

Fall 2016

## Stop the Silence Surrounding Mental Illness. Make it OK.



Bob was hospitalized for complications of diabetes. His work team circulated a card and everyone sent him well wishes for his a speedy recovery. His employer sent a beautiful bouquet of flowers and heartfelt 'Get Well' wishes.

Roberta was hospitalized for depression. Any words said about her absence in the workplace were said in hushed tones. Her work team did not circulate and sign a card and no flowers were sent.

Why were these two employees both hospitalized with an illness treated so differently? Chances are it is due to the stigma surrounding mental illness. It is time to change these attitudes for the wellbeing of us all.

According to NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness), mental illnesses are as common as silver cars or people with brown eyes and is more common than being left-handed. Despite being one of the most common illnesses, there is still a stigma attached to mental illness and many people struggle with talking about them.

Mental health is just as important as our physical health, which is why Sand Creek is part of an effort to stop the silence and the stigma that surrounds mental illness. The effort is part of a campaign called "Make It OK." Make It OK is designed to encourage people to talk more openly about mental illness and ask for help.

### **It's OK to have a mental illness, many of us do!**

One in four Americans from every walk of life experiences a mental illness. Most people live with the symptoms of a mental illness for ten years before seeking treatment, largely due to the stigma. The sooner people get treatment, the greater their chances of recovery. As with any illness, it's better to identify and treat it early before someone becomes seriously ill.

### **It's OK because it is a medical condition, not a character flaw.**

Mental illnesses are biological conditions that can be treated, just like diabetes and cancer. They cannot be overcome through "will power" and are not related to a person's character or intelligence.

## STOP THE SILENCE, CONTINUED...

### It's OK because it's treatable. Life can and does get better!

The best treatments for serious mental illnesses today are highly effective. In fact, between 70-90 percent of people's symptoms are reduced and they feel better when following individualized treatment plans.

### Together, we can Make It OK

Contact Sand Creek to begin the journey to health. Sand Creek professional staff will talk to you about your wellbeing or your concerns for a loved one and assist you in finding the right resource to help.

Other resources are available to help guide people on how to talk about mental health in your workplace and your home. Visit [MakItOK.Org](http://MakItOK.Org) for tips on talking about mental illness. Visit [NAMIhelps.org](http://NAMIhelps.org) for more information and resources for mental illnesses.

## A Client Story

I've struggled with severe depression for many years. It cost me a marriage and the loss of several family relationships. Two years ago I got tired of dealing with it and decided to seek help. At first I didn't even know how to do that, growing up and working in a small town – a farming community – that just wasn't something that you did openly. It has taken a good group of people that share the same issues, a lot of counseling and even some medication to improve my life. Most importantly, it has been my own will and desire to get better.

Don't get me wrong, I still struggle with depression. The difference between now and then is that I now have the ability to deal with it. I understand what my "triggers" are and know what thoughts and activities get me out of it, and ultimately how to bounce forward, rather than continually going backwards, or worse, staying stuck!

After awhile, I started to dig deeper on the topic of mental illnesses. I learned

that mental illnesses are very treatable. It takes time and patience, but it's worth every second. For the very first time in my adult life, I have hope again.

I want other people with mental illness to be able to experience the amazing gifts of life. There truly is beauty all around us; why not savor it! I also want people who don't understand mental illness to please take the time to learn more about it and know that it is real, not something that should be judged or criticized.

I'm certain that if anyone ever reads this that you likely know someone, or will meet someone with mental illness. It's important to learn what to do, what to say, and how to deal with it. Let's help break the stigma that surrounds mental illness. Support each other and try and walk in another's shoes.

I thank Sand Creek, and the counselors there that have put me on the path of self-acceptance and solutions!

# MENTAL WELLNESS BEGINS WITH A HEALTHY TEAM CULTURE

By: Carol Nagele-Vitalis, M.A., Organizational Development Consultant

Every organization has a culture. In fact, the culture exists whether you are paying attention and being intentional about it or not, so why not be intentional and build the kind of healthy team culture you wish to work in?

To begin, we must ask the “What,” meaning the tasks and details we are working on as a team cannot be separated from the “How” we get the work done. For example, pay attention to how the agenda is put together. An agenda drives the meeting and determines what is important enough to discuss. If you want a healthy team culture, where participation is full and people are excited, why not send out the agenda ahead of time and ask for the team to contribute agenda items?



By including team member ideas right from the beginning, you are building a culture of inclusiveness and participation. It also sends the message to team members that leadership is shared on this team, which builds a healthy culture of shared responsibility for outcomes.

A positive team atmosphere is the result of cooperative relationships within the team. This fosters a healthier mindset and overall mental wellbeing. Team members know they need one another’s skills, knowledge and expertise to produce something together they could not do as well alone.

How do you actually encourage that kind of team culture?

Perhaps consider the integration of a short, Team evaluation, and do it consistently. Members could evaluate themselves as well as the team. Include the evaluation on the agenda so team members know this is an important part of the meeting. Be sure to give about five minutes for people to answer the questions so they can be thoughtful with their answers.

Possible evaluation questions:

1. What was the team’s greatest strength in today’s meeting? (i.e. resolving a conflict, coming to a decision, many people contributed to the discussion)
2. How can we build on that strength?
3. What is one thing that would help our team improve?

Making positive changes to “how” your team gets the work done will build a healthy and interdependent team culture that not only produces great work, but also creates a place where people enjoy working. Try implementing these two ideas on your team and notice what changes. Our Organizational Assistance Program (OAP) experts have more ideas for improved and healthy team functioning, give us a call.

# Cultivating Mental Health in the Workplace

By: DJ Enga, CPFC

We have all heard the quote: “Attitude is everything” and when you apply that adage in a work setting you realize that it’s easier said than done.

Each of our behaviors, attitudes and actions in the workplace can dictate whether or not an organization is productive – fulfilling its purpose and meaning – or if it’s challenged and consistently hitting road blocks. Promoting mental health in the workplace is a vital component to an organizations overall success.

Depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues can be very expensive for employers. In fact, estimates show that mental illness and substance abuse issues can cost employers between \$79 and \$105 billion annually in indirect costs. Absenteeism, decreased productivity, and increased healthcare expenses are just a few of the ways mental health problems cost employers money.

Supporting one another to help reduce stress is important when working at all levels of business. While there are many benefits available to help employees with emotional problems, more can be done to help prevent or address them. Recognizing the impact of daily life on an individual is a key first step when shaping a professional environment that places priority on mental health, and one that is necessary for each person to play a role for it to be successful.

**Here are some suggestions on how you can play a role in promoting a mentally healthy workplace:**

1. **Fostering a Healthy Environment:** There are myriad of ways to create a healthy environment for one another. Anything from starting an exercise challenge with other coworkers, engaging socially during lunches or breaks, to offering open and transparent dialogue in meetings that address in a safe environment the challenges and struggles we all experience both at work and in our personal lives.
2. **It Starts with You:** While at work, be mindful of your own behavior: Are you open and selfless or are you more closed-off, selfish and cynical? Whether we realize it or not, “attitude is everything,” especially in the workplace. Enthusiasm and a smile can go a very long way towards being a contagious positive element that fosters a more comfortable work climate, even if you’re busy!
3. **Self Invest = Self Care:** We spend one third of our daily life at work. Much of that time is working towards attaining the common goals of the organization and while this can bring tremendous self-fulfillment, it is also critical that you identify other areas of your life that might afford you purpose and meaning. Having personal goals in relation to hobbies or areas of interest are important tools to help shape a healthy, positive mindset.
4. **Access Available Resources:** Approximately one in four adults experience a diagnosable mental illness in any given year, and yet many suffer in silence. It takes courage to reach out to others. The Sand Creek Workplace Wellness staff is a wonderful free and confidential resource for employees dealing with all manner of life stressors. Using your employee assistance benefit for counseling help is a good first step in addressing chronic emotional issues that all too often end up causing problems in our lives and in our relationships. You can reach Sand Creek today by calling 888-243-5744.



## DEAR SANDY,

**M**y marriage of 23 years has recently ended and I'm devastated. While it's been almost nine months since the divorce, I still can't seem to find any peace of mind or hope for my future. It's impacted my work because some days I wake up and realize that I do not have the ability to face people and act like everything is normal. I've called in 'sick' now a half a dozen times since this past May. I have no interest in leaving the house or engaging with family or friends and seem to be simply going through the motions when I am forced to do things. What makes it worse is that my ex-husband seems to be doing fine, and is now living with another woman. The world goes on without me and I feel very disconnected to everything. Everyone says, "You need to move on!" and I'm finding it much harder than I ever imagined.

Signed,

Heartbroken

## DEAR HEARTBROKEN

**I** was very touched reading your message. I'm so incredibly sorry about the end of your marriage, especially hearing how long you were together. Please know that everyone grieves loss in different ways and has varied timelines towards healing. There is no deadline to overcoming heartache, so don't force it.

When a relationship ends it is normal to experience deep depression, anxiety and sometimes even fear of things that once never were at issue. Hearing certain songs, places that you visited together, even items around the house, can all serve as triggers to the past and leave a person feeling very unsafe and lost. When you slowly start to recognize that what you're feeling is ok, and that some days will be better than others, then you can start to find some measure of solace.

It sounds as though you would do well to talk with a counselor about your feelings of hopelessness, especially if it has impacted your job and desire to engage in everyday activities to the point of not wanting to leave the house.

It takes a brave person to reach out for help. You do not need to experience this pain alone and meeting with a counselor can help you sort through what it is your feeling and help you create a plan of action that will help create avenues for healing and restore wholeness and a redefined purpose for your life.

My thoughts are with you,

Sandy



SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO DEAR SANDY BY EMAILING US  
AT [INFO@SANDCREEKEAP.COM](mailto:INFO@SANDCREEKEAP.COM).

[www.sandcreekeap.com](http://www.sandcreekeap.com)  
888-243-5744

## About Sand Creek Workplace Wellness

Sand Creek is a women-owned small business specializing in providing exceptional workplace wellness services to support the human spirit at work. We embrace our core values of service, hope, trust, compassion, and wisdom in each interaction, there by upholding our mission of providing helpful solutions to improve productivity and shining a light in the darkest of moments.

Our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is designed to offer face-to-face counseling and consulting to those that voluntarily reach out to us. We are not simply a phone counseling service or online tool type EAP. Thousands of professional counselors form a worldwide Sand Creek network available to deliver personal care and support to you in your community. Our services are administered nationally, but delivered locally.

Sand Creek supports the relationship between individual health and overall organizational health. Our Organization Assistance Program (OAP) service extends the reach into the organization and provides work teams with a systemic approach to improve the health and well-being of an organization.