

CUPE WIRE

Official Publication of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 38
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Burnout Is About Your Workplace, Not Your People

An excerpt from Jennifer Moss article in Harvard Business Review

We tend to think of burnout as an individual problem, solvable by “learning to say no,” more yoga, better breathing techniques, practicing resilience — the self-help list goes on. But evidence is mounting that applying personal, band-aid solutions to an epic and rapidly evolving workplace phenomenon may be harming, not helping, the battle. With “burnout” now officially recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO), the responsibility for managing it has shifted away from the individual and towards the organization. Leaders take note: It’s now on you to build a burnout strategy.

When Stanford researchers looked into how workplace stress affects health costs and mortality in the United States, they found that it led to spending of nearly \$190 billion — roughly 8% of national healthcare outlays — and nearly 120,000 deaths each year. Worldwide, 615 million suffer from depression and anxiety and, according to a recent World Health Organization (WHO) study, which costs the global workforce an estimated \$1 trillion in lost productivity each year. Passion-driven and caregiving roles such as doctors and nurses are some of the most susceptible to burnout, and the consequences can mean life or death; suicide rates among caregivers are dramatically higher than that of the general public — 40% higher for men and 130% higher for women.

If those statistics aren’t scary enough, consider the fact that companies without systems to support the well-being of their employees have higher turnover, lower productivity, and higher healthcare costs, according to the American Psychological Association (APA). In high-pressure firms, healthcare costs are 50% greater than at other organizations. Workplace stress is estimated to cost the U.S. economy more than \$500 billion dollars, and, each year, 550 million work days are lost due to stress on the job. Another study by the APA claims that burned-out employees are 2.6 times as likely to be actively seeking a different job, 63% more likely to take a sick day, and 23% more likely to visit the emergency room.

Continued on Page 2

Black History Month

February 1 to February 29

February is a month to celebrate, share and promote the history, cultural heritage and contributions of the entire African Diaspora.

In December 1995, the House of Commons officially recognized February as Black History Month in Canada following a motion introduced by the first Black Canadian woman elected to Parliament, the Honourable Jean Augustine. The motion was carried unanimously by the House of Commons.

Besides all the history of Blacks in Canada since 1603, the labour movement has been guided by the gains brought on by the African Canadians fight to be equal. Not only did black labour activists like Philip Randolph, Bromley Armstrong, and many others fight for improved working conditions and equal rights for African-Canadians and Americans and change the way we do things at work, they also paved the way on the broader issue of equality for all. In February we celebrate Black History Month. We should also pay homage to all ethnicities and minority groups that have benefitted by the work done by our ancestral friends to promote equality.

CUPE has a proud and successful track record of using collective agreements to promote human rights in the workplace before they were achieved through legislation.

For more information on Black History Month
<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/black-history-month.html>

Upcoming Dates to Remember

March 8th, International Women’s day—is an opportunity to celebrate the contributions of women and renew our efforts in achieving gender equality. 2020’s theme is #EachforEqual ... “An equal world is an enabled world.”

March 21st is also another very important day where we honour the fight for equality by observing The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Bargaining Update

Your bargaining team has met with ENMAX in early January to continue bargaining a new contract. We have been successful in resolving a number of non-monetary issues.

We are currently focused on the use and role of contractors in ENMAX. To this end, your bargaining team has asked for detailed information and we are awaiting a response from the ENMAX bargaining team. We anticipate getting back to the table later this month.

We have also secured dates in February to continue talks. It is our hope to move into monetary discussions soon.

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH



“Your value does not decrease based on someone’s inability to see your worth.”

~ Author Unknown

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Continued from Page 1

According to the foremost expert on burnout, Christina Maslach, social psychologist and professor emerita of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, we are attacking the problem from the wrong angle. “Categorizing burnout as a disease was an attempt by the WHO to provide definitions for what is wrong with people, instead of what is wrong with companies,” she explains. “When we just look at the person, what that means is, ‘Hey we’ve got to treat that person.’ ‘You can’t work here because you’re the problem.’ ‘We have to get rid of that person.’ Then, it becomes that person’s problem, not the responsibility of the organization that employs them.”

To Maslach’s point, a survey of 7,500 full-time employees by Gallup found the top five reasons for burnout are:

- Unfair treatment at work
- Unmanageable workload
- Lack of role clarity
- Lack of communication and support from their manager
- Unreasonable time pressure

The list above clearly demonstrates that the root causes of burnout do not really lie with the individual and that they can be averted — if only leadership started their prevention strategies much further upstream.

In our interview, Maslach asked me to picture a canary in a coal mine. They are healthy birds, singing away as they make their way into the cave. But, when they come out full of soot and disease, no longer singing, can you imagine us asking why the canaries made themselves sick? No, because the answer would be obvious: the coal mine is making the birds sick.

This visual struck me. Although developing emotional intelligence skills — like optimism, gratitude, and hope — can give people the rocket fuel they need to be successful, if an employee is dealing with burnout, we have to stop and ask ourselves why. We should never suggest that if they’d just practiced more grit or joined another yoga class or taken a mindfulness course, their burnout would have been avoided. I have long been a proponent of empathy and optimism in leadership. I believe in practicing gratitude skills for a happier, higher performing work and life experience. I endorse the idea of building resilience to better handle stress when it arises. But these skills are not the cure for burnout, nor are they the vaccine.

Organizations have a chance, right now, to fix this type of thing. Burnout is preventable. It requires good organizational hygiene, better data, asking more timely and relevant questions, smarter (more micro) budgeting, and ensuring that wellness offerings are included as part of your well-being strategy. Keep the yoga, the resilience training, and the mindfulness classes — they are all terrific tools for optimizing mental health and managing stress. But, when it comes to employee burnout, remember — it’s on you leaders, not them.

REGULAR MEMBERSHIP MEETING

All CUPE 38 Members Invited to Attend



When: Tuesday, January 28, 2020

at 7:00 p.m.

Where: CUPE 38 Office

1439-9 Avenue SE

Business: Regular & Elections

Elections:

- 1. Eighteen (18) Eligible Delegates to CUPE Alberta Division Convention, March 17-20, 2020 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.**