



Helping Remove the Stigma

By Sara Filbee

As many of you know, I am the Champion for the Mental Health Initiative in ESDC. What you probably don't know is why.

I have said many times that all of us will either experience mental health issues, or will have friends or family that will. In my case, it is myself and I want to share my experience with you. My decision to do this was not an easy one. I hesitated because of the possible stigma that is associated with such an admission. However, upon reflection (lots of it!), I knew that I could not encourage others to talk about their mental health challenges if I was not prepared to do so myself.

Creating an atmosphere where it is ok and not limiting, in any way, to discuss mental health is what ESDC has been working so hard to achieve. After all, that is a key step for a Department with a mission that includes engaging our employees and establishing a healthy work environment. More importantly, I believe that leadership is about courage and, if I can't put my money where my mouth is, then I am not much of a leader!

My challenge is with depression. I don't know when it first hit me but I was diagnosed in my late 30's and I have been managing it ever since. It is my firm belief that all of us must take personal responsibility for our health to the extent that we are able – including our mental well-being. Just as physical illnesses can be treated effectively, mental health challenges can also be managed. Over the years I have taken medication and learned the power of cognitive behavioral therapy – an approach that allowed me to successfully regain control of my fears, anxieties and negative patterns.

I am one of the lucky ones. My illness is minor and easily managed if I stay on top of it. But I still remember all too well the pain of being in a black hole when I was first diagnosed.

Let me be clear – Depression is not logical. I am, and know myself to be, incredibly blessed. To start with, I live in Canada, one of the best countries in the world! I work with people I admire and respect. I have built a wonderful career and the job I am doing is so very worthwhile. I have a great family with whom I seem to get closer with as the years pass by. I now live in my dream house and am surrounded with very dear friends, both in the Atlantic Region and in Ottawa. Yet despite the countless positive aspects of my life, I have had to manage the fears and negative thoughts associated with depression.

There is also another element to my story. I believe that what happens to us – the good and the bad – is all a part of making each of us the great people that we are. Because of my experience, I am more aware of the impact of personal challenges that we all face from time to time and I feel that this makes me a better leader. For example, I regularly challenge myself and my team to be sensitive to the overall well-being of our colleagues and employees as a key step on our journey to create an even higher performing organization.

I hope that sharing my story will help us to collectively understand just how serious and how important our work to create a mentally healthy workplace is. No one person can do it by themselves – mental well-being is truly a team sport. I would encourage anyone facing mental health challenges to seek support from your family, friends, manager or colleagues as well as our Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Share your thoughts and be part of the initiative.
Visit the iService Mental Health site: <http://iservice.prv/mentalhealth>

