

TEAM EFFORT TRANSFORMING COMPANY CULTURE

This week, 500,000 Canadians will miss work due to a mental health issue or illness. According to a recent poll, 44 per cent of employees say they have or have had mental health challenges, but only a third of them access help, largely due to stigma.

The reality at Diversified Rehabilitation Group is different, says president

and CEO Derek Sienko. Here, employees address issues like burnout or stress openly, with the expectations that they will be heard and supported. "Initially, people were not as open about their [mental health] challenges, but today, there is no fear, no stigma," he says.

For Sienko, this very noticeable change is the outcome of a conscientious and collaborative decade-long effort to create a psychologically healthy workplace in a field where burnout is notoriously common. "We are working with people with different disabilities and helping them get back on track and return

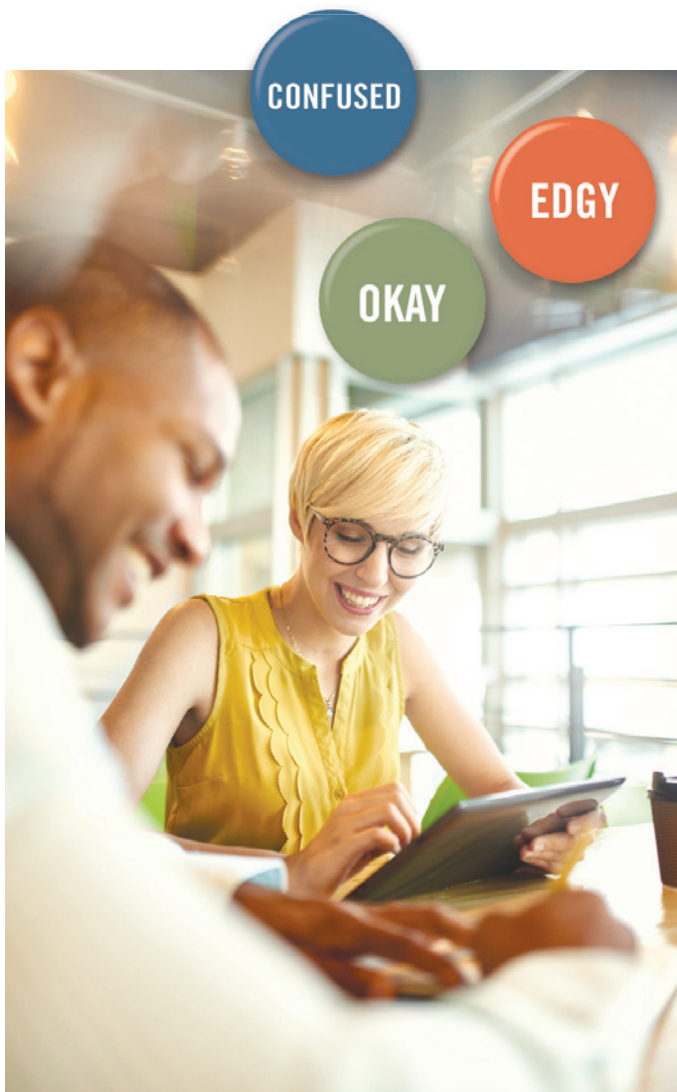
to health and wellness," he says. "This can be a very strenuous task, making a psychologically healthy workplace so imperative."

Headquartered in Kelowna and with several locations across British Columbia, Diversified Rehabilitation Group offers health and wellness return-to-work-related services to individuals, businesses and insurance companies. In 2008, the management team went to employees with the invitation to weigh in with ideas on how they envision a psychologically healthy workplace – and how to get there, says Sienko. "For people to open up, you need to first earn their trust. And on the journey of earning that trust, the management team had to demonstrate that we really care and want everybody to be a part of the solution."

The commitment to tackling the issue as a team has led to organization-wide engagement – it also required leading by example, says Sienko. "You need to embrace the change for yourself. If you expect employees to share their challenges, managers also need to be open when they are going through difficult times," he says. "At the end of the day, we are all human beings with the same vulnerabilities."

In addition to the benefits already in place, input from Diversified Rehabilitation Group team members led to the creation of three "wellness days" a year, which they can spend as they choose. The company also introduced a four-day workweek for employees, although the facilities are open on five business days. "We were initially concerned that this would negatively impact our productivity, but our bottom line has gone up, and disability rates and sick time dropped drastically," says Sienko.

The dedication to transforming company culture earned Diversified Rehabilitation Group the CMHA Workplace Excellence Award. "We've created an environment where sharing and admitting vulnerability is part of today's company culture," says Sienko, adding that the impact has also been noticed by clients. "Feedback from our clients tells us that they feel heard and supported," he says. "Instead of just telling them what to do, we allow them to be vulnerable and take an active role in their recovery."



Building a psychologically healthy workplace can lead to increased employee engagement and reduced disability rates and sick time. **ISTOCK.COM**