

Return to work with success

The right preparation can make all the difference!

Returning to work after an absence can be difficult, especially if the reason for the absence was due to a mental health problem. More and more people today are off work on disability with diagnoses such as Depression, Burnout, Anxiety, and Stress. When they have been medically cleared to return to work, many are not ready to cope with the day-to-day demands of the job and stressors of work.

Many do not have the stamina, concentration, focus or ability to adhere to a work routine which is expected of them once they are in the workplace. Furthermore, many lack the coping skills that will help them deal with the pressures they will face. For some, it is the work pressures that caused them to leave work in the first place and rendered them on disability. Without basic work skills and coping strategies, returning to work can be terrifying. It can also be an utter failure.

People who are away from work often complain of fatigue. They say that they don't have the stamina that they used to have. They tire easily and can't imagine how they will perform at work. They are

worried that they won't be able to make it through the first day, let alone the first week.

They report decreased concentration and an inability to stay focussed on a task. Many people say that they lack initiative and/or they don't have what it takes to stay on task for any substantial length of time.

Poor memory is another common complaint. This has been likened to having cobwebs in the brain that need to be cleared out.

These complaints may be related to simply having been away from work, from the routine of the day-to-day job, and not having had expectations put on them. These complaints can also be related to prescription medication. In any case, people may have received the medical clearance to return to work but they may not be functionally prepared.

This is where ERGO-Wise can help. Owned and operated by Adeena Wisenthal, registered occupational therapist, Adeena designs return-to-work programs

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Work Information Newsletter is developed by Adeena Wisenthal, registered occupational therapist and owner of ERGO-Wise, a centre in Ottawa that specializes in workplace mental health.

This issue focuses on successful return-to-work following a mental health disability leave.

Past newsletters may be found at the download section of www.ergo-wise.com.



Signs of Workplace Stress

- Headaches
- Chest pain
- Back pain
- Stomach problems
- Fatigue
- Poor concentration
- Anxiety



Consequences at Work

- Increased errors
- Missed deadlines
- Absenteeism
- Poor work quality
- Poor productivity
- Lower customer satisfaction

Workplace stress impacts the bottom line

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aimed at targeting a person's specific concerns and barriers to returning to work. Adeena assesses the impact of a person's disability on function and productivity.

Through her hallmark *bridge2work*TM program, Adeena uses the concepts of work hardening to assist people in their return to work. Adeena designs work simulations that mirror a person's work or at least the skills required in a person's job. She engages the person in these work tasks as a first step in guiding them through the return-to-work process. Tasks are graded in complexity based on the person's functioning. By the end of such a program, the client is more prepared to return to work and there is greater return-to-work success.

The development of coping strategies is an inherent part of a *bridge2work*TM

program. Again, depending on the client's needs, Adeena may offer them strategies in improving their skills in assertiveness, time management, effective communication, and conflict management.

If a person is also dealing with pain, Adeena incorporates pain management techniques in the return-to-work program. These may include: pacing techniques, energy conservation, proper ergonomics, and activity mobilization. Adeena also considers the psychosocial factors that are often associated with people suffering from chronic pain.

Through the customized return-to-work program available at ERGO-Wise, clients return to work with renewed self-confidence and the ability to start work-

ing right away often with less of a ramp up than without return-to-work preparation. Workers who are better prepared to return to work translate to more profitable businesses and lower insurance premiums for employers. Better prepared workers are more successful when they return to their jobs. They are

more productive, less dependent on health benefit plans, absent less often and have higher job satisfaction.

The employee has restored independence, self-confidence, and self-worth. The employer regains an experienced, productive worker and avoids the cost of recruiting, hiring, and training a new employee. The insurer no longer has to pay costly disability benefits and claimant files are successfully closed. It's a win-win-win!



Statistics from Health Canada:

- ❑ Lost productivity/year due to mental health problems:
 - 1998: \$14 billion
 - 2004: \$33 billion
- ❑ By 2020, Depression will rank second to heart disease as the leading cause of disability worldwide.
- ❑ Three million Canadians will experience depression at one point in their life.
- ❑ Depression most often affects people in their working years, between the ages of 24 and 44.



ERGO-Wise facilitates timely return to work through customized work hardening programs. We work with all stakeholders including employee, employer, and insurer.

At ERGO-Wise, we improve functioning by reducing the negative sequelae of a disability. We empower people to achieve success in their personal and work lives.

Contact us for more information about: *bridge2work*TM program, duty to accommodate, ergonomics, pain management, and vocational counselling.

2571 Carling Avenue, Suite 205
Ottawa, Ontario K2B 7H7
Phone: 613.726.6329 Email: info@ergo-wise.com

ergo-wise.com