

Making Mental Health Awareness A Priority in the Workplace



OVERVIEW

As part of their overall commitment to diversity and inclusion, Vancity is dedicated to ensuring that mental health awareness is a priority for their organization. Vancity embarked on a number of initiatives surrounding mental health to help build their employees understanding of the issue.

OBJECTIVES

Vancity has adopted the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the workplace and their goals surrounding mental health awareness include:

- Reducing stigma around mental health in the workplace
- Reinforcing that mental health can affect anyone – even those who you least expect
- In one way or another, everyone is affected by mental health issues at some point during their life/career
- Giving employees tools to better understand and cope with mental health conditions

APPROACH

Vancity launched a number of initiatives detailed below. They launched some of this activity during Mental Health Awareness Week and continued to build on it.

- Mental health lunch and learns
- Mindful meditation
- Better utilizing Employee Family Assistance Programs (EFAP)
- Creating an employee advisory group on mental health
- Certifying an employee as a Mental Health First Aid Provider through the Mental Health Commission Of Canada

Mental Health Lunch and Learns

Vancity created lunch and learns on a variety of topics including: resiliency, emotional hygiene, stress relaxation techniques, and meditation. There are also a variety of lunch and learns on topics that can help reduce stress in employee's home lives such as: caring for their aging parents, managing finances, enhancing couple's relationships, healthy lifestyle choices, etc. These lunch and learns are open to all employees.

Mindful Meditation

Vancity trained eight employees to be mindful meditation facilitators. The commitment from the trained employees was to provide weekly guided meditation experiences for a large percentage of their employee base. Calm Monkey was the organization that provided training.

Better Utilizing EFAP

Vancity started leveraging their EFAP in different situations. Some examples of this are calling out Morneau Shepell counsellors when there was a disturbing incident (e.g. a shooting occurred near a Vancity branch and employees witnessed it), but also proactively when Vancity thought that a learning exercise might benefit from it (e.g. learning about Indigenous history). Vancity also started using EFAP to facilitate some of their lunch and learns.

Employee Advisory Group: Mental Health

Vancity has created an employee advisory group on mental health, as a subset of their Occupational Health & Safety group. The objective of this group is to gain insights from people with lived experiences with mental health. This group will help advise Vancity on how the organization can support employees with mental health challenges.

Mental Health First Aid Provider

Vancity has a few employees trained as Certified Mental Health First Aid Providers through the Mental Health Commission of Canada. The certified provider helps people through mental health crisis including: intervention, immediate support and guidance, and having conversations about mental health.

OUTCOMES

Vancity has seen an increased awareness from employees on mental health. The organization profiles mental health frequently, recognizing the issue, the seriousness and the effects. Vancity is continuing to monitor progress towards their objectives.

LESSONS LEARNED

Vancity has learned a great deal during their journey, and some of their key lessons learned are detailed below.

Know What Resources You Have Access to

There are mental health initiatives that have a budget associated with them, and other activities that are easier to implement with a very low/no budget. Knowing what resources you have access to can help determine what initiatives you choose to implement.



It Is an Ongoing Commitment

Vancity knows that in order for their initiatives and activities to have a lasting impact, it requires an ongoing, organizational commitment. Ensuring the conversation continues, remains relevant, and happens throughout the organization is part of that ongoing commitment.

Proactive vs Reactive

There is tremendous value in addressing mental health preventatively, before issues turn into crises. Vancity is increasingly trying to do more in preventing mental health crises by supporting employees early on and proactively.

NEXT STEPS

Vancity is committed to mental health awareness in the workplace. In addition to continuing the activities listed above, they are really looking to leverage their employee resource group to help advise the organization on how to support people with mental health. They are also working towards having more people trained in Mental Health First Aid, Mindfulness, and having their managers trained in how to better support employees struggling with mental health challenges.