

Mental Health Podcast Part 2

SPEAKER	TRANSCRIPTION
Mandeep Bains	<p>The following is a continuation and conclusion of Part 1 of this special CPA Canada mental health podcast. In Part 1, we discussed the term 'mental health' and how the term may have different meanings for practitioners.</p> <p>We also discussed what are some examples of mental health issues, and what are some potential warning signs that you need to be aware of.</p> <p>We encourage you to listen to Part 1 prior to listening to Part 2 of this podcast.</p> <p>In Part 2, we resume the discussion with the panelists, Debbie Gorsline, Susan McIsaac, and Brianna Courneya, to talk about what steps SMPs can take to mitigate work stressors and promote personal and professional wellbeing. Let's listen in.</p>
Brianna Courneya	<p>I think foundationally, it's just really important to just make a stance on mental health for why, you know, across your company, we want to talk about mental health, and we want to support our employees' mental health. So, I think that's something that's worked really well for us at LiveCA, is just to be open about it and building that foundation.</p> <p>I think it's also really important to have some resources in place. You know, things like an employee assistance program or other health benefits, and then also be aware of those benefits, and making sure you're making it clear to the team by giving them information about those resources when they need them.</p> <p>I think, too, another sort of foundational thing is just creating a really safe space to talk about mental health. You know, as an HR manager, I try to always make it really clear that whatever is talked about is private. Of course, if I needed to talk to a health practitioner because it was becoming a dangerous situation then, you know, I'd try to make that clear.</p> <p>But aside from that, it's a very private space for those conversations. So, I think creating that safety, as well, helps people to open up a little bit more about it.</p> <p>And I think, too, just being an ear. You know, there's a lot of resources and things we can put in place, and it can feel a little bit daunting. But I know for myself personally, one of the most important things for me is if someone can just listen. You know, I think a lot of times, you know, as go-getters and Type A personalities, we may be looking for solutions, like let's fix this problem.</p> <p>But sometimes the best thing we can do is just listen, and that's, I think, sometimes more valuable than we even realize.</p>

Mandeep Bains

And then I want to just ask Susan, here, if she can expand upon what Brianna says from a practitioner's point of view is, what can SMPs do better to help foster a healthy environment to encourage that open and honest dialogue?

Susan Mcisaac

I think the best thing that we can do as practitioners is to be proactive, before we become aware that a staff member or coworker is suffering from mental health challenges, so we can be creating the space. We can be, with our employee benefits plan, if we can have an employee assistance program, which may give them access to resources, to counselling, for example, and we can make sure that people know those tools are out there.

Many of the resources listed in the framework, as well, we can be putting them in front of – we can be posting them on the bulletin board in the kitchen. We can be, at staff meetings, bringing them up and just letting our employees know what there is out there, and the help they can get.

And if we can do that upfront, before anyone has any mental health concerns, then maybe we can head off some more of really difficult experiences for some staff. But if we haven't got there, if we find ourselves in a position that we realize that staff member is having a mental health challenge, or perhaps even a mental health crisis – because that happens in a work environment, it can happen in ours – we need to make sure that we're being calm.

We need to look at ourselves and how we're reacting to it and dealing with it. Again, we have to provide them with the resources, but as the partners, we also have to be aware that other staff are probably going to know something is going on. They may or may not know details of the issue, and we aren't going to break any confidences or any privacy with our staff, but other staff do need to know that we are being supportive of employees, that we aren't allowing sub-par performance just because we don't accept that.

We aren't playing favourites. But we need to ensure that other staff is aware of the seriousness of the situation, and that we are providing space and helping to look out for an individual when they're going through a difficult time in their life.

Mandeep Bains

I would reiterate the fact too, echo it, that yeah, like, the conversations may be uncomfortable in the beginning, but as you do it, as you get more used to doing conversations, I think that's something that for sure, it helps create an open and honest dialogue. So, it's not something that will happen really quickly right away, so I think everyone has got to work at it.

So, no, that's great insight there that you guys were able to provide.

Now we're going to shift over to the next question, where a lot of what you guys have said leads to the part where talking about how important is it for SMPs to take a proactive approach rather than a reactive approach when dealing with mental health. So, I'm going to pose this question to Debbie, here, is that, what's the importance of being proactive rather than reactive? And what are potential repercussions if SMPs and practitioners don't take mental health seriously?

Debbie Gorsline

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Well, for sole practitioners, I think the idea of keeping it front of mind is very important, and this will enable to ensure that they're making sure they're taking care of themselves before they take care of their clients, and then that will ensure that they're able to help serve their clients better.

And I think part of the repercussions of not taking care of our mental health is how we deal with our clients. And the end result is, you may lose a client, and that's never what anybody wants.

Mandeep Bains

The key thing here is to be proactive wherever possible. Don't be reactive. Even if you are proactive, it may not solve the issue, but you'll get ahead of it as opposed to being reactive.

As previously mentioned by our panel, we do have our mental health policy framework. That is available on the CPA Canada website. In this framework, it provides a list of sample policies and initiatives that SMPs can incorporate in their own mental health policy framework. We encourage everyone to go to the CPA Canada website for more details.

I'm going to pose the next question to Brianna. In many cases, some firms may not implement appropriate policies, or may conduct certain actions that may not be as beneficial when approaching the topic of mental health. This question is more from a holistic level, but can you quickly chat about one or two examples of what SMPs should not do when approaching the topic of mental health?

Brianna Courneya

Yeah, I guess two things. One would be to do nothing - this is probably one that should be avoided, especially at this point, I think. The pandemic has really highlighted to us how important talking about mental health is and having some resources in place.

You know, I think it can feel really overwhelming, starting to dig into mental health and how to provide resources. But from my experience, just really small steps can help.

And I can say the other thing is to not ignore red flags, and this is maybe even more important. You know, oftentimes there are red flags, but because we're busy, you know, we're in busy season and there's so much work, or transitions on the team, or whatever it may be, we assume, you know, best case scenario, that it's not a big deal or will resolve itself. And oftentimes, that's not the case.

You know, it's really in the best interests of the person involved, the team, and the clients, to take the time to dig into the issue. So yeah, I would say those would be the two.

SPEAKER**TRANSCRIPTION**

Mandeep Bains

The key point here is, doing nothing is not an option. For you, the listener, you have taken the first key step to learn more about mental health and what you can potentially do to implement mental health initiatives at your firm.

While we're not mental health professionals, it's important for everyone to become more aware on the topic.

Now we're heading towards the end of this special podcast. While COVID-19 has brought mental health to the forefront, the struggles of promptly addressing the issue of mental health in the workplace has always been critical, and sometimes it's been overlooked or downplayed.

I'm going to ask the panel to provide their final thoughts here, and share why they believe mental health should stay a priority for SMPs to manage in the future.

First, I'll go to you, Debbie, to get your final thoughts.

Debbie Gorsline

Thank you, Mandeep. I think we've all brought forward many ideas of why it's important, and I think the main thing to remember is, it is okay and important to continually take care of your own mental health. There's nothing wrong with putting yourself first, and I think that's something we need to remember.

And by doing all that, that helps us continue to be able to work and serve our clients, which is always our number one goal.

Mandeep Bains

All right, perfect. No, thanks there, Debbie, and Susan: any last, final thoughts here to add on the podcast about why mental health should stay a priority for everybody?

Susan Mcisaac

The key, I think, is right now, as damaging as the pandemic has been on so many fronts, it has brought the topic of mental health to the forefront. It's easier to talk about now. Take the opportunity and talk about it now. A healthy workplace is going to be a more productive workplace, and it's going to be in all of our best interests in the long run.

Mandeep Bains

Exactly. And finally, last but not least, Brianna. Any final last comments?

Brianna Courneya

I guess just to add on to, yeah, what Susan just said, that mental health has become easier to talk about through the pandemic, and I am really grateful for that.

You know, clearly mental health is part of our lives outside of the pandemic as well, so it's great to have this space to be able to talk about it and open up new opportunities for conversations and connections.

Mandeep Bains

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No, for sure. So, as we wrap up our discussion here, it's important to remember that mental health affects everyone, both on a personal and professional level. And this is an area that SMPs and senior leadership need to monitor and assess regularly to ensure that everyone is taking proper care of themselves, and that from a perspective of a firm, employers are doing their part to support a constructive work environment.

So finally, a few key takeaways that you, our listener, can take away from this podcast. One, it's important that SMPs and senior staff need to work towards removing the stigma associated with mental health and encourage people to foster a workplace where open and honest discussion is valued.

Second, SMPs should also monitor their own mental health to ensure they can identify and address any potential issues that may arise. You have to first take care of yourself before you can start taking care of others.

Finally, three, this is really important to acknowledge: SMPs and practitioners were not all mental health professionals. So, when a situation escalates, or it's beyond your scope of understanding, it's essential to recognize when external help would be best.

And lastly, just to reiterate, we do have the mental health policy framework for small to medium-sized practitioners. That is available for free on the CPA Canada website. So please visit www.cpacanada.ca. This is a great resource which we encourage everyone to access as a starting point to figure out how to implement mental health initiatives at your firm.

Thanks again to Debbie, Susan and Brianna for being on the panel today, as well as sharing your insights on this important issue. Leading by example makes a great difference. And we thank all of you for listening and tuning in and joining with us.

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Thanks again for listening in.

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