

“EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE” BEATS WORKPLACE STRESS

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OTTAWA- Many Canadian workers say workplace stress has negatively affected them physically or psychologically, with one in five claiming it has limited their careers, according to survey results released Monday.

However, a report released along with the results argues that an awareness of their own emotions and those of co-workers can boost employees' "emotional intelligence" and ease work-inhibiting stress.

More than eight in 10 respondents say they experience stress in the workplace at least sometime, according to the report by Leger Marketing for Toronto-based Multi-Health System Inc., a distributor of mental health care software programs used by psychologists, psychiatrists, other mental health professionals, and human resource managers.

And 41 percent, including blue collar, service and professional workers, say they frequently experience workplace stress as a result of work or personal experiences, it said.

Physically, 53 per cent of working Canadians say that they experience headaches, clenched jaws, indigestion, constipation or diarrhea, increased inspiration, and fatigue or insomnia due to stress, it said.

Psychologically, 55 per cent experience anxiety, irritability with co-workers, defensiveness, anger, mood swings, and feelings of helplessness or of being trapped.

And behaviorally, 52 percent say stress in the workplace causes them to be impatient, procrastinate, quick to argue, withdraw, or isolate themselves from others, neglect responsibility, and perform poorly.

Also, 30 per cent say stress has prevented them from being recognized for their contribution at work and 22 percent believe it has prevented them from being moved up in their company. "The good news is, you can learn or improve your emotional skills...even in the presence of stress," said Steven Stein, a clinical psychologist and president and CEO of Multi-Health Systems. "If individuals monitor and interpret their emotions and the emotions of others, then apply that knowledge to better succeed in dealing with the world around them, they have a better chance of experiencing workplace success."

"A strong emotional intelligence can help build positive relationships with colleagues and improve performance – the ideal formula for workplace success," the report added.

However, the survey found that nearly six in 10 working Canadians are not familiar with emotional intelligence and its impact on their professional success, and 56 per cent are not familiar with the negative effect stress has on their emotional intelligence.

Stein, in an interview, suggested that workers learn to take some time out at work to think about their emotions; first, how they feel and then why they feel the way they do. "Another thing is to pay attention to others," he said, adding that sometimes requires taking more time to listen to colleagues.

The national survey of 1729 working adults was conducted online between May 25 and 30 and is said to be accurate within 2.4 percentage points 19 out of 20 times.