Mastering Mental Health Through Resiliency and Coping Skills

Dr. Bill Howatt
Chief of Research, Workforce Productivity,
The Conference Board of Canada
Today’s Agenda

**Why** mental health matters.

**What** is the slippery slope. Understanding the relationships between stress, mental health, and mental illness.

**How** to develop mental fitness.
Dr. Bill Howatt

25+ years of experience

Author: Certified Management Essentials (CME), 10-course program

Pathway to Coping Skills: nine-week interactive program

Employee Recommended Workplace Award

Total Health Index

Author: The Coping Crisis

Regular contributor to:

Chief of Research, Workforce Productivity, The Conference Board of Canada and CEO, HowattHR
How Big Is the Mental Health Problem?
How Big Is the Mental Health Problem?

1 in 5
Canadians are impacted by mental health per year
Total Canadian population*

36.7 million

*population estimates as of July 1, 2017

Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 051-0005.
1 in 5 Canadians Experiences a Mental Health Problem or Illness Within a Given Year

Canadian population experiencing a mental health problem or illness

7.1 million

*population estimates as of July 1, 2017
Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 051-0005.
1 in 5 Canadians Experiences a Mental Health Problem or Illness Within a Given Year

That’s approximately 20% of the Canadian population.

*population estimates as of July 1, 2017
Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 051-0005.
Exploring How to Curb the Slippery Slope From Health to Mental Illness

Healthy state → Coping challenges → Mental health risk → Mental illness
“Stressovation”—For Some of Us, Stress Can Be Exciting or Pain; It Depends on Circumstances
Two Common Ways We Cope With Stress

Lazarus purported that perceived stressors are dealt with via two kinds of actions:

(a) **problem-focused coping**—controlling the perceived stressors directly;
(b) **emotion-focused coping**—controlling one’s emotion in the face of perceived stressors.
Mental health is an ideal state. It is a balance of mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health (i.e., caring relationships, a place to call home, a supportive community, and work and leisure all contribute).

Mental health requires coping skills.
## Mental Health Continuum—It Is Helpful to Know Where We Are Each Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Illness</th>
<th>Languishing</th>
<th>Moderate Mental Health</th>
<th>Flourishing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• DSM diagnosis</td>
<td>• Internal dialogue that there is no alternative but to remain in an unpleasant place or situation</td>
<td>• Neither flourishing nor languishing</td>
<td>• Internal dialogue that promotes personal success and the feeling of thriving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lost functionality</td>
<td>• High risk for developing a mental health illness or addiction</td>
<td>• Well-being is affected</td>
<td>• Low risk for developing a mental health issue or addiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “getting by”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mental Health and Mental Illness

- A person flourishing with optimal mental well-being who has no mental illness
- A person flourishing with optimal mental well-being while living with a mental illness
- A person languishing with minimal mental well-being who has no mental illness
- A person languishing with minimal mental well-being while living with a mental illness
Early Signs Coping Skills Are Being Challenged Through Stress

Common effects of stress on your body
- Headache
- Muscle tension or pain
- Chest pain
- Fatigue
- Change in sex drive
- Stomach upset
- Sleep problems

Common effects of stress on your mood
- Anxiety
- Restlessness
- Lack of motivation or focus
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Irritability or anger
- Sadness or depression

Common effects of stress on your behaviour
- Overeating or undereating
- Angry outbursts
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Tobacco use
- Social withdrawal
- Exercising less often
Mental Fitness Versus Cognitive Impairment

Mental Fitness

CALM  
STRONG  
FOCUSED  
SELF-ASSURED  
RESILIENT  
RELIABLE  
DRIVEN  
TOUGH  
TENACIOUS

Cognitive Impairment

CONFUSED  
NERVOUS  
LACKING IN CONFIDENCE  
WEAK  
ANXIOUS  
UNFOCUSED  
DEPRESSED  
PARANOID  
TIRED  
STRESSED
What Percentage of Time Do You Spend in Each of the Default Mode Network States?

- The average person’s mind is wandering 47% of the time—we call this day dreaming.

- When you do this your mind is tuned into a part of the brain called Default Mode Network.

- You have three types of programs that run.

Programs:

1. **Positive construction programs**—positive thinking, wishful thinking, creativity; you see yourself in only a positive

2. **Guilty dysphoric programs**—replaying past events, worse moments; these memories are hard on your mental state

3. **Poor attention programs**—when you zone out and are not really thinking of anything
Descriptors of Resiliency

- It is dynamic and not static.
- It requires intentional effort to build our resiliency reserves.
- It provides us with the intrinsic energy that we can draw upon to maintain, and to push through life challenges and stressors.
- Metaphorically, it provides us with a seat belt that keeps us grounded so we can weather minimum, medium, and major setbacks.
- It provides the hope that we can find our way through our challenge.
- Our resiliency reserves are defined by our action—as a result, our resiliency is ultimately an outcome, not luck.
Resiliency Charge
Resiliency Charge

Energy drains

Personal stress
Resiliency Charge

Energy drains

Personal stress
Situational stress

Low coping charge/resiliency
Resiliency Charge
Total Health Energy Drains

**Physical health issues**—chronic pain, mental health challenges, obesity, chronic disease

**Mental health issues**—negative thinking, traumatic event, addictions, poor coping skills

**Work**—bullying, respectful workplace, manager-employee relationship, culture, work demand, job security

**Life challenges**—divorce, parenting, care taking, debt, family, community
Resiliency Charge

Energy booster

Personal habits
Resiliency Charge

Energy booster

- Personal habits
- Environmental support

Regained coping charge/resiliency
Exploring the Link Between Total Health and Mental Health

- Biometrics factors
- Lifestyle choices
- Medical history
- Physical activity
- Nutrition
- Sleep

Physical
- Health Risk Assessment (HRA) plus biometrics & medical

Mental
- General mental health
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Burnout
- Coping skills

Total Health

- Perceived stress
- Safety
- Work experience
- Attendance

Work
- Stress, productivity, engagement, safety & lost-time risk

Life
- Financial security, relationships & work-life blending

Work-life blending
- Financial health
- Relationships
The Coping Crisis and psychosocial factors

How many Sams are out there today who are not aware of how their microdecisions and choices are shaping their health?

Information does not equal results. For example, what’s one key to losing weight?

What percentage of people struggling with their weight know this successful formula?

What is one potential roadblock?
Evidence of the Role Coping Skills Play in Resiliency, Health, Engagement, and Productivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>THI</th>
<th>EEI</th>
<th>Productivity</th>
<th>Avg. chronic issues</th>
<th>Avg. days missed</th>
<th>Avg. DE</th>
<th>Avg. days unwell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active/optimal</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem/strained</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At risk</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>95.9</td>
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A Conversation on Mental Health & Mental Fitness

Thank you—keep in mind it is what you do with intention that will promote your mental fitness.