization (ECO) Canada that will make it easier for Canadian employers to hire environmental interns. Eligible employers could receive up to \$12,000 to help cover the costs of hiring a recent graduate in a paid internship role.

Organizations that meet the following criteria are eligible to apply for the subsidized environmental internships:

- Are Canadian owned or a Canadian subsidiary;

- Offer a new position that has a significant environmental component;
- Hire a new employee for a full-time position;
- Have not accessed another federally funded wage subsidy for the position; and
- Support the intern's application to become a Certified Environmental Professional in Training.

Wage subsidies are offered on a first-come, first-served basis to the organizations that meet funding requirements. More information on the program is available at [eco.ca/internships](http://eco.ca/internships).



# Insights from Employers on Returning Cancer Survivors to Work

BY JUDY GOULD AND IRENE NICOLL

The Canadian Partnership Against Cancer recently undertook research to explore the return-to-work challenges encountered by employers and to identify any supports offered by the workplace for working cancer survivors and their employers. Three focus groups were held with senior managers and human resource representatives from medium (100-500 employees) and large organizations (over 500 employees) with a mix of physically active job positions. Interviews were also conducted with senior staff, including employers, insurers, lawyers and union representatives.

Researchers found that the challenges faced by employers do not vary meaningfully by size of firm, nature of the work or by sector. However, the ability to address them, and the tools and resources on hand to do so, do change significantly. Specifically, to deal with the challenges, large employers were most likely to mention strategies that build on what they already have in place and on internal resources, such as providing improved or more formal training for managers and developing a comprehensive disability management program.

Small and medium-sized employers are encouraged to consider the assistance of external resources including: providing education for managers and the better use of external resources for support, including the Canadian Cancer Society ([www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)), and/or local agencies such as Wellspring ([www.wellspring.ca](http://www.wellspring.ca)), CarePath ([www.carepath.ca](http://www.carepath.ca)), and the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer ([www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca](http://www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca)).

The focus group discussions led to the following recommendations:

1. Develop educational material for managers on issues such as: communication with employees, health care workers and insurers; what to expect from employees who are undergoing or have undergone treatment; how to build a back-to-work program; and how to manage workload and productivity.
2. Facilitate or provide training sessions about return-to-work issues for human resources managers, including coaching employers about



their legal responsibilities and educating them about available resources.

3. Build a toolkit of relevant resources, including packages for both employees and physicians with return-to-work forms and information, and accommodation policies.
4. Provide access to external professionals who have expertise in workplace accommodation and the development of return-to-work plans.
5. Compile and provide online access to a list and description of community services that could assist employees and employers who have workers with diminished capacity related to a chronic illness such as cancer.

For further information about the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer studies, please email the CPACC Person-Centred Perspective at [PCP@partnershipagainstcancer.ca](mailto:PCP@partnershipagainstcancer.ca).





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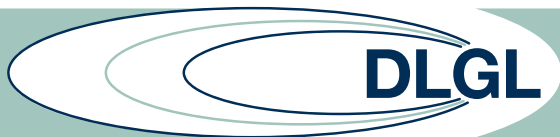
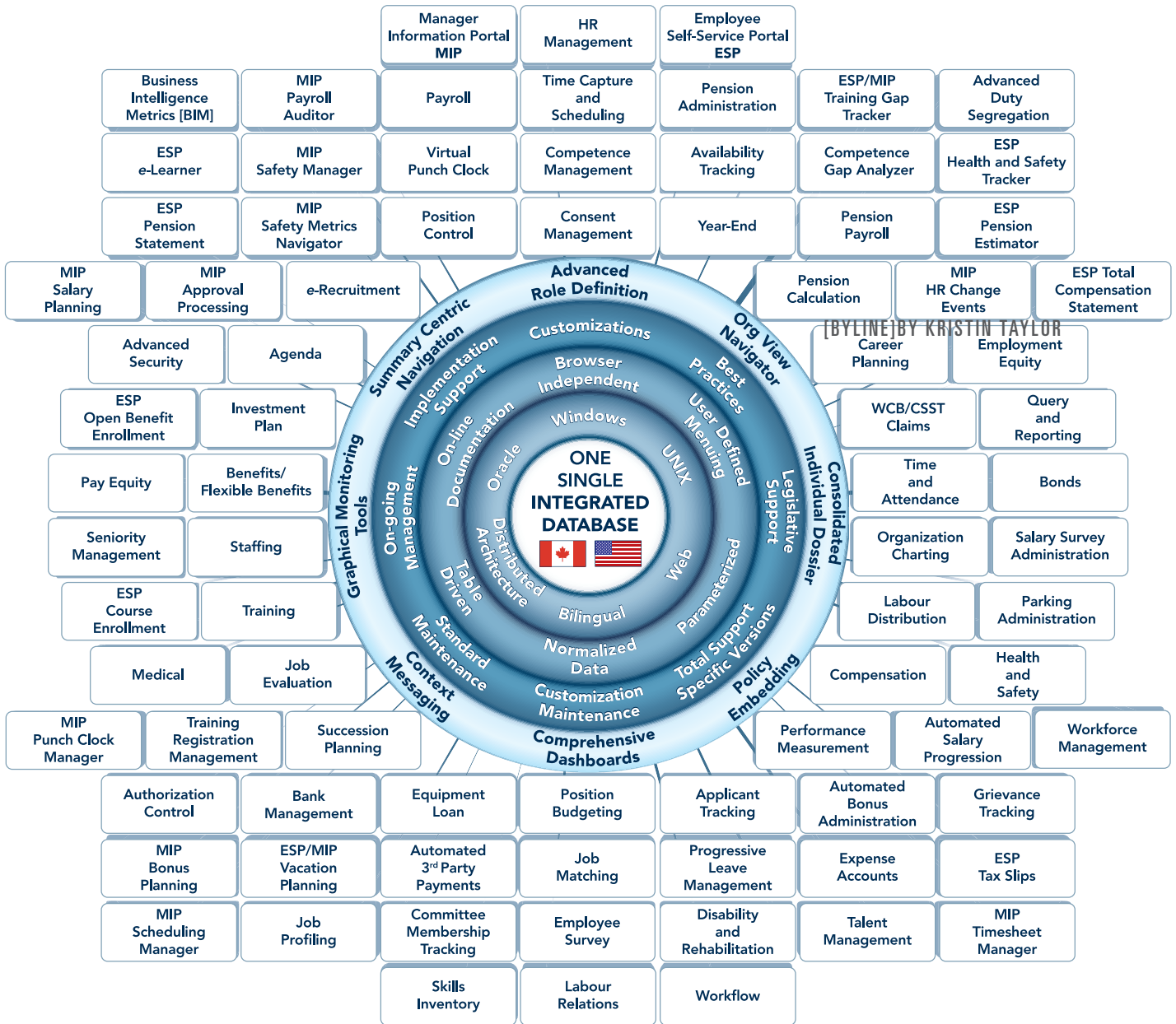


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## LAW FIRM DIVERSITY: PROGRAMS THAT WORK

**A**s co-chair of the Toronto Diversity and Inclusion Committee at Fraser Milner Casgrain LLP (FMC) for the past two years and a member of the committee from its inception more than five years ago, I have had the benefit of seeing what works as part of an effort to transform a law firm's culture. Transformation is never easy and law firms are notoriously stodgy and curmudgeonly. Lawyers are trained to find fault, so pleasing everyone in the room is an impossible task. This being said, I have seen FMC make tremendous strides.

So how did we do it? Step one, of course, was to make the business case. Our own clients and prospective clients assisted by inquiring about the diversity of FMC's lawyers and what we were doing to make diversity and inclusion a priority. Clients expect their lawyers to reflect the diversity within their own organizations and they challenged us to embrace diversity and inclusion as a business imperative. We decided to meet this challenge head on. Along the way, we have learned the value of broadening our insight and perspective, enhancing our ability to provide our clients with the best possible advice and service. Diverse teams translate into innovation and creativity; qualities that clients seek in a law firm. A diverse and inclusive environment also means that FMC members can bring their true selves to work, enabling us to reach our full potential and minimizing impediments in productivity. This is the goal.

What have we done then to achieve our goal? We made sure we had the support of senior leadership at the national level. Local leadership is also critical. Without support from the top, any initiative is doomed to fail. This is particularly so for diversity and inclusion initiatives that can be met with an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" type of resistance. We have been fortunate to have not only the support of our senior leadership, but promotion and encouragement. Diversity and inclusion is part of our National Strategic Plan, therefore making it a priority across the offices. We also adopted a separate, formal strategy to create and maintain a firm-wide culture of inclusion, which consists of a comprehensive plan, sufficient resources assigned to execute it, diversity and inclusion policies,



increased diversity of the individuals involved in the firm's decision-making and diversity training initiatives.

Many initiatives were easy and almost "no-brainers" in retrospect. We were the first law firm to sponsor a scholarship for law students with the Black Business and Professional

Association (BBPA). The BBPA scholarship is available nationally to a black law student who has demonstrated outstanding academic achievement, commitment to diversity and financial need. Not surprisingly, it also has been an excellent way to recruit exceptional law students and two past recipients have articulated with FMC.

We were the first law firm and founding corporate partner and pro bono legal counsel to Pride at Work Canada, a professional organization created to support the LGBT community at work. Pride at Work Canada is a tremendous resource of best practices to create an inclusive workplace both generally and specifically for the LGBT community. Since we began working on this initiative, we have supported members of the firm involved in other LGBT organizations such as Out on Bay Street and SOGIC (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Conference).

FMC was the first law firm corporate partner of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) Mentoring Partnership Program. This particular program has been a tremendous success and provides the opportunity for all members of FMC to give back and support recent immigrants in their transition to Canadian workplaces.

We established the FMC Legal Professional Internship, which provides hands-on experience to a foreign-trained lawyer new to Canada through a six-month paid position with the firm. This was the first program of its kind in Canada. We also were the first corporate partner of the University of Toronto's Internationally Trained

## LEGAL

Lawyer Program. The hurdles through which foreign-trained professionals must jump are well-known. These programs create opportunities to make that process easier for these individuals, providing them with opportunities they may otherwise not have had.

It has been said that it is better to give than to receive, which is

a mantra FMC has adopted with its participation in Uniterra's Leave for Change program. FMC firm members are encouraged to use their professional skills to help developing countries by volunteering abroad. Members of FMC who have participated in this program attest to just how transformational these experiences can be.

In addition, we were the first law firm to participate in the Diversity Roundtable, a group of representatives from financial institutions, major corporations, government and professional services firms who meet bi-monthly to discuss matters of interest and share ideas in an effort to promote diversity in the workplace. Not professing to know all the answers and seeking out the best practices from other organizations has been instructive.

Our Celebrations Committee raises awareness of important holidays and events throughout the year and encourages firm members to share their thoughts and experiences about holidays.

One of our more recent initiatives has been diversity and inclusion training for senior leadership and firm members responsible for hiring, promotion and compensation. This half-day program has tackled unconscious bias as an obstacle to achieving a truly inclusive workplace.

Changing mindsets is not easy. At FMC, we seek to embrace a cross-section of cultures, ethnicities, genders, ages, orientations and backgrounds that our diverse communities reflect. In doing so, we support our people in their personal and professional development. We also support our communities by providing satisfying career opportunities for professionals of different backgrounds. Being repeatedly honoured as one of Canada's Best Employers for New Canadians (2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012) and one of Canada's Best Diversity Employers (2011 and 2012) demonstrates that we are on the right track. **HR**

*Kristin Taylor is a partner with Fraser Milner Casgrain LLP, working from its Toronto offices. To learn more about FMC, visit [fmc-law.com](http://fmc-law.com). Contact Taylor at [Kristin.taylor@fmc-law.com](mailto:Kristin.taylor@fmc-law.com).*



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## DETOX YOUR DEPARTMENT: DEALING WITH TOXIC EMPLOYEES

**I**t's the ugly truth: most organizations have "toxic employees." If they were your lowest performing employees, it would be easy to get rid of them. But what makes dealing with them difficult is that many of them are average to high performers. However, despite their decent work performance, their attitudes cast a vile cloud over your organization, creating a negative influence that affects everyone—especially your most valued staff.

Toxic employees can be difficult to recognize and even more difficult to address, but they generally fall into three types:

- **The Diva:** You can recognize divas by the attention they demand. While they may be brilliant performers, they also have to remind you of their accomplishments and require constant reassurance that they are indeed valued. They may need so many pats on the back and demand so much time and praise that they actually suck the energy out of the team. Divas assume they are the reason for the team's success, overlooking the necessity of the team's support.
- **The Gloom and Doomer:** It's going to be bad. Just wait. "Gloom and doomers" know that no plan, no initiative is going to turn out well, and they will spread that message to anyone who listens. They may deny being negative, saying that they are just being *realistic*—but constant naysayers and complainers are an irritant to the group and inspire doubt and cynicism.
- **Pot Stirrer:** Did you hear what the pot stirrer did this time? Unlike divas, pot stirrers don't want to be in the spotlight. Instead, these intelligent (usually bored) employees choose to stay in the background, spreading gossip and innuendos just to keep themselves and others amused. The result: increased tension and suspicion within the workforce.

Ideally, managers who are paying attention to their teams can recognize the behaviour of



a toxic employee early and address it before it goes too far. Toxic employees would be easy to deal with ("You're fired!") if they were poor performers, but because they are not, managers have a harder time addressing their influence on the work group. Just like a dangerous chemical, however, if these behaviors are not contained and neutralized, the entire group—including your most valued performers—can suffer.

Sometimes toxic employees don't know they are toxic and don't realize their behaviour is detrimental to the work group, so the first step is giving them a reality check. This is difficult for managers who lack interpersonal skills, especially communication skills. It's much easier to look at a sales or production report and see who is not performing, but it's much more difficult to tell an employee that his behavior is not up to par, even if his skills are.



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# WORKPLACE CULTURE

The manager needs to identify the toxic behaviour to the employee—being very specific and providing examples—and let him know it isn't acceptable. Higher-ranking employees are particularly taken aback when told that they have toxic behaviours. They may not believe it, so doing a 360-degree performance review can be effective.

The next step in dealing with toxic employees is talking to them about reform and rehabilitation. They have to understand that their behaviour is having a detrimental impact on the work environment and on their co-workers and it cannot be allowed to continue. The manager and employee must develop a reform and rehabilitation action plan that gives the employee an opportunity to determine how to change that toxic behavior. A plan must have concrete action steps detailing what the employee needs to change within a prescribed time period (90 days is usually fair). During this time, the manager must follow up with the employee to see what changes are occurring. That initial 360-degree review can be revisited at the end of the process to see how the rest of the team believes the behaviours have changed.

Despite your best efforts, some employees refuse to change. They may reject the idea that they are the one who needs to alter their behaviour, or they may not want to invest the effort in making a sustained change. If the employee's skill set is one you absolutely need, remove him as much as possible from the work

environment and from the team so that he is not infecting others with his toxicity. Put him in an office alone so he can work without interacting with the team. If this last effort doesn't work, the employee needs to be fired.

When dealing with toxic employees, the needs of the

many outweigh the needs of the few. Protect your work group from the contamination of the diva, the gloom and doomer, and the pot stirrer to keep your team strong and healthy. **HR**

*Executive coach and "recovering attorney" Paul Glover is the author of WorkQuake, [www.workquake.com](http://www.workquake.com).*



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# ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND “INTERCONNECTIVITY” ATTRACT THE BEST

Corporate values and ethics bring depth and resonance to how a company and its brand is perceived

BY J. LYNN FRASER

**W**e all have interconnections. We have them with people, organizations, businesses, resources, the environment and the communities we belong to. Likewise, companies with well-developed and authentic corporate responsibility projects and values thrive on these linked relationships. A company’s relationship building, i.e., their “interconnectivity” with various groups, brings depth and resonance to how their company and its brand is perceived. The more robust a company’s “strength of character” is in pursuing social commitments and green environmental policies, the more likely it will be seen by its employees as a “best of” and “best place to work.”

When employees are engaged and when they can feel pride in their company’s social commitments, the company as well as its brand and employees will benefit in a multitude of interconnected ways.

## DEMONSTRATE GENUINE VALUES

“Every part of your actions should speak to your morals and values,” states Sybil Taylor, communications director of Toronto’s Steam Whistle Brewery, “Employees and the public see through ingenuine efforts.” The company, she notes, supports hundreds of events that are “cultural, charitable and community oriented.”

Steam Whistle Brewery has won numerous awards for the quality of its products, its green initiatives, its support of various social projects and its management culture. It has been recognized as one of Canada’s Greenest Employers and has one of Canada’s Most Admired Corporate Cultures. In 2011, it received an award for Excellence in Corporate Responsibility. This year the company was acclaimed, for the fourth year, as one of Canada’s Best Managed Companies. A key to the company’s success, according to Taylor, “is by hiring and attracting fantastic employees and keeping them loyal to the brand.”

Taylor also notes the importance of social media in affecting the perception of a brand: “People talk about the products they love and hate. We want to make sure people have a fantastic [experience] of the brewery either at an event or online.” Steam Whistle is a robust example of what can be achieved when a company is mindful of the crucial interconnections of corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies, product quality, brand reputation, employee engagement and public perception.

Sean Lewis, Senior Consultant, MT&L Public Relations in Halifax, a partner with NATIONAL Public Relations, observes, “Employees have the ability to build an employer’s reputation, but they also have the ability to harm it. The brand promise that an organization makes to consumers is not only delivered through products and services, but also through its employees. Employees who are engaged and feel they are valued members of the company are more productive, more customer-focused, more loyal and ultimately, more





committed to business success and more likely to be brand ambassadors and positively influence public perception.”

A 2012 study in 23 countries by global custom market research organization TNS Global looked at the links among employee engagement, “brand ambassadorship” and customer engagement. The study found that employees who believe they are working for “one of the best” in their industry were 86 per cent more likely to say they were satisfied with their employment. When employees perceived their companies as being “average” in their field only 50 per cent said that they were satisfied. Some 78 per cent of employees who worked for “one of the best” companies would use customer feedback to “improve products and services” in comparison to 40 per cent of employees from companies perceived as average. Employees were also more likely to act above and beyond to deliver brand experience to customers and to recommend products/services to others when they believed

themselves to be working for one of the best companies. Companies who lead by example in their industry and communities will, in turn, inspire and engage their employees.

## **MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

“We have a strong and engaged organization. Employees coming to Mount Sinai Hospital want to make a difference. Our mission and values are central, as is having a role in society,” notes Debbie Fischer, senior vice-president of strategy and organizational development. In 2009, MSH won an award for Most Admired Corporate Cultures in Canada and in 2010 it received a Green Health Care Award. In 2012, it received several awards including recognition as one of Canada’s Best Diversity Employers, one of Greater Toronto’s Top Employers, and was awarded Hospital Exemplary status by Accreditation Canada.

Mount Sinai’s CSR policies, like that of Steam Whistle Brewery, are broad and inclusive. Their environ-

mental and CSR policies recognize that companies have a relationship with communities that are both local and global. They know these policies also affect how their organizations are perceived as good citizens. Mount Sinai’s employees participate in the hospital’s in-house and community environmental programs, and its physicians and staff provide health care, along with community partners, to marginalized groups in Canada, as well as in 25 countries.

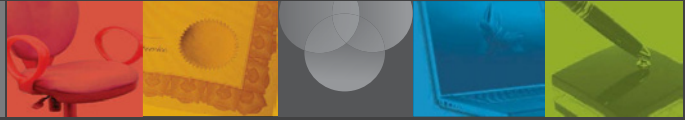
“We do believe our commitment to these groups is in line with where we originated [as a hospital] established for equal access,” Fisher notes. She advises companies that when choosing CSR initiatives to ensure that they “tie into your values.” She notes the MSH’s initiatives are “an extension of how we do our business.”

It is helpful to think of a company’s CSR policies, its brand/products and its relationship with its employees as three sides of a triangle. For balance, for public goodwill and for the sake of authenticity, all sides of the triangle must be in balance. As con-



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sultant Lewis notes, “A company’s social contribution has an impact on public perception, but it is only one aspect stakeholders use to develop their opinion about a company. Stakeholders take into consideration the sum of all experiences they associate with a company when developing their perception. As an example, a company could be perceived to donate time and resources to a community initiative and treat their employees well, but if they are perceived to have a product of poor quality, public perception could be negative toward the company.”

## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Corporate social responsibility is one avenue for companies to become “one of the best.” In 2009, IBM surveyed 224 businesses leaders worldwide and found that 60 per cent of the leaders felt that corporate social responsibility had increased in importance since 2008. The survey found that more than two-thirds of those surveyed felt that CSR was “part of an integrated business strategy to grow new revenue and control costs.”

There is more, however, to a company’s CSR policies than financial considerations. Authentic CSR policies inspire pride in employees and give them a sense of ownership in what their company stands for. This identification has important effects on both employees’ and companies’ well-being. Recent research by Einar Westerlund, director, project development at Queen’s Centre for Business Venturing at Queen’s School of Business, into “Best Small and Medium Employers in Canada” has established that employees who work for “best employers” stay longer with these companies, have high engagement, lower absenteeism and stress, and better health as well as better customer service and business returns.

“We know that our commitments to environmental sustainability, social

justice and inclusion and co-operative principles and practices are a significant influence on perceptions of Vancity as a great place to work,” comments Mandy Whiting, acting vice-president of human resources at Vancity. “One tangible measure of this is through our annual engagement survey...where employees rated corporate social responsibility as the aspect of working at Vancity that they are most satisfied with, and our scores outperformed the highest performing organizations in [Aon Hewitt’s] database of 5,700 employees by a margin [referring to 2011 data].”

Vancity is Canada’s largest credit union and it has received many kinds of awards for its social and environmental policies. It has been, for example, recognized as one of BC’s 50 Top Employers in both 2010 and 2011. *Maclean’s* consistently ranks Vancity as one of Canada’s Top 100 Employers. Authentic and sincere CSR and environmental policies are value-added attractors for companies. They inspire current employees and they offer a competitive advantage to organizations who want to attract top talent. As Whiting notes: “Many people choose to work at Vancity because they want to make a difference in their career, in their community, in their lives. They want a challenging career in a place where their job is about more than dollars and cents, with an organization that has a triple bottom line of financial, environmental and social performance.”

In an uncertain economy, creating broad, diverse and multiple interconnections with a variety of stakeholders and communities increases a company’s future opportunities and gives it flexibility. Being perceived as a “best of” company through strong values, genuine support of environmental and CSR projects helps create those connections while attracting top talent and retaining it. **HR**



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# PAY FOR PERFORMANCE: REWARDING TOP PERFORMERS THROUGH CARVE-OUTS

Companies must structure their rewards programs to differentiate between critical and non-critical talent and between top and average performers

BY ADAM SORENSEN

**N**ot long ago, it was almost impossible to read the news without hearing about the “war for talent.” It seemed that companies everywhere were scrambling to find the right employees with the skills necessary to meet their business objectives. Then came the recent recession and the loss of countless jobs across almost every sector of the economy. Suddenly, the war for talent seemed to be over as companies froze hiring and began cutting jobs. But even as the larger war for talent slowed, the competition for top talent and those with mission-critical skills continued on. And, in a time of limited budgets to attract, motivate and retain employees, the war for critical talent became even more competitive.

A key element of many companies’ strategy for attracting, retaining and motivating critical talent is paying for performance. In fact, a recent survey

found that more than two-thirds of companies have a pay-for-performance policy. Unfortunately, having such a policy does not necessarily mean that there is real alignment between what an employee contributes and what rewards he or she receives for those contributions. The same study found that only one in five companies ensures that rewards are accurately aligned to employee contributions and, to make things even more difficult, fewer than half of those companies formally identify employees with critical skills.\*

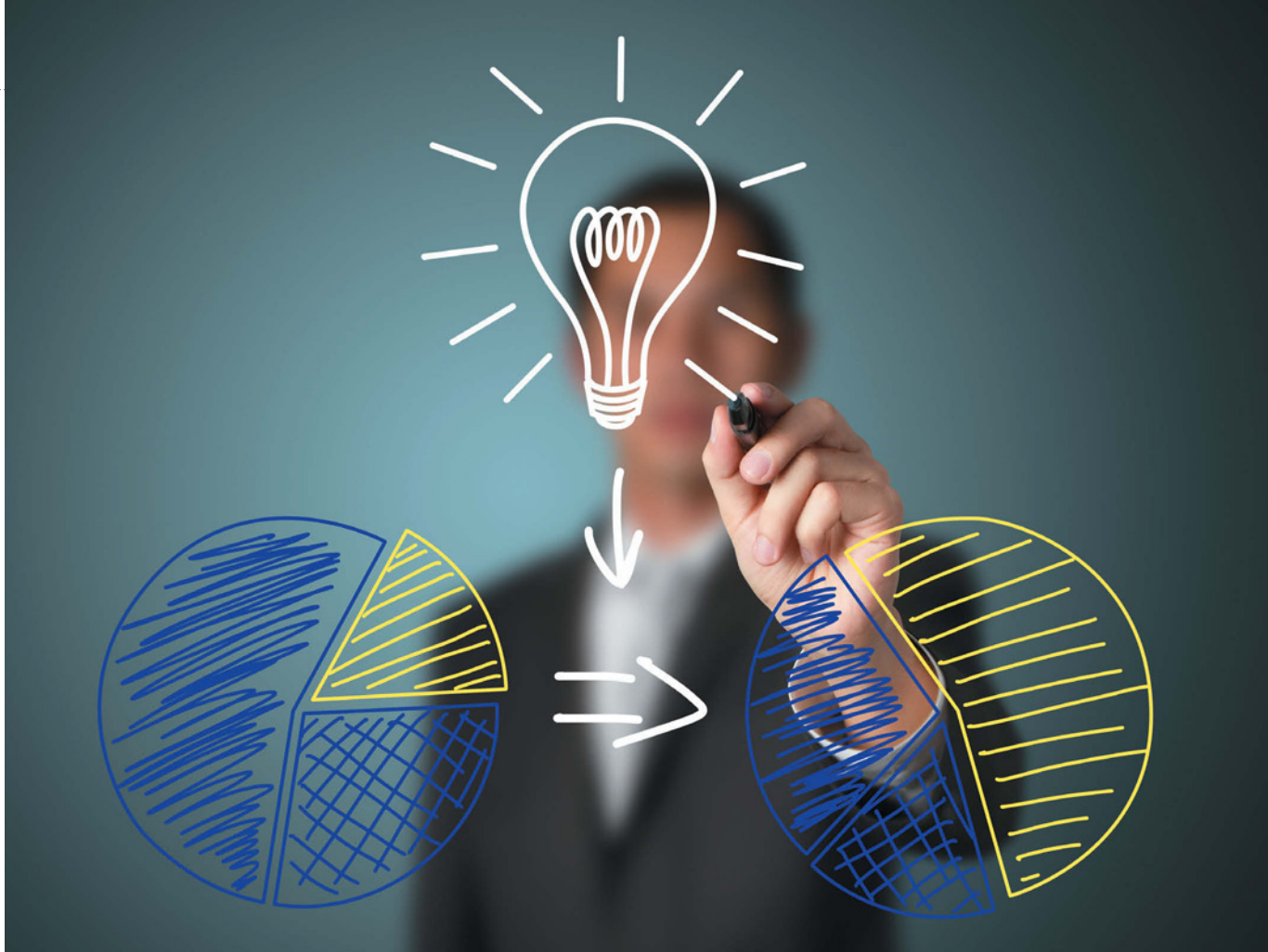
Early in my career, I worked at a company that had abandoned annual reviews and merit increases in favour of an across-the-board annual increase. Even though the company had a strong egalitarian culture, the end result was that average performers saw little change from the merit increases they had seen in the past.

\*Research by SuccessFactors and Accenture: <http://www.worldatwork.org/waw/adimComment?id=49979>

However, below-average performers saw much larger increases and top performers saw much smaller ones. Poor performers felt empowered to continue performing poorly while top performers lost much of their incentive to outperform their peers.

## REWARDING TOP PERFORMERS

In order to effectively attract, motivate and retain critical talent, companies must structure their rewards programs to differentiate between critical and non-critical talent and between top and average performers. One mechanism to create this differentiation is to “carve out” a portion of the annual merit budget—small as it may be—to deliver targeted, meaningful rewards to critical talent and top performers. In a carve-out approach, top performers receive substantially larger increases compared to those in the middle and bottom, but there are still merit funds available to reward those in the middle who



also play an important role in the organization's success.

At its most basic level, a carve-out approach simply means setting aside a portion of the company's total merit budget to provide targeted and differentiated rewards to top performers. While the numbers will vary from company to company, a common approach is to set aside 25 per cent of the total merit budget as a "carve out." For example, a company with a merit budget of four per cent might set aside three per cent as the general merit pool and then distribute the remaining one per cent of the overall budget to top performers, especially those in mission-critical roles. This approach results in a substantial increase in the size and impact of the merit delivered to top performers while still delivering meaningful rewards to those who are not identified as top performers. Even a small carve out can have a dramatic impact if the number of top performers is relatively small compared to the overall employee population.

## KEY ELEMENTS OF A CARVE-OUT POLICY

In order to be effective, a carve-out approach must first begin with a clearly articulated reward philosophy. This philosophy should explicitly link the organization's reward objectives with its business goals and objectives. Next, a company must decide how to define key concepts such as "top performer" or "critical talent." These terms will likely vary considerably from one organization to another and, again, should be linked back to the organization's business goals and objectives. Finally, the approach must fit within the organization's culture. Implementing a carve-out approach in a highly egalitarian culture might take time and careful planning, but it can be done successfully.

In addition to these philosophical issues, there are a number of practical considerations when implementing a carve-out approach. First, companies must define the target population that will be eligible to receive the additional

merit funds. Having too many in the top category will dilute the impact of the carve-out. Second, the budget must be structured to deliver differentiated rewards to the target population while still meeting the objectives laid out for the remainder of the employee population. Third, companies must decide how they will deliver the additional merit funds to top performers. Some may choose to deliver a larger base salary increase (which will increase the long-term costs since the increases escalate over time) while others may opt for a one-time bonus payment (which helps manage fixed costs over the longer term). Fourth, companies must have the right systems in place to track, evaluate, and compare employee performance to ensure that there is good, reliable information for determining who should or should not be eligible for a portion of the carve-out.

## CASE STUDIES

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100,000 employees worldwide. The company has a highly integrated performance management and reward structure, and the culture emphasizes performance. Managers are expected to manage poor performers out of the organization, and top performing employees expect to be recognized financially for their contributions. Each year, about 10 to 15 per cent of the total employee population is identified as being “top” performers. Some business units impose a forced distribution to achieve a 15/80/5 split between top, middle and bottom performers.

The company’s carve-out approach allows employees in the top tier to receive merit increases that are, on average, twice as large as those received by the middle tier. Top performers are formally identified and receive specialized communication about their performance and rewards. Although these employees might not be recognized publicly, there is broad awareness within the company that differences in performance result in different reward outcomes. Creating a strong, formal, and transparent link between performance, culture and reward allows the company to deliver substantial differentiation to top performers, who are critical to the organization’s short- and long-term success.

**Company B** is a small international professional-services firm with 200 employees in the United States. The small size limits the size of the company’s merit budget and number of potential “top” performers, which is usually around 10 per cent of the total population. The company’s reward strategy is to deliver differentiated rewards to top performers while recognizing the contributions of middle performers through a wide variety of financial and non-financial rewards programs.

The company’s carve-out approach results in merit increases and bonus payouts to top performers that are

“Even a small carve-out can have a dramatic impact if the number of top performers is relatively small compared to the overall employee population.”

25 to 50 per cent larger than those received by middle performers. Top performers are formally identified through the performance review process, and the company’s total merit budget is usually communicated to all employees. Managing expectations and careful communication are critical to this organization’s carve-out approach since communicating the full amount set aside for merit increases can raise questions about fairness and create a sense of entitlement among those who receive smaller-than-average increases.

**Company C** is a mid-sized U.S.-based raw materials company with around 5,000 employees. The company has a large number of employees performing similar jobs with similar outcomes, which makes it more difficult to identify top performers. In most years, the company identifies about 15 to 20 per cent of its total population as top performers

and delivers differentiated rewards exclusively through merit increases to base pay.

Top performers typically receive 50 per cent more than middle performers. This company uses a “two budget” approach where all employees with satisfactory performance receive a share of the first merit budget (e.g., two per cent) and only top performers receive a share of the second merit pool (e.g., one per cent). Top performers receive specialized communication, but the total merit pool amounts are not usually communicated to the entire employee population. While a large number of top performers can reduce the impact of the carve-out approach, especially in years with smaller merit budgets, creating and managing two separate merit budgets can help organizations deliver differentiated rewards to top performers while still rewarding middle performers.

Delivering differentiated rewards to top performers through a carve-out approach can be a powerful tool for attraction, motivation, and retention. To make this approach successful, companies should:

1. Set reasonable expectations for the program, especially if this is a new approach for the organization;
2. Define clear performance criteria, both for how top performers will be identified as well as for how the program itself will be evaluated;
3. Emphasize differentiation when designing the budget and types of rewards to be delivered; and
4. Communicate early and often, especially with the managers that will be responsible for identifying top performers, evaluating their performance, and delivering performance messages to those that receive (or not) the differentiated rewards. **HR**

*Adam Sorensen, GRP, leads the Global Rewards Practice at WorldatWork, a global human resources association focused on compensation, benefits, and integrated total rewards. He can be reached at adam.sorensen@worldatwork.org.*

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# CALLING IN

With one in five Canadians suffering mental health challenges, workplaces need to get proactive about strategies

BY SUZANNE BOWNESS

**H**er tenacity as a foreign correspondent and dedication to reporting on contentious stories suggest that becoming an award-winning

journalist was part of Jan Wong's career plan; it seems less likely that she would also have intended to become a workplace mental health spokesperson and advocate. But that's the thing about mental health issues—you never imagine that they will happen to you.

After a devastating clinical depression in 2006 followed by a less-than-stellar response from her workplace, Wong decided to do what she does best and share her experience through writ-

ing, penning a memoir called *Out of the Blue: A Memoir of Workplace Depression, Recovery, Redemption, and yes, Happiness*. Clearly the book (self-published after her publisher got cold feet) resonated with readers as it garnered dozens of reviews, flew onto bestseller lists and moved into a second printing almost immediately.

Besides the runaway success of Wong's memoir, this year also saw continued mental health advocacy by Bell Canada, which began in 2010 by dedicating \$50 million over five years in support of mental health. Bell's "Let's Talk" campaign also attempts to reduce the stigma around these issues by inviting celebrity spokespeople including former Toronto Maple Leaf Ron Ellis and Olympian Clara Hughes to share their experiences.





# SAD

That's the thing about mental health issues—you never imagine that they will happen to you.



Journalist and author Jan Wong

brought on by a specific incident when her former employer, *The Globe and Mail*, did not fully support her (and she was eventually fired) after personal and racist public backlash against an article she wrote in covering the Dawson College shooting in Montreal.

"The newspaper did not back me. They said it was my fault. I felt betrayed," says Wong. Before long, that sense of betrayal slid into what would later be diagnosed as a clinical depression.

## HOW SHOULD HR RESPOND TO MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES?

While workplace mental health is only starting to be formally addressed, the size of the problem is already overwhelming: a 2012 report from the Conference Board of Canada says 450,000 Canadians are unable to work due to mental health issues, listing the economic cost of illnesses such as depression, bipolar disorder, panic attacks and other such conditions at \$20.7 billion, annually.

For Wong, who had not previously experienced mental health issues, the symptoms of not being able to eat, sleep or work, not to mention crying uncontrollably, hit so unexpectedly that she didn't even initially recognize she was truly unwell. In her case, depression was

As HR director in a workplace that clearly fits the profile of a high-stress medical environment, Manson Locke oversees not only 13 HR personnel but 10 occupational health and safety staff. Together his team offers services to the 1,800 employees of Baycrest Hospital, a long-term care home for the aging that provides assisted living and outpatient clinics. Locke and his team are very aware of the mental health implications inherent in their high-stress, fast-paced workplace, where the staff includes everyone from senior executives and research scientists to front-line cleaners and nurses. "As a team we talk about mental health as an issue we struggle with," says Locke. "We take a 'whole person' perspective on mental health."

So what does an effective HR response to mental health issues look like? Ideally, there should be a plan in place from the start. Locke says his organization tries to treat mental health issues like any other physical ailment.

"We approach those issues as if they're a disability to be accommodated and worked on, often involving things like health promotion and teaching, linking employees to assistance programs and assisting them to get referrals," he says. Baycrest offers a suite of programs including mindfulness training, a gym, occupational health services and education on mental health and wellness via the company intranet.

## KNOW THE SIGNS

Almost as important as having programs in place is knowing what to look for in terms of identifying mental health issues. While individuals react differently to mental health challenges, there are some general signs to watch for.

"When somebody is struggling with a mental health issue, there is almost always some behaviour change," says Paula Allen, vice-president of organizational solutions and training at Morneau Shepell Ltd. Common symptoms include withdrawal, making more errors than usual and being on edge. Locke adds to that list: significant changes in performance, being disruptive or confrontational, look-

ing unwell or unkempt, objecting to authority, or any behaviour that is out of character for that person. While breakdowns in mental health can sometimes be triggered by a major event, as in Wong's case, in other cases employees break down when daily stressors overwhelm. "Sometimes it's not a big thing but number of smaller things piling up," says Allen.

Beyond keeping an eye out, another way to monitor a workplace is by tracking sick time and the use of mental health medications. If either of these increases substantially, it could be a signal to consider a more proactive and robust mental health strategy. The promise of reducing absenteeism can also be crucial in securing management support for

mental health initiatives. "As with all wellness you need to link mental health strategies to business costs," says Locke. "If you can put a program in place that helps to drive organizational performance and improve productivity, that's a strong business case for supporting mental health in the workplace."

## LOOK FOR THE SOURCE

Often a good first step when dealing with a mental health issue is to determine the root cause. "If someone comes to our HR department saying they're depressed, we try to understand whether it is about their work environment or about themselves as an individual. If the issue is in their work environment, we work with their manager," says Locke.

Wong agrees that HR professionals should try to determine the source of the problem and take action to mitigate the situation. "If it's a workplace issue they should move in and separate the distressed employee from situation. If you leave that situation in place, you're asking for the problem to explode," she says.

While an employee feeling comfortable enough to approach their HR department with their mental health challenge is the ideal, there is still enough stigma around these issues that HR professionals need to be vigilant and even proactive when it comes to struggling employees. Allen suggests that HR professionals approach these employees and ask if there's anything HR can do. After going through a depression herself, Wong agrees that it would have been helpful to have had someone reach out to her.

"HR professionals need to be proactive with employees on the edge," she says. "They should take them aside, waylay them in the hall and ask what's happening. They should tell them that counselling is available, and urge them to get help."



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“Perhaps one of the most important components of a successful workplace mental health strategy is making sure that employees know about it.”

Allen emphasizes that quicker reaction can be key to quicker recovery. “The main rule of thumb is the earlier the intervention, the better the outcome,” she says.

At the same time, HR professionals should also keep the full trajectory of the illness in mind to consider how they will return the employee to productivity. “If somebody needs to take time off work, we figure out what they need from a care point of view, but also what they need in terms of a structure to be able to return to work,” says Allen.

There are also ways in which HR departments can hinder recovery, as Wong details in her book. In her case, the HR department cut off her sick pay after just six weeks, even though her doctor said she was not yet well enough to return to work, and tried to make her sign a form that would allow them to talk to anyone in her life about anything personal, an action that she saw as an invasion of her privacy (she grieved the form and won). The combination of these

and other actions made her feel vastly unsupported and triggered a relapse in Wong’s depression. Additionally, she was ordered not to talk about her issues with her colleagues, a restriction that made her feel even more isolated. “You can’t muzzle an employee about her own health,” says Wong. “Secrecy is toxic when you are depressed because there’s a stigma already.”

### **BROADCAST NEWS ABOUT YOUR PROGRAM**

Perhaps one of the most important components of a successful workplace mental health strategy is making sure that employees know about it. Allen emphasizes that communication about such programs must be “multi-modal,” suggesting that workplaces publicize their mental health strategies not just in a company-wide email but in cafeteria posters, town hall meetings, educational sessions and on the company intranet.

Wong says that such programs would have been helpful to her, not only in realizing her own issues but in retrospect to have recognized when co-workers may have been struggling. “I wish the company had had a program, a lunchtime talk where we would talk about the symptoms, how to deal with them, what to do if you see a colleague going through something. You’d think journalists would be informed but I was oblivious,” she says.

As a survivor of mental health challenges, Wong now divides her time between Toronto, where she writes for such publications as *Toronto Life*, and New Brunswick where she is a journalism professor at St. Thomas University. She says she is now much more sensitive to the benefits that workplaces offer. Whereas she used to pay attention only to benefits like dental coverage, she now notes what workplaces offer in terms of mental health support, and says others

## **SIX STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIES**

Paula Allen, vice-president of organizational solutions and training at Morneau Shepell Ltd., Canada’s largest provider of human resource consulting and outsourcing services, says depression is the most common mental health issue she sees, followed by depression/anxiety and anxiety.

As part of a consulting group that helps organizations figure out mental health best practices, she identifies six steps towards determining a successful strategy: policy, needs assessment, managing risks after understanding any gaps in the current system, communication, manager training and ongoing review.

Allen also emphasizes the importance of identifying the unique mental health stressors in your workplace. She rhymes off several jobs that are naturally stressful, including: call centres (because they involve dealing with the public and complaints), air traffic controllers, first responders, police, emergency room staff and compassionate care staff.

should, too. She compares a limited attitude towards mental illness to the former attitude towards maternity leave where women were vulnerable to job loss or insecurity.

“Nowadays we accept that maternity leave and parental leave are part of the human condition, and in a democratic society we value workers who have babies, and don’t want to lose them,” says Wong. With one in five Canadians suffering from mental health challenges, it’s time that HR departments become equally proactive about these issues as well. **HR**



The year '2013' is rendered in a large, colorful, multi-faceted font where each digit is composed of many small triangles in various colors like blue, green, yellow, and red.

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## FILLING IN THE GAPS: HOW EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TRAINING CAN COMBAT WORKPLACE BULLYING

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” This age-old phrase still rings true today in our workplaces. How many times have you sat through an investigation interview and thought how did they *not* know that wasn't appropriate? I'm guessing quite a few.

Bullying is one of the most concerning aspects of conflict in the workplace facing the field of HR. And this topic has received quite a bit of attention with the introduction of Bill 168 in Ontario, but what has really been done to combat these negative behaviours? How exactly does Bill 168 address the issue and actively take steps to ensure the health and safety of employees? Well, as we've seen in a recent OLRB ruling (e.g., *Re. Investia Financial Services Inc.*) that failed to institute a harassment-free workplace standard on employers, the legislation is simply not going to do enough. The legislation on its own does not speak to how the policies and programs surrounding Bill 168 are implemented; it simply legislates that employees must be given training.

In practice, the only real steps that have been taken are in regards to workplace violence. Arguably, this is an area of significant concern but bullying, while not as dramatic and immediate as workplace violence, has a similar effect on employees. It poisons the work environment slowly with fear, depression and anxiety. Bullying may end up turning into violence if nothing is done. So instead of waiting until bullying turns into violence, organizations should be working to actively prevent these behaviours by taking a more proactive approach to workplace bullying.

### A Proactive Approach

Taking a proactive approach is especially important when you consider who the victims of workplace bullying typically are and the effects bullying can have on them. Employees suffering at the hands of bullies are typically those in the organization that are well-liked, dedicated and those who have



years of experience and success under their belt. In other words, your stars may very well be the ones targeted and bullying can have devastating effects on their personal and professional lives. The Canada Safety Council found that 76 per cent of bullied employees suffer stress effects such as severe anxiety and sleep disruptions, and even post-traumatic stress disorder. Bullying can also have alarming effects on productivity as bullied employees can waste anywhere between 10 to 52 per cent of their time at work. This signifies a substantial impact on the bottom line; and when you consider how effective your high-performers are, these findings represent an even more staggering overall impact.

So what measures would be effective in actually combatting workplace bullying? This is where Emotional Intelligence comes into play. Bill 168 hasn't really changed options for employees bullied at work, so if legislation doesn't work to improve the situation, training programs will have to fill the gap in order to take a positive step towards preventing these behaviours.

# FOCUS

## Sarnia-Lambton Program

One of the organizations taking a leading edge approach to Bill 168 training is the Sarnia-Lambton Industrial Educational Co-operative, an organization established by 23 industrial companies in the Sarnia-Lambton area of Southwestern Ontario and Lambton College. Its newly redesigned full-day training program teaches not only the basics of the legislation and violence prevention, but also incorporates EI concepts such as developing empathy and understanding the emotions of yourself and others. It delves into the personal side

of preventive measures by addressing personality dimensions and generational differences that can cause conflicts in the workplace and outlines various methods of effectively dealing with these types of issues in the workplace.

This type of training program addresses the core issues that are presented when a worker is engaged in bullying or is a victim of this behaviour. Nadine Brown,\* the developer of this training program, cautions that there has to be a balance between addressing personal differences in the workplace and giving employees the right tools they need to continue to develop their own Emotional Intelligence. This is a topic best served in portions and the only way to develop it, is to work at it. So it's important to remember that, like with any training, employees may attend and hear the message but they have to be committed to introducing the new learning into their lives or nothing will change. **HR**



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*Naomi Brown is a former small business owner, currently working for Suncor Energy in the oil sands of Fort McMurray. She has a special interest in researching methods of continuous improvement for a variety of areas in the field of HR.*

*\*No relation to author.*

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## ACCELERATING HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

**M**any organizations and their leadership teams at all levels are paying a big price now for their failure to pay full and proper attention to team effectiveness in the past, as well as for their failure to build a solid foundation on which to depend upon when the going gets tough. Simply put: it's easy to ignore imperfections in team effectiveness when times are good, but when the pressure is on and it really matters, those small cracks can become giant chasms and set in motion a chain reaction that, ultimately, impacts performance effectiveness. Leaders have a twin responsibility to drive performance and create a positive climate and when team effectiveness deteriorates, neither of these two can be achieved.

The minute you bring any group of people together, let alone the hard-charging, high-achieving types we all want in our organizations, you are bound to ignite tensions. The human dynamic provides for an endless number of variables that even the very best leader can find tough to master, let alone channel. Team effectiveness can inevitably end up twisted and distorted by two underlying tensions which impact performance, harmony and survival. These are:

- Cognitive tensions—that arise from an unequal distribution of the mental fire power and the inability to reach common understanding.
- Emotional tensions—embedded even deeper in the character, motives, intentions and fears of the various members of the team.

### Barriers to Sustainable Excellence

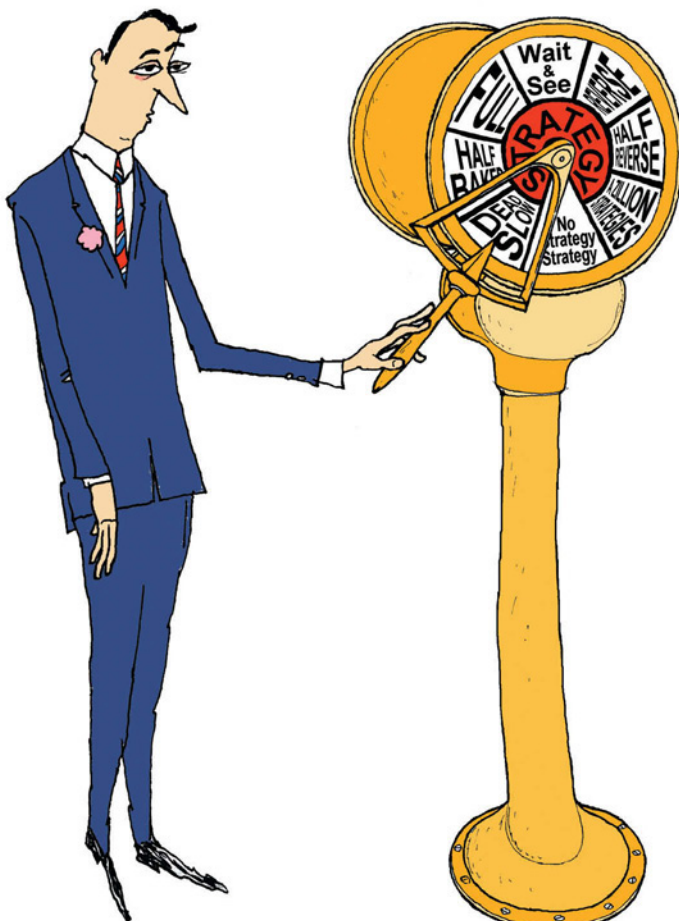
At the macro level, sustainable excellence depends on the willingness of the team to measure their effectiveness and to do so on a regular basis, with a focus on getting better rather than just getting there. In other words, accepting there is no final hurdle to cross, just a continuing series of ever escalating levels of proficiency.

Over and over again, we see teams making the mistakes of declaring victory too soon, after some early initial success and not pushing hard enough through what author Seth Godin calls “The Dip.”

There are also some common symptoms that indicate struggles within the team:

- A leader who fails to master the role of maestro of the various personalities.
- Teams who operate in silos or who move in small packs for protection.
- A leader who uses a hub-and-spoke style of dealing with team members.
- Teams who fail to fully define the common ground on which to coalesce.

At the end of the day, the first thing to usually give way is credibility—individual and collective—and when that happens, it almost inevitably leads to a slide into turmoil, dysfunction and ineffectiveness. Teams need to learn from the tensions, successes, setbacks and missed



opportunities they cause, and commit to nothing less than mastery.

## Importance of Strategic Clarity

There is no more predictable cause of team ineffectiveness than a lack of strategic clarity. This doesn't mean the vision, mission and values. It means an unwavering expression of clear intent, accompanied by the fortitude, discipline and willingness to use that intent to sharply define the playing field, and then the fierce resolve to use it as a filter to drive priorities and make decisions.

Teams fail (or even worse, limp along) because they:

- Do not make dependably smart choices on what to do and what not to do.
- Fail to use the strategic filter as a means of rigorous prioritization.
- Are not disciplined in maintaining focus and conserving energy.
- Mix operational issues with strategic priorities at critical moments.

In other words, when there is anything short of total clarity about the strategy, combined with less than total zeal to focus only on what really matters, you have a gap into which team ineffectiveness will seep in and, more often than not, with dire consequences.



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### **The Importance of Cultural Clarity**

The sad fact of the matter is, corporate culture is constantly ignored, or deeply discounted, as a source for driving performance effectiveness in the modern organization. How wrong that sentiment is and how dangerous it can be when the chips are down. A sound, healthy, progressive culture is like a rainy day fund. You may not need to draw against it in good times, but when the going gets tough, you can't just cross your fingers and hope things hold together. You need a bank account!

Culture is the foundation upon which sustainable high performance is built. Culture is the sum total of all the social capital the organization has built up, and that it can use to stimulate even higher levels of performance in difficult circumstances.

The culture of an organization, no matter how big or small, represents the values, beliefs, aspirations and behaviours the organization stands for. It is as much a part of the organization's brand as the products sold or the services provided. The brand will either resonate within the organization or it will cause dissonance. The failure to understand the costs and consequences of a poor cultural brand can cut multiple percentage points off your bottom line.

### **Credibility the Essential Ingredient**

It is common to hear members of a leadership team imply or whisper about a certain lack of trust within the team or, even worse, state it out loud. It is often a dirty little secret they prefer to think is safely hidden from the eyes of their peers and direct reports, but which, in fact, can be easily spotted at 100 feet in thick fog. When contractual trust is broken at the senior level, and hidden incivility rears its head, it is generally well known through the organization and is anything but a secret. The end result is a lack of leadership credibility and that, in turn, causes a whole series of cascading problems, politics and performance failures.

Credibility is the currency we use to measure leadership team effectiveness. It's like a stock price. It rises and falls, over time, according to what the market (in this case, the people in the organization) determines the credibility to be. This is not the same as employee engagement or employee satisfaction; it is much deeper, more complex and far more important. It is a value attributed to the confidence the organization

has in the leadership team's ability to navigate a certain course to a desirable destination.

Credibility is poorly understood amongst the members of most senior leadership teams, and yet it is essential to getting people to follow, take risks, innovate and drive forward aggressively. It is the lubricant of high performance and, while it is built through many different things, the two most important drivers of the credibility currency are:

- The quality of the decisions made by the senior team.
- The way in which relationships are built and nourished over time.

### **Dysfunctions and Other Diseases**

It's sad to say, but the altar of high performance team effectiveness does require some human sacrifice—just not the kind you may fear! It requires people be willing to invest themselves fully in the pursuit of a worthy strategic objective, and requires them to make a commitment that comes from deep, intrinsic motivations. You cannot have a high-performing team without high levels of commitment, and it is not hard to detect when a team goes sideways.

There are usually plenty of symptoms and the only real surprise is how easy it seems to be to ignore them. Here is a list of what I have observed:

- Cliques, sub groups or coalitions of mixed loyalty.
- Side deals negotiated outside of the team.
- Directives from the top that go unanswered.
- Lack of candour that causes conversations to go underground.
- Lack of a self-regulating, self-aligning team discipline.
- Failure of the leader to sense the problems.

### **Steps to Take: Actions to Consider**

I have seen leaders fall into one of two camps. Those who believe they already have a highly effective senior team, but really don't, and those who know they have an ineffective senior team, but are afraid to do the hard work necessary to fix it. Strangely, the latter group somehow tend to find it easier to replace members of the team, rather than fix the foundation.

It is hard work cobbling together a diverse group of talented individuals and getting them pointed in one direction. As we have noted previously, the number of variables in the equation is staggering, and the random acts



of emotional influence can overwhelm even the most rational of leaders. The key is to take honest stock of where you stand, where you need to be, build the business case for making the investment it requires, and then have the tenacity and resolve to carry it out. The following suggestions may help.

## 1. Push for Genuine Alignment

Few things in business life are more frustrating for a leader than a half-hearted effort. As a result, leaders have to hold themselves accountable for making the full effort to ensure the team is fully

## KEEPING SCORE: HOW TO MEASURE TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

The art and science of business leadership is certainly guilty of overdosing on theories, models and frameworks, but it is often equally guilty of falling short on meaningful metrics and the willingness to use the power of measures to chart and maintain a course. It strikes us as odd that the very same CEOs who watch, and even obsess over, every movement in the share price or in competitive market share, conveniently choose to ignore a similar approach to tracking and measuring team effectiveness.

Here is the Team Effectiveness Scorecard we believe best captures the essentials; does your team meet this criteria:

### Operational Effectiveness

- Crisp Strategy & Objectives
- Solid Structure & Alignment

### Relationship Effectiveness

- Collaboration & Communication
- Trust & Respect

### Transformational Effectiveness

- Critical Thinking and Decision Making
- Change Management & Innovation

### Learning Effectiveness

- Knowledge Transfer & Growth
- Talent Management & Development

### Performance Effectiveness

- Focus & Execution
- Accountability & Commitment

aligned and not just superficially compliant. There is nothing worse than a timid leader with a lack of deep commitment.

## 2. Demand Tough Discipline

Discipline is a word that gets a bad rap. Of course, there are countless forms of discipline, but when it comes to senior team effectiveness, we are talking about the kind of discipline that can be nicely wrapped up in their Say: Do ratio. In other words, the ability to keep promises and deliver what they say they will.

## 3. Keep Score

The business world typically loves its numbers, and most leaders have their own set of performance indicators that help them stay on track and tell them how they are doing. However, the one set of numbers many choose to ignore are the ones that would show them the cost of team ineffectiveness. (See sidebar on the left.)

## 4. Practice Integrative Thinking

High-performing teams not only do things differently, they think differently as well. They have mastered the ability to avoid the headlong rush to premature conclusions and, instead, hold themselves accountable for enriching the lateral thinking process and discovering multiple right answers.

## 5. Raise the Quality of Dialogue

In most team meetings, the quality of the discussion is typically quite disappointing. People do not stay on topic, minds wander and the important, hidden thoughts rarely hit the table. High-performing teams ensure the highest possible level of dialogue by demanding intellectual commitment and courage.

## 6. Enforce Accountability

Actions have consequences, both intended and unintended. The responsible high-performing team knows this and requires members to accept the full weight of their decisions and choices. It does not allow commitments to be avoided, nor does it permit actions and behaviours to be inconsistent with the organizational code. **HR**

*Doug Williamson is president and CEO of The Beacon Group, a Toronto-based firm that specializes in organizational transformation and effectiveness programs as well as talent identification and leadership development. Visit his web site at [www.dougwilliamson.ca](http://www.dougwilliamson.ca) or share your comments via Twitter at @rdw52.*

## JULIE GIRALDI, SHRP: NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE ORGANIZATION'S CULTURE

**J**ulie Giraldi is both a true leader and an agent of change. After all, this is the woman who transformed the culture and structure at the Ontario Hospital Association so drastically that employee engagement grew from 31 per cent to 98 per cent. And before that impressive feat, in the role of acting vice-president of human resources at troubled eHealth Ontario, she led the development of a strategic HR plan, launching initiatives that radically improved the organization's ability to attract and retain talent. Giraldi was also one of the first four recipients of the Senior Human Resources Professional designation.

We sat down with Giraldi to find out what it's like to lead in difficult times, where HR is going in the future, and what it takes to rise up in the ranks in human resources.

### **HRP: How did you decide you wanted a career in human resources?**

**JG:** I stumbled into HR. I was studying criminology and Italian literature at the University of Toronto, and got a summer job at the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC). Once I graduated, I started applying for safety and security jobs, but the woman who hired me at the TTC pulled me



### IN A NUTSHELL

**First Job:** Receptionist at a school board. I loved it!

**Childhood ambition:** I wanted to be a teacher or a ballerina.

**Best boss and why:** I've had a few really great ones – they pushed me to my limits and really believed in me. My worst bosses were micromanagers.

**Mentor:** I have a couple. They listen to me without judging and have more belief in me than I have in myself.

**Source of inspiration:** The OHA staff and my colleagues, and the great leaders at our member hospitals. They inspire me. I can't help but learn when I'm around them.

**Best piece of advice I ever got:** There are two: "Culture eats strategy for lunch," and "Deliver, deliver, deliver."

**Ideal retirement destination:** I love Italy. I've been many times.

**Last music you listened to:** David Guetta.

**Favourite author or book:** I love Pablo Neruda's amazing poetry. My favourite book is *The Moon and the Bonfires* by Cesare Pavese. And then the classic *The Divine Comedy* speaks to my Italian lit background. I also love Ina Garten; her recipes actually work!

# HR HERO

aside and said, “Julie, you cannot go into safety and security. You belong in HR. You’re great at this.” Prior to that, I didn’t consider HR at all.

## **HRP: What was your first HR job?**

**JG:** I started as an employee records clerk at the TTC; from there, I just stuck with it and things kept getting added to my role. By age 24, I was promoted into a manager role, responsible for administration and employee files. I ended my 12 years at the TTC as a director responsible for the HRIS, the administrative functions, policies and procedures, the budget, equal opportunity, benchmarking, analytics, HRIS and recognition programs.

## **HRP: Tell me about your job now. What are your main areas of responsibility?**

**JG:** I’m the chief human resources officer and vice-president of health human resources leadership at the Ontario Hospital Association, leading a team of 24 staff. A key part of my portfolio is provincial health HR leadership, which includes HR research, analytics, benchmarking, compensation surveys, labour market surveys, collecting information and

producing reports for the hospital sector. Really, the role is to help our 151 hospital members make sense of what’s going on in their environment. I also am responsible for the group benefits programs and health and safety services that are provided to our members.

I also personally advise leaders in our hospitals on HR matters like executive compensation and various legislative matters. I’m also responsible for all the internal HR, as well as IT for our organization. Finally, I am on the board of trustees of the Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan (HOOPP), which is a \$40 billion asset organization.

## **HRP: What do you love about your job at the OHA?**

**JG:** I love that it combines provincial scope with internal accountability. I love interacting with the different parts of the system—the hospitals, other health care providers, the government, the stakeholders.

I love that I work on a variety of issues and initiatives.

I love the diversity of our membership—their needs are different, so from an HR strategy

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perspective, how do I make sure I'm contributing to their success and needs?

I love the staff at the OHA. We came from an environment when we were at a 31 per cent turnover when I joined, and we couldn't recruit to save our lives! We rebuilt the entire HR process and culture, and now we're at 98 per cent engagement over the last seven years. I love that because I'm able to see how HR can really impact an organization.

Finally, I love my job because my colleagues expect me to weigh in on strategy and all matters of the organization. That to me is incredibly gratifying.

**HRP: What are the challenges in your job?**

**JG:** We are a member association, so providing meaningful services to a broad array of members is a challenge. You can't make everyone happy all the time.

But the biggest challenge for me right now is the political environment. The public service in the province is really undervalued. Too few legislators understand the importance of public sector leadership and this has consequences. Hospital executives have had seven pieces of legislation passed that affect their compensation in just two years—no other industries have seen that. Some legislation conflicts with other legislation; for example, legislators imposed pay-for-performance hospitals in 2010, curtailed it in 2012 and may eliminate it entirely by 2013. Instability negatively affects recruiting and weakens our leadership cadre. We have to decide whether we want the best people running our hospitals, or just the people who are available.

**HRP: Previously, you held a senior HR position at eHealth Ontario. What's it like leading HR during a very difficult time for an organization?**

**JG:** It's very challenging, but also very rewarding. It's a great opportunity because you have a burning platform—the organization is in trouble and looking for someone to lead them out of it.

I made sure that when I went in there that I got input from all levels of the organization. That was important, because I needed to rebuild the organization's morale, but I also had to establish myself as a leader and trusted advisor and make some pretty difficult decisions. It's a balancing act built on trust and communication.

**HRP: What tips do you have for new grads or those in entry-level HR jobs about moving up in HR?**

**JG:** Be open to new opportunities. Grow and learn. Stretch yourself. Volunteer for things—the United Way, a blood drive. It gives people a chance to see your leadership abilities.

Try to understand the organization—its strategic direction and its customers. Unless you understand the business, you'll never be respected. What's more, if you're a recruiter and you don't understand the direction of the organization, how could you possibly hire the right person? HR is not just about hiring and firing. It has to be a strategic partner at the leadership table. They want solutions, they want insights; we're not just the people police. We walk a fine line in HR. You have to make sure people are adhering to policies, but you also have to be creative and see every situation in the context in which it's presented.

Finally: never underestimate culture. Culture eats strategy for lunch. I've lived that.

**HRP: Where do you think HR is going? What's the future of HR?**

**JG:** More and more organizations are looking for HR to contribute to their overall strategy—provided they are confident that you have the basics right. If we can't handle the day-to-day well, no one will come to us for strategy. Walking leads to running.

I also think technology will impact the future of HR and how we deliver services. We need to be open and ahead of the curve to make sure we're ready for those kinds of changes.

**HRP: You have the SHRP designation. What does that mean to you?**

**JG:** I'm flattered and honoured to have been one of the first four recipients in Canada. It speaks to my commitment to HR. It's solidified that I'm an HR leader and it's given me credibility with my peers. It's very gratifying.

**HRP: What overall advice do you have for students or recent grads in HR?**

**JG:** Before you accept a job, do your best to understand the perception that HR has within the organization. That'll tell you a lot about the culture. That will determine whether it's the organization for you. By having some insights, you'll find out if HR has no credibility with staff.

Another thing: don't underestimate the small tasks. Every small task is an opportunity for you to learn new skills, and no task should be seen as too small or menial—they are all growth and learning opportunities. **HR**

## THE IMPACT OF CAREGIVING ON THE WORKPLACE

**W**ith a growing population of baby boomers in Canada, caring for an aging family member or friend in need of support because of frailty, a long-term medical condition or disability is becoming a regular mid-life experience.

Today, there are between four-to-five million family caregivers from coast to coast in Canada. Most are between the ages of 45 and 60, and seven out of 10 of them are employed. More than 80 per cent of care given to those with long-term conditions is provided by informal caregivers, with an estimated contribution of more than \$5 billion of unpaid labour annually.

### In your workplace

Statistics show that one in five employees is now faced with the task of caregiving. Those who are providing more than four hours of care weekly are more likely to reduce their work hours, change their work patterns or turn down a job offer or promotion. Among this group, 65 per cent

of women and 47 per cent of men working full time were substantially affected.

Not only must these busy caregivers balance their personal lives with their caregiving responsibilities, but they must also work hard to maintain their professional lives and stay healthy at the same time.

Loss of productivity, absenteeism, presenteeism, employee turnover, and early retirement are significant risk factors during these trying times.

According to labour force surveys, between 2003-08, 220,093 female caregivers reduced their workload to part-time hours, while 263,203 reported workplace absences. The impact on male caregivers was not as significant, but still high at 37,656, reducing their hours to part-time, and 127,020 reported absences from work to provide care. Total income lost during this time because of eldercare-related employment disruptions was reported at \$220.5 million for women, and \$116.3 million for men.

## BECOME A CAREGIVER-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE

Canada Cares, a newly founded, not-for-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness for family caregiving, is establishing partnerships with employers from coast to coast.

Canada Cares will launch its three-year campaign starting November 2012 with a series of kick-off events across the country. The objective of Canada Cares is to engage 500,000-plus Canadian caregivers and encourage workplace and community participation through a variety of activities, events and educational opportunities.

Making a difference in your workplace can begin by ordering a free Canada Cares Employer Kit. Kits include a campaign information booklet, educational resources for use in the workplace, local event suggestions, caregiver tips and stories and links to partner resources. Print and online copies of *Caregiver Solutions Magazine*, [www.caregiversolutions.ca](http://www.caregiversolutions.ca) (for eldercare) and *Today's Kids in Motion*, [todaykids.ca](http://todaykids.ca) (for families caring for kids with special needs) are also available for workplace distribution.

Visit [www.canadacares.org](http://www.canadacares.org) to order your kit today. Requests for the employer kit should be sent to [info@canadacares.org](mailto:info@canadacares.org).







*Caroline's mother, Margaret, had a disabling stroke when she was 74 and has lived in a long-term care facility in Cobourg for more than 11 years. She's pictured here with her partner, Don.*

In fact, the number of Canadian caregivers reporting employment consequences doubled from 1994 to 2008 with 25 per cent of caregivers reporting their employment situation has been negatively affected by their caregiving duties. Those at higher risk of leaving their jobs were long-distance caregivers, those caring for a close family member and those with high education. Women were more likely to take time off or make workplace adjustments.

#### **Understanding caregiver burnout**

Caregiving by its nature is not something that can be easily added to daily activities. It must be integrated with many other responsibilities.

Simply helping a family member with daily tasks such as bathing and dressing can take

up to nine hours a week and that doesn't take into account assisting with medical and dental appointments, shopping, household maintenance and companionship. If you add that to personal and employment responsibilities, it can become overwhelming and lead to exhaustion, stress and burnout.

Although it may take up to six to 18 months for burnout to become evident, there are early warning signs to watch for. Headaches, lingering colds and social withdrawal as well as anger, depression and symptoms indicating lack of rest are clear signs that your employee may be in the "caregiver risk zone." Being aware as a human resources team member the need to provide preventative education, support, guidance and assistance can help ease the burden and alleviate longer-term consequences.



# GENERATIONS

## What you can do

Many caregivers do not understand whether workplace supports are available and fear repercussions from taking a leave of absence or calling in sick to take care of a sick relative. Clearly outlining company policies and the opportunities for caregiver assistance and caregiving leave may clear up confusion and reduce stress. Compassion as well as flexibility and accommodations will also help considerably.

Creating local support groups run by caregivers with personal experience can provide caregivers a sense of community and reduce isolation. Workshops with guest speakers from organizations such as the Parkinson Society, Alzheimer's Society of Canada and the Heart and Stroke Foundation can provide the educational information needed to reduce caregiver stress and lunch-and-learns can be invaluable.

In addition, consider offering proactive counselling and referrals to home support and nursing services, as well as having resources and literature available in the workplace and online for employees to turn to in a time of need.

Sixty-six per cent of caregivers surveyed in a Health Canada report benefit from flexibility at work. Work with a particular employee through the human resource department and their local managers to determine exactly what scheduling needs are: would shorter workdays, leaving early, telecommuting, working from home, compressed work weeks or part-time hours help?

## Without support, risks increase

Studies show that among employees 45 years and older, 10 per cent said they retired to care for a family member. Of recent retirees, six per cent would have continued working if caregiving arrangements could have been made. In 2002, one in five women and one in 10 men said caregiving would be a likely reason for retirement.

## Every journey is different

Remember, every caregiver's situation is unique. While some may be thrown into the crisis-mode of caregiving after a parent has a debilitating stroke or heart attack, others are gradually pushed into the responsibilities with a family member's declining health or the progression of a condition such as Alzheimer's disease. One journey may last 10 years, while another is over in a few months. Some caregivers will go through the motions only once, while others will need to take care of several aging family members over their later lifetime.

Taking an individualized approach to helping your employees is usually the best way to truly help reduce absenteeism, save lost performance and keep valuable employees from leaving the workforce. **HR**

*Caroline Tapp-McDougall, the editor of Caregiver Solutions magazine, a Canadian publication for family caregivers, and a number of other medical journals. She has extensive experience in the areas of health, employee wellness and rehabilitation and leads workshops for employers, caregivers and healthcare professionals.*

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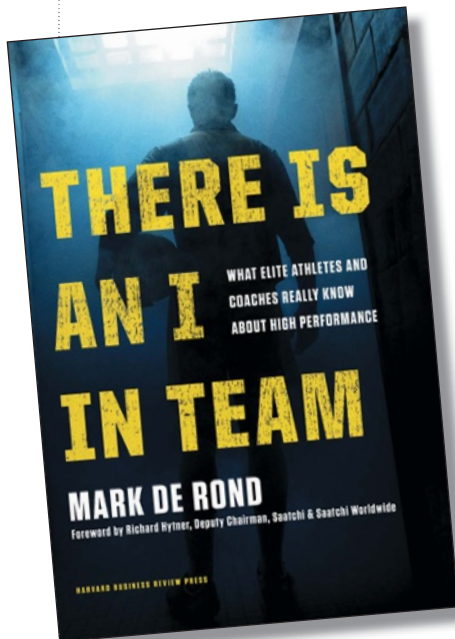
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## WHAT'S WORTH READING

### ***There is an I in Team: What Elite Athletes and Coaches Really Know about High Performance***

Harvard Business Review Press, 2012

By Mark de Rond



Mark de Rond is an associate professor of strategy and organization at Judge Business School, University of Cambridge. De Rond has studied the realm of teams by embedding himself among them. He has lived with a boat race crew as well as a group of military surgeons deployed in Afghanistan's Helmand province.

De Rond combines cutting-edge research with first-hand accounts of top athletes, coaches and corporate executives to turn the time-honoured belief that there isn't an "I" in team on its head,

demonstrating why individual performers are crucial to a team's success. Each chapter highlights a high-profile athlete or coach to illustrate a particular feature of teams before broadening out to an application to business.

Both sport and business teams seek to get talented people to work together successfully. Most of us have experienced the immensely talented, smart individual who brings significant value to the team and the organization. As their tenure on the team moves forward, we come to the realization they are a terrible teammate. De Rond writes that popular business books emphasize the importance of interpersonal harmony, assuming that it is a stimulant to team performance; it isn't. Managers incorrectly assume that what matters to the organization matters to individuals, that co-operation is better than competition and that everyone on the team is equal.

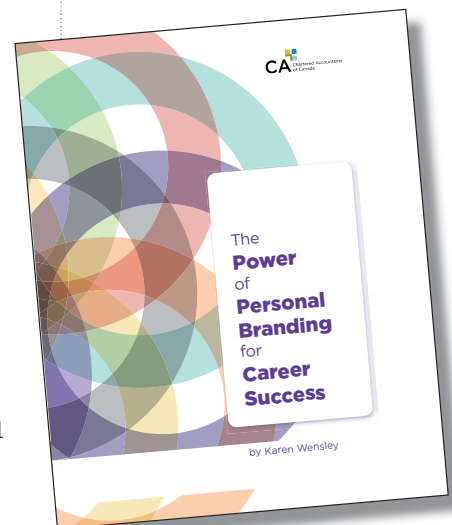
De Rond cites numerous studies to support assertions that likeability trumps competence; that perception matters more than reality; and why superstition can be good for performance. Although the book uses sports metaphors extensively, HR and business professionals will find this book a refreshing take on the nature and function of

teams as well as a source of new ideas around pay-for-performance and career development.

### ***The Power of Personal Branding for Career Success***

The Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, 2012

By Karen Wensley



Although published in conjunction with the CICA, the book's focus, choosing and developing your personal brand, extends to individuals in any occupations. The term "personal brand" is defined by Wensley as both the way you define yourself and the way you are perceived by others as well as the sum total of all your personal and professional skills, abilities, attitudes and values. To assist readers to focus and develop their specific attributes, worksheets are available in the book and online.

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## OFF THE SHELF

Over the past decade the focus on personal and professional development has moved toward strength-based inquiries rather than isolating weaknesses or shortfalls. Wensley follows this trend in strength-based development, helping readers to discover what they are already doing well and to use those strengths to build a personal brand. Using an eight-step process and real-world stories, Wensley guides readers to discover how their strengths and their brand can be leveraged into a value proposition for the organization.

*The Power of Personal Branding for Career Success* is an easy-to-read publication geared toward anyone wishing to manage how they are perceived in the workplace and how they can take charge of their personal brand to leverage career opportunities. For those HR professionals looking for fresh resources for their career development practices, Wensley's book offers an encouraging process for employees at all levels to revitalize, redesign or re-evaluate their career paths.

Karen Wensley retired from Ernst & Young in 2010 as a partner. Starting out as a tax partner, Wensley joined the firm's leadership team as the national HR leader. She is currently an executive coach to senior professionals new to Canada as a volunteer mentor with the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council. Wensley also teaches business ethics at the University of Waterloo and is a member of the Li Koon Chun Finance Learning Centre at the University of Toronto. **HR**

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**E**ven if you aren't heading to the classroom this fall, you are not off the hook. A commitment to life-long learning is critical to continued success—in whatever field you work in. With that in mind, here are five things you can do to invest in your professional future and move your career forward.

### **1. Kick it old school and crack open a book.**

While much of the information we digest these days is in small chunks, books may be a bit underrated, but they definitely sustain you for the long haul. Want to identify your strengths, learn how to become a millionaire or be more creative? There's a book for that! Too busy to read an entire book? Ask your company's training team if they grant access to Get Abstract ([www.getabstract.com](http://www.getabstract.com)), an online CliffsNotes for business books.

### **2. Locate your company's learning platform and use it.**

Most companies offer an intranet or online place—often called a Learning Management System—where employees can access free training courses on their computer or sign up for an in-person class. An added bonus is that you can track your progress online, and chances are your company is continually updating it with new content and courses. For example, ERA Real Estate supports the success and growth of its sales force through tailored training tracks on its online learning platform.

### **3. Read (or write) a blog.**

Whether you read them or write them, blogs can impart a wealth of knowledge. No, they're not all rants about products or ramblings about recipes, although those can be fun. To expand your knowledge horizons, identify five blogs to follow regularly—some about topics that interest you and some about things you know nothing about. If you're really motivated, start your own blog. You will learn while you think about and research your topics and glean further insights from readers' comments.



### **4. Go back to school, literally.**

Two key words here: tuition reimbursement. Many organizations will help an employee in good standing earn a specific certification or academic degree. Ask your manager or human resources team if your company offers financial assistance and how to go about utilizing it. Start off slowly with one class per semester to get used to juggling work, home and school life. Or, just try one basic class to see if going back to school is for you.

### **5. Get a mentor, be a mentor.**

Don't be shy: ask for help, advice or insight. Or, offer your experience to someone else. Sometimes, teaching is the best way to reinforce what you already know. Mentors and mentees challenge one another to delve into what they already know and explore the unknown—the “what could be” of one's career.

What could be is up to you but you won't make any headway doing the same thing. Take a page from the Eleanor Roosevelt book of life: try something new every day, even if it scares you. **HR**

*Shannon Poser is director of learning and development for ERA Real Estate.*



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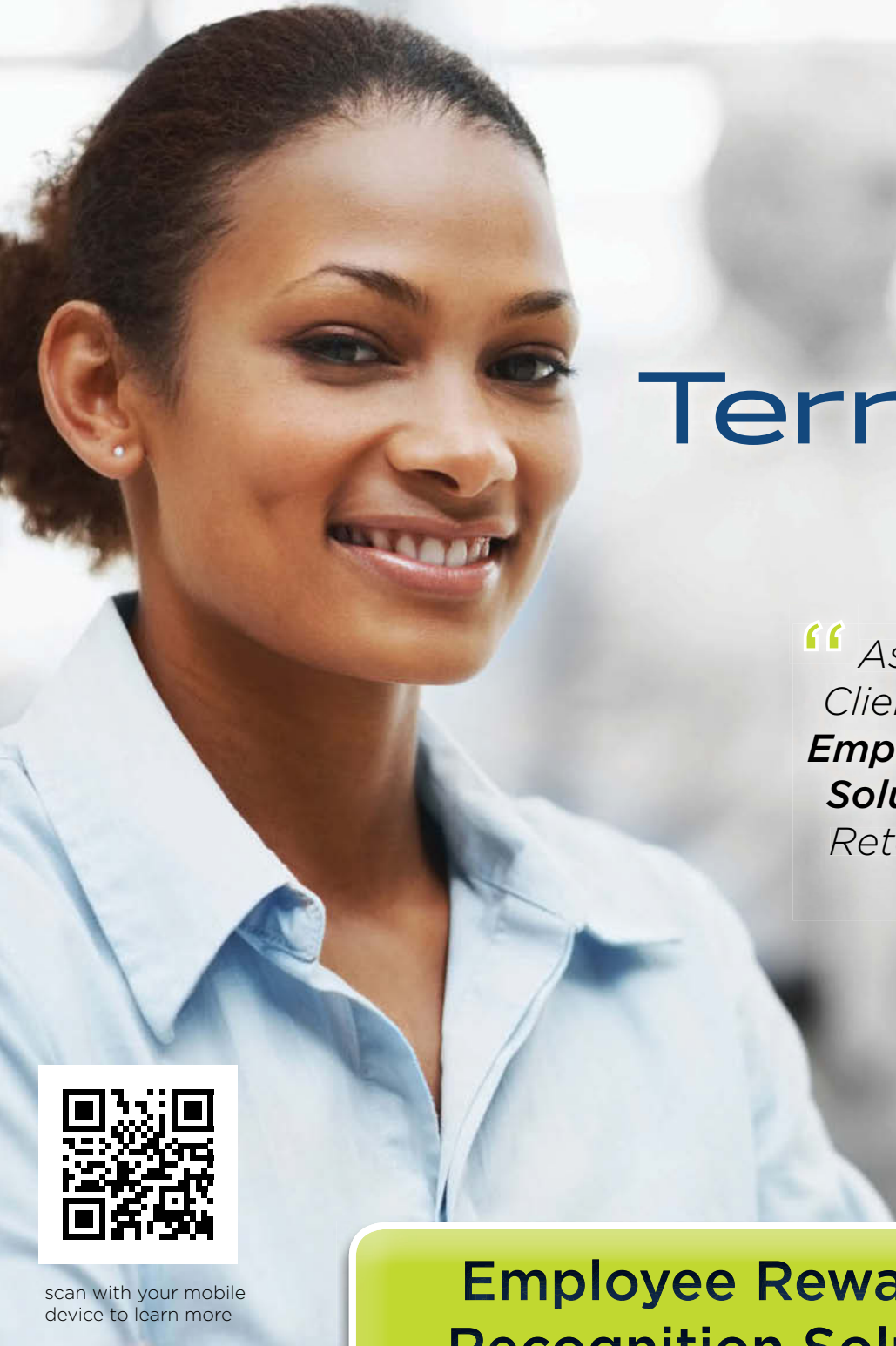


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