Career Development & Mental Health

By Sidney S. Billings, CPO

My first experience with negative remarks towards my mental health issues was in 1988 while I was working in Ottawa.

While in hospital to discover exactly the diagnosis of what I had, it was determined at that time I suffered from ADHD. This devastated me. I was scared to tell my employer and when I finally did, the response was less then acceptable.

The management labeled me crazy. Some of my co-workers called me dumb, stupid, and I felt like an outcast.

One of my good friends actually said the following remark. “I would prefer you stay away from me. You’re crazy.”

This hit me like a knife through butter. After that, I never said anything about my illness because I was afraid of negatively from employers.

I didn’t let this stop me though. In 1996, I went to college for a year. I also obtained my GED. For me, this was an accomplishment. I felt proud of myself. At the same time though, I had been given a different diagnosis. I was told I had bi polar disorder. Recently I was diagnosed with borderline personally disorder and PTSD.

As I went through life , I did have my struggles. I didn’t inform employers of my conditions until 2013 when I became a manager. At first, the employer accepted and understood me. But when there was a change with the higher ups, again things fell apart. This time, I was pushed to perform over and above my capacity and I had to resign my position.

I still didn’t let life get me down. In 2016, I passed my security course with a high mark. Then I received my license to be a security guard. In October of 2017, I obtained my greatest accomplishment ever. I am a Certified Protection Officer (CPO). This designation will open a lot of doors for me in the future.

With my accomplishments came a lot of hardships as well. I still find myself hiding the fact that I have mental health issues. The reason is some employers are not wanting to acknowledge that there is a problem in the workplace with this topic. Sorry to say, this is the 21st century and mental health is being talked about everywhere. The generations of today are under more pressure than ever before.

Statistics show 1 in 5 Canadians suffer some kind of mental illness. With our population of 32 million, that means over 6 million people are in this category.

This is where my message come into play. Companies big and small are now needing to discuss this issue with their management teams. The time is now to bring mental health awareness to the forefront of business.

I have come up with 5 steps for companies and employers to follow in bringing this issue to the workplace. These are only suggestions and my opinion. This is not something set in stone so you can find other ways to introduce this issue to your businesses.

1. Research mental health conditions and what you can do to introduce policies for helping your employees when they share this concern with you.
2. Educate your management teams so they too can help with communication in your workplace on this issue.
3. Look for signs and symptoms of a concern you might need to address. If you find a concern, again research and respond.
4. If professional help is needed, understand that he/she may need time. Please understand this and above all, assist with time off and show compassion to the employee.
5. Keep in contact with that employee. When you continue communication with him/her, they will return and be a productive member of your team.

If these steps are helpful to you, you can tweak them to anyway you want so it will be a tool for you to follow. I came up with these from previous experiences and again, they are suggestions only.

I hope businesses become aware of the stigma over mental illness and make plans to introduce ideas to address this issue.

If you have any questions I could answer, please don’t hesitate to message me on LinkedIn. My profile is Sidney Smith Billings, CPO