



The Thief in Plain Sight

What's **stealing** from your bottom line?

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It robs companies of an estimated \$20 billion each year.ⁱ Eighty-three percent of employers consider it one of the top risk factors in the workforce.ⁱⁱ Its M.O.? Causing 19% of repeated workplace absences, 30% of short-term and long-

term disability costs, 60% of workplace accidents, 40% of employee turnover, 55% of Employee Assistance Plan costs, and 10% of drug plan costs.ⁱⁱⁱ What is it that's so detrimental to worker safety and your company's bottom line?

Stress

In Canada, 1 in 4 workers report that they are highly stressed, with work being the main source of stress approximately 60% of the time.^{iv} Because stress has such a far-reaching impact on mental and physical health, productivity, and frequency of workplace incidents^v, proactive companies have begun searching for tools to better assess, measure, and mitigate workplace stress.

A quick way to assess and measure stress is through behavioural observation. Behavioural observation allows you to evaluate if employees are engaged in their work, if interactions are positive, and if overall morale is high. Employee surveys can be another great tool for assessing and measuring stress as they often uncover underlying issues that employees may not feel comfortable discussing. Survey samplings can give quick insight into issues and help identify immediate fixes that should be made. To probe further, these samplings can be followed up with larger or more targeted surveys in combination with employee feedback. To go even deeper, an analysis of organizational metrics can be used to reveal lagging indicators of stress in your workplace.

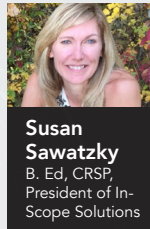
Regardless of the type of assessment being used, they should all be made using criteria that gauge the 5 key contributing factors of stress:

1. High work demands
2. Low levels of control and influence
3. Few or no employee rewards
4. A sense of unfairness
5. A lack of managerial or organizational support^{vi}

Based on your observations, you can then re-evaluate existing policies and practices in relation to psychological health.

With strategic criteria and targeted policies in place, it becomes possible to create action plans focused on addressing the identified stressors. For example, if you identified that employees felt they lacked control or influence over their work, strategies could focus on increasing their autonomy by giving them more control over their workflow and providing them with more decision making opportunities. You may also look at developing better supervisor training, providing flexible work options, or requesting employee input on important decisions. Additional stress management solutions could include implementing Employee Assistance Programs, providing stress resiliency training, and promoting good physical and mental health. All of these solutions help employees expand their repertoire of successful coping skills and strategies.

As the statistics suggest, the effects of employee stress can be costly. Once recognized, however, every dollar invested in stress prevention is worth \$3.40 in future savings.^{vii} Employers who create optimal work environments and help employees better manage their stress have demonstrated marketplace advantages^{viii}—not to mention a happier and more productive workplace.



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Susan speaks internationally on the topics of fatigue and stress factors in the workplace. She is an instructor at the University of Calgary and the University of New Brunswick.

ⁱ Anderssen, E. (2011, June 17). Ottawa to fund mental-health strategy: First-ever Canadian standards to tackle problem estimated to cost \$20-billion a year in workplace losses alone. *The Globe and Mail*, p. A3.

ⁱⁱ Towers Watson. (2014, February). 2013/2014 Staying@Work Report – Canada Summary. Retrieved March 22, 2016, from <https://www.towerswatson.com/en-CA/Insights/IC-Types/Survey-Research-Results/2014/02/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Tangri, R. (2003, March 31). StressCosts Stress-Cures. Retrieved March 22, 2016, from <http://www.secretsellingtips.com/Vault/StressCostsStressCures.pdf>

^{iv} Crompton, S. (2011, October 13). What's stressing the stressed? Main sources of stress among workers. Retrieved March 22, 2016, from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2011002/article/11562-eng.htm>

^v Guarding Minds. (n.d.). The Business Case for Psychological Health & Safety: How does employee psychological health impact an organization? Negative Impacts. Retrieved March 22, 2016, from http://www.guardingmindsatwork.ca/info/safety_why/business_case

^{vi} Standards Council of Canada. (2013, January). Psychological health and safety in the workplace — Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation. Retrieved March 22, 2016, from http://www.csagroup.org/documents/codes-and-standards/publications/CAN_CSA-Z1003-13_BNQ_9700-803_2013_EN.pdf

^{vii} Canadian Federation of Independent Business. (n.d.). Managing stress at work: a how-to for employers. Retrieved March 22, 2016, from <http://www.cfib-fcei.ca/english/article/2922-managing-stress-at-work-a-how-to-for-employers.html#1>

^{viii} Towers Watson. Ibid.



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