

**Results of CEO  
Research on  
Mental Health**

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BMO Financial  
Group**

**For**

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## 1. Background and Objectives

In a recent Conference Board of Canada conference entitled “2003 Workplace Health and Well-Being: Mentally Fit Canada” the Roundtable reported that, in Canada alone, \$30 billion a year is lost due to mental conditions suffered by employees. This figure represents about 14 per cent of the net operating revenue of all Canadian businesses combined.

Mental and stress-related illness in the workplace is one of the most significant challenges facing Canadian businesses today. Mental illness affects the productivity and competitiveness of organizations which, in turn, decreases organizations’ chances of success in today’s difficult business climate.

The Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health commissioned GPC Research to explore the attitudes of CEOs towards the issue of the mental health of employees in Canadian organizations.

Specific research objectives were to determine:

- Perceived level of risk to the mental health of employees;
- Perceived level of impact of poor employee mental health on Canadian organizations;
- Perception of the level of commitment within Canadian organizations to providing assistance to employees with poor mental health;
- Perceived role of senior management in promoting good employee mental health;
- Suggestions for communicating to senior managers an understanding of the impact of employee mental health on their organization.

## 2. Methodology

GPC Research conducted a total of 16 one-on-one elite interviews by telephone with Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Canadian organizations from a cross-section of industry sectors. Potential participants were selected from Canadian Fortune 500 companies. These individuals were sent a letter inviting them to participate in the research via a 30-minute telephone interview. Also explained in the letter were:

- The purpose and objectives of the research;
- The confidentiality involved (i.e. that no comments are attributed to individuals by name without prior permission from the participant);
- The identity and role of GPC Research and of the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health; and
- The importance of their contribution to the project.

A copy of the letter that was mailed to potential participants is found in Appendix A. Interviews were conducted with CEOs from the following sectors: manufacturing (metals, chemical products and plastics), information technology (hardware and software development), healthcare services, retail (general merchandise and beverage alcohol), energy, financial services, communications, and not-for-profit organizations.

An interview guide was prepared by GPC Research consultants with input from the Global Roundtable on Mental Health.

Interviews were conducted by consultants from GPC Research from October 9<sup>th</sup> through November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

### 3. Executive Summary

Most participants agreed that the Canadian business environment has been characterized in recent years by increased consolidation in the form of mergers and acquisitions. Many organizations have downsized, causing staff to lose their jobs. The result has been pervasive job insecurity even for those who survive the cuts who fear for their jobs and attendant health and insurance benefits – including prescription drug coverage and disability income protection.

Participants emphasized that employees are coping with an increasingly rapid rate of change. Constantly evolving job requirements and roles are forcing employees to acquire new skills sets. Older employees are finding it more of a struggle to acquire new skills than younger employees. For this reason, younger employees are often more optimistic about their future.

Participants perceived quite a high risk to the mental health of employees in their industry sector and in their respective organizations. This risk of developing conditions such as stress, burn-out or depression is exacerbated by the pressure of a fast-paced environment, the need to acquire new skills and a corresponding fear of skill obsolescence. Employees are expected to achieve greater performance levels with fewer and fewer resources. As well, the development of new telecommunications technologies such as “blackberries” imposes no limits on the length of the working day.

Many, but not all participants, perceived middle level managers to be at greater risk of developing mental conditions such as stress, burn-out or depression than junior or senior level employees. Middle level managers have the responsibility for ensuring that front line employees achieve the objectives of the organization while, at the same time, implementing changes as directed by senior management. Middle managers also have less opportunity to regulate their working environment than senior managers.

Some participants expressed the view that the risk to employee mental health is not defined by their position in the organizational hierarchy or job function. All employees within a given job function, such as finance, are equally affected during periods of intense change.

Most participants considered that employees are more at risk from mental conditions such as stress, burn-out or depression than they were five years ago.

Most participants considered that senior managers are more concerned about the mental health of employees in their organizations than they were five years ago. Senior managers have access to more complete statistics on lost work days and increased employee health plan expenditure on mental health-related disorders.

The media has also paid greater attention to the issue of employee mental health within the past five years. Participants stressed, however, that many employees who are not working at full capacity due to poor mental health, remain undetected. These employees are still “under the radar.”

Most participants perceived that employees who exhibit symptoms of poor mental health have a potentially high impact on their organizations ability to maintain a productive workforce, recruit and retain the most talented personnel, maintain the highest standards of client or customer service, remain competitive, to retain profitability and long term growth and to control operating costs.

Most participants, but not all, perceived that employees with poor mental health would have the greatest impact on their organization’s ability to **maintain a productive workforce, to recruit and retain the most talented personnel or to maintain the highest standards of client or customer service.**

Participants considered that employees with poor mental health impact the organization’s ability to maintain a productive workforce in team-based environments, such as in manufacturing, where there is a high degree of task interdependency.

Employees working in environments, such as consulting or software development, which require creative thinking and where a high degree of information sharing is required will have a great impact on productivity if they suffer from conditions such as stress, burn-out or depression.

Employees with poor mental health can impact the productivity of co-workers through disruptive behaviours such as intimidating outbursts of anger or frustration, or through lowering morale with an attitude that “the glass is always half empty”.

Participants considered that talented employees who suffer from mental conditions such as stress, burn-out or depression will be more likely to leave organizations that do not provide them with the necessary support and assistance in coping with these conditions. Furthermore, organizations which have a reputation for not respecting employees and addressing the issue of employee mental health will be unlikely to attract the most talented recruits. Similarly, employees who are abused by managers who behave unacceptably (e.g. screaming or yelling) as a result of conditions such as stress or burn-out will be more likely to seek employment elsewhere.

Participants from industry sectors with intense customer contact (people businesses), such as financial services, considered that employees with poor mental health would have greatest impact on the ability to maintain high standards of customer service. These participants also cited research which proved a link between mental health, employee and customer satisfaction.

Participants identified a number of ways in which they, as CEOs, can help to promote the mental health of employees in their organizations.



- Participants called upon fellow chief and senior executives to fund and sponsor employee assistance programs that provide free or subsidized treatment for mental conditions;
- Chief and senior executives will also need to ensure that employees who play a supervisory role have the training to be able to achieve early identification of the symptoms of mental conditions such as stress, burn-out or depression;
- Chief and senior executives are also responsible for ensuring that managers further down the organizational hierarchy are held accountable for mental health of employees for whom they are responsible;
- Chief and senior executives are also responsible for minimizing the stigma applied to employees who suffer from poor mental health. Specifically, senior managers need to communicate to the rest of the organization that mental conditions like stress, burn-out or depression are conditions that can be treated and cured and do not represent a failing in character on the part of the sufferer;
- Chief and senior executives need to instil and foster a culture which respects employees, makes them feel part of their organization, and which takes employee mental health seriously. Senior managers have the opportunity to act behavioural role models which set an example to the rest of the organization.

Participants considered that the senior management teams in Canadian corporations are reasonably committed to preserving the mental health of employees in their organizations but that work remains to be done to improve that commitment.

Participants stress that senior managers have to have a desire and a reason to address the issue of employee mental health. Most participants agreed that altruism or a desire to be “seen to be doing the right thing” would not be sufficient to persuade senior managers to devote resources to maintaining the mental health of employees. Senior managers would need to understand the full impact of poor employee mental health on their “bottom line” profit.

Participants suggested that quantitative data be used to demonstrate the detrimental effects of absenteeism or increased health plan expenditure on profit. Participants considered it just as important to demonstrate the benefits to the “bottom line”, such as few lost work days, of implementing mental health programs.

Participants also expressed the view that senior managers are most likely to be influenced by their own peer group. These participants suggested that CEOs act as champions of mental health within their own community. These champions could share examples of best practice developed from their own experience in tackling the issue of employee mental health within their own organizations.

## 4. Main Research Findings

Key findings of this research are presented in the following paragraphs.

### 4.1 Current Employee Challenges

Participants were asked to outline what, in their opinion, are the main challenges faced by employees both in their industry sector and in their respective organizations.

Participants across many industry sectors reported that there has been a great deal of consolidation in their sector, primarily due to mergers and acquisitions. Participants also alluded to the cyclical nature of their businesses and poor growth rates that they have experienced in the past five years.

*“There has been global consolidation, especially across Europe and Japan.”*  
CEO -Manufacturing Sector

*“The chemical industry is in a downturn.”* CEO -Manufacturing Sector

Mergers and acquisitions have led to widespread re-structuring within many Canadian organizations. Participants reported that such re-structuring efforts have resulted in staff downsizing. Employees who are retained after companies have been re-structured are left with a fear of losing their own jobs.

*“Our parent company has just been acquired and we will be integrated into a new operation. Employees will be uncertain whether or not they still have a job.”* CEO –Financial Services Sector

*“There have been major structural changes in a mature industry which has seen a 50% reduction in the workforce.”* CEO –Energy Sector

Employees in many industry sectors are challenged by an increasingly complex work environment, fuelled by the fast pace of technological advancement.

*“There is a need for workers to acquire new skills as the requirements of the job grow more complex. There is a greater than ever need for training.”*  
CEO –Manufacturing Sector

*“Business re-engineering has changed the skill set and imposes greater cognitive demands on employees.”*  
CEO – Healthcare Services Sector



Participants from the manufacturing and energy sectors noted that the workforce in these sectors is ageing. Older employees have lower morale and are less confident about their future than their younger counterparts.

*“The workforce is getting older. The average age is 47.”*  
CEO –Manufacturing Sector

*“The younger workforce is more optimistic. There is more rivalry between them and the older group.”* CEO –Energy Sector

Employees across all sectors are required to increase performance and productivity with a diminishing pool of resources. As well, organizations which report monthly results to shareholders are applying pressure to employees to achieve consistently high performance levels from month to month despite operating in an environment with a heavily seasonal business cycle.

*“There is pressure on the workforce to do more with less.”*  
CEO –Manufacturing Sector

*“The market (stock) looks for quarterly performance outcomes. This affects work life balance.”* CEO –Information Technology Sector

Participants also noted that female employees often find it more difficult to achieve a “work life balance”. Female employees often shoulder the additional burden of fulfilling the requirements of their job whilst also coping at home with a young family or ageing parents.

*“Women have to look after ageing parents. This can lead to stress and depression which some people cope with better than others.”*  
CEO –Not-for-Profit Sector

Some participants stated that they face the constant challenge of recruiting and retaining the most talented personnel available to cope with an increasing complex and fast paced working environment.

*“Companies have to work hard to attract talented employees. Employees have high expectations {of their work environment}.”*  
CEO –Not-for-Profit Sector

These participants stressed the need, particularly during periods of industry expansion, to maintain a stimulating working environment in which the most talented employees can achieve their own career goals.

*“The biggest challenges are to ensure that the work is meaningful and to empower employees to accomplish their business objectives.”*  
CEO –Communications Sector

Similarly, employers also face the challenge of matching job requirements with employees who have the necessary skill set and personal characteristics. One participant from the retail sector stated that the seasonal nature of the retail environment often places employees under a great of stress. This participant stressed the need to ensure that employees are able to operate effectively in such an environment.

*“Retail is a fast paced, intense environment which always challenges employees. Organizations need to keep employees very focused and organized.”* CEO –Retail Sector

#### **4.2 Perceived Threats to Mental Health**

In order to determine differing perceptions of the participants on a number of key issues, the survey team used a one to five rating scale to assess the level of risk posed by mental conditions to employees as perceived by participating CEOs in their industry sector and in their own respective organizations.

Overall, half of those interviewed gave a rating of four or five out of five – five denoting a high health risk – one denoting a low health risk.

Those who gave higher ratings on the risk to employees of these mental conditions do did so for a number of reasons. For example, employees who found themselves in the midst of a merger or acquisition developed a constant fear of job loss. One participant referred to this state of mind as a “survivor syndrome.”

*“Workers are afraid of loosing their jobs, pensions and employee benefits. They suffer from a “survivor syndrome.”* CEO – Manufacturing Sector

Another health risk cited by participating CEOs related to employees having to cope with an increasingly complex work environment in which job definitions and requirements are in a constant state of flux.

Participants noted, therefore, that employees in many organizations are under constant pressure to ensure their skills do not become obsolete.

*“Workers are concerned that their skills will become obsolete if they cannot cope with increasingly complex job requirements.”*

CEO –Manufacturing Sector

*“Technological advances change service models all the time and employees have to adapt to this change.”*

CEO –Financial Services Sector

Another health risk: employees in many sectors being required to achieve higher performance levels with a constantly diminishing pool of resources. Employees work longer hours with less compensation, thus adding to the risk of mental conditions arising from fatigue or financial difficulties.

*“Employees are depressed by the high tech slump. Higher performance is expected of them with longer hours and less compensation.”*

CEO –Information Technology Sector

Some participants considered that the rapid advancement in communications technology has increased the risk to the mental health of employees across all industry sectors.

One participant pointed out that modern communications technologies such as cellular telephones, email and “blackberries” now compel employees to be available 24 hours a day, hence placing no limit on the number of hours in the working day.

*“In any sector there is a focus on high technology that is not defined by a “9 to 5” environment. Employees are expected to be available 24 hours a day due to communications technologies such as cell phones, email and “blackberries”. Employees need to manage this environment.”*

CEO –Not-for-Profit Sector

Participants who perceived a lesser risk to employees of these mental conditions tended to place less emphasis on the workplace as a source of these conditions.

*“There are some issues of change but is not a big factor.”*

CEO –Manufacturing Sector

These participants also considered that employees were less at risk from such mental conditions because job roles and expectations in their particular industry sector are, for the most part, well defined. These participants considered that stress, for example, stems more from dysfunctional relationships between differing personality types than from specific work-related factors.

*“Most employees know the framework in which they are operating. Stress is more an issue between individuals.”*

CEO –Manufacturing Sector

#### **4.2.1 Perceived Threat to Employees at Different Stages of Career Development**

Participants were asked to state which employee groups they considered were most at risk from mental conditions such as stress, burn-out, and feelings of isolation or depression. Most participants considered that middle managers were at greater risk than other employee groups. One participant considered that senior managers were at greater risk while the remainder considered that all employee groups were equally at risk.

Participants considered that middle managers are at greater risk than other employee groups for a number of reasons.

Some participants considered that middle managers have the main responsibility for implementing change in an organization. This need to implement change also intensifies the requirement for middle managers to quickly acquire new skills which they are then responsible for imparting to others.

*“They (middle managers) have to implement changes that impact the front line employees. Stress comes from the need to constantly learn skills.”*

CEO –Manufacturing Sector

Furthermore, they have the responsibility, not only for ensuring that front line employees perform at the required level to maintain high levels of customer satisfaction, but often simultaneously, for implementing strategies defined by senior management. The challenges of such a role within an organization may also be compounded by the fact the objectives conceived higher up the organizational hierarchy may not always be clearly defined.

*“They are the “ham in the sandwich”. They have to lead the troops in order to get things done for the customers and they also have to implement the ideas of senior management, even if those ideas don’t always make sense to them.”*

CEO –Financial Services Sector

*“They can sense a lack of direction from senior management or suffer from overload.”* CEO –Not-for-Profit Sector

Many participants considered that middle managers have less control over their environment than senior managers and, therefore, less power to create a work environment that will minimize the risk of mental conditions such as stress and burn-out.

*“They have less control and less power to change their environment.”* CEO –Information Technology Sector

Some participants also considered that a superior ability to cope with stress, and therefore, a greater resilience to the symptoms of mental conditions such as stress or burn-out, are defining qualities of a middle manager. These participants described career progression as a Darwinian “survival of the fittest”. Managers who demonstrate their ability to cope with increasing workloads and stress levels will grow and move to senior management positions, others remain “stuck” within middle management positions.

*“People that become middle managers either mature and accommodate the pressure or get “stuck”. Senior managers get there by a Darwinian “survival of the fittest”.* CEO –Retail Sector

Participants considered that all employee groups are equally at risk for the following reasons.

Some participants considered that the vulnerability to mental conditions like stress, burn-out or depression is not defined by the seniority of employees (e.g. senior versus middle management) but by job function. An employee’s job junction defines the level of risk to that employee of mental conditions such as stress, burn-out or depression because the rate of change is equal for employees at all levels of seniority within the function that is undergoing rapid change. One participant cited the example of a merger which puts an intense workload on the finance department at all levels of seniority, due to the need to re-design the financial reporting model, but leaves the sales force relatively unaffected.

*“For my organization, the impact is not so much a function of hierarchy, because the rate of change is the same for all, but of function. At the moment, finance is stressed by the big task of setting up a new reporting system. Sales is less impacted by the change.”* CEO –Manufacturing Sector

Other participants expressed the opinion that front line employees often have no greater control over their working environment than do middle managers. These participants cited the example of those who work shifts and are obliged to adapt to constantly change sleep and lifestyle patterns.

*“Any employees who have no control of their environment are subject to higher levels of stress. They are unable to “call the shots” for example, if they do production work with changing shift patterns.”* CEO –Not-for-Profit Sector

#### **4.2.2 Perceived Threat to Employees at Different Stages of Career Development Compared to Five Years Ago**

Most participants agreed that employees, and in particularly, middle managers are more at risk from mental conditions than they were five years ago. Participants stated that changes to the competitive environment such as industry consolidation, globalization, and in sectors such as information technology and manufacturing, an industry downturn, have compounded the pressures on employees to perform at higher levels with increasingly limited resources.

*“Industry consolidation has been tumultuous for all involved.”*  
CEO –Financial Services Sector

*“The risk to mental health is greater due to slumps in the industry.”*  
CEO –Information Technology Sector

Participants also noted that re-structuring has resulted in a reduction in the proportion of employees in Canadian organizations occupying middle management positions in the past five years. Middle managers are, therefore, obliged to absorb ever increasing workloads.

*“Organizations are less hierarchical which means there are fewer middle managers being asked to take on a higher workload.”*  
CEO –Manufacturing Sector

*“There is even more pressure to produce more with less people.”*  
CEO –Manufacturing Sector

#### **4.2.3 Level of Concern among Senior Management about Mental Health compared to Five Years Ago**

Most participants considered that senior managers are either *somewhat more concerned* or *much more concerned* about the issue of employee mental health than they were five years ago. None of the CEOs interviewed considered that senior managers are less concerned about the issue of mental health than they were five years ago.

Participants cited a number of reasons why they considered that senior managers are more concerned about the issue of employee mental health than they were five years ago.

Some participants considered that senior managers are more concerned about the mental well being of employees in their organizations due to the increased media attention that this issue has received.

*“There is more focus on it (employee mental health) in the papers than there used to be.”* CEO –Not-for-Profit Sector

Other participants emphasized that senior managers now have access to more reliable statistics concerning the number of lost work days that can be attributed to mental conditions such as stress or burn-out. These statistics are enabling senior managers to understand the negative effect of poor mental health on workforce productivity.

*“More senior managers are getting access to the numbers of people who are “on leave” due to stress-related conditions. They realize that these numbers have increased from 10-15 years ago.”*  
CEO –Manufacturing Sector

*“There is heightened awareness of the effect (of poor mental health) on people, insurance costs and the negative effect on productivity.”*  
CEO –Information Technology Sector

Senior managers are also making fuller use of employee surveys which monitor employee satisfaction levels and collect open-ended feedback which is designed to detect conditions such as poor morale.

*“We do employee surveys which track employee stress levels. These surveys typically have an 80% response rate.”*  
CEO–Financial Services Sector

Many participants considered that senior managers are beginning to notice sharp increases in the dollar value of employee health insurance claims that are made due to mental conditions such as chronic fatigue.

*“There is growing awareness of the mental health issue because employers are seeing higher health plan bills to treat stress disorders and chronic fatigue.”*  
CEO–Not-for-Profit Sector

Participants also noted that senior managers are becoming more aware of the disruption caused by inappropriate or abusive behaviour by managers towards their direct reports and are taking steps to minimize that behaviour.

*“Senior management is more aware of the disruption that stress can cause and is paying more attention to eliminating inappropriate behaviour.”*  
CEO–Retail Sector



Abusive behaviour such as shouting at co-workers or subordinates is no longer tolerated in many organizations and is viewed as employee harassment. Similarly, senior managers are less tolerant of managers who impose increasing workloads on their staff but do not give those staff sufficient direction in managing that extra workload.

*“Behaviours such as screaming and “carrying on” are no longer tolerated. It is no longer acceptable to increase workload and expect employees to “just figure it out.” CEO–Retail Sector*

Some participants considered that the level of concern among senior managers has not changed in the past five years because the deterioration in the mental well being of many employees remains undetected. As a result, many senior managers, as yet, do not fully understand the pressures faced by employees at all levels.

*“There is still a “hidden group” of employees who are not working at 100% due to stress. They are still under “under the radar”.” CEO–Manufacturing Sector*

Furthermore, these participants believed that many senior managers understand neither the impact on their organizations of not addressing the issue of employee mental health nor the benefits of improving the mental health of employees in their organizations.

*“Senior managers are more concerned (about employee mental health) but don’t understand the consequences. They don’t understand the tangible benefits.” CEO–Information Technology Sector*

### **4.3 Specific Business Objectives Impacted by Poor Mental Health**

Participants were then asked to rate the potential impact that employees who exhibit symptoms of mental health conditions such as stress, burn-out or depression on their organization’s ability to fulfil the following strategic and operational business objectives:

- maintain a productive workforce;
- recruit and retain the most talented personnel;
- maintain the highest standards of customer or client service;
- remain competitive;
- remain profitable and achieving long term growth; and
- control operating costs.

Participants used a five-point scale where a rating of five meant that the participant considered that employees who exhibit symptoms of mental conditions would have a great impact on their organization’s ability to fulfil that particular objective. A rating of one meant that the participant considered that employees who exhibit symptoms of



these mental conditions would have no impact on their organization's ability to fulfil that particular objective.

Analysis of these responses revealed that participants perceive that employees who exhibit symptoms of mental conditions such as stress, burn-out or depression would have considerable impact on their organization's ability to fulfil all of these objectives. Figure One shows that, with few exceptions, at least one participant from each sector represented in the research gave an impact of rating of four or five out of five on all of the objectives.

**Figure One**

In the following chart, a check mark indicates that participants in that sector gave a four or five rating on the impact of employees with mental health problems on their organization’s ability to fulfil each business objective.

Business Objectives (Gave an impact rating of 4 or 5 out of 5)	Sector			
	Manufacturing	Energy	Information Technology	Retail
Maintaining a productive workforce	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recruiting and retaining the most talented personnel	✓		✓	✓
Maintaining the highest standards of customer/client service	✓	✓	✓	✓
Remaining competitive	✓	✓	✓	
Profitability and long term growth	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controlling operating costs	✓	✓	✓	✓

Business Objectives (Gave an impact rating of 4 or 5 out of 5)	Sector			
	Healthcare Services	Financial Services	Not-for-Profit	Communications
Maintaining a productive workforce	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recruiting and retaining the most talented personnel	✓		✓	✓
Maintaining the highest standards of customer/client service	✓	✓	✓	✓
Remaining competitive	✓	✓	✓	✓
Profitability and long term growth	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controlling operating costs	✓	✓	✓	

### 4.3.1 Business Objectives Most Impacted by Poor Mental Health

Participants were then asked which **one** of these objectives would be most impacted by employees with mental conditions such as stress, burn-out or depression.

Analysis of these responses revealed that most participants considered that employees in their organization who exhibit symptoms of mental conditions such as stress, burn-out or depression would have more impact on their organization's ability to maintain a productive workforce and recruit and retain the most talented personnel than on their organization's ability to fulfil any of the other objectives that were discussed.

With the notable exception of controlling operating costs, at least one participant stated that employees with these mental conditions would have the greatest impact on their organization's ability to maintain the highest standards of customer or client service, to remain competitive or to remain profitable and achieve long term growth.

The reasons why participants selected one objective as being the most impacted by employees who exhibit symptoms of mental conditions are presented in the following paragraphs.

#### 4.3.1.1 Maintain a Productive Workforce

Some participants from the manufacturing sector noted that employees work in a team-based environment in which team members are heavily interdependent. Poor performance by team members who exhibit symptoms of poor mental health has a direct impact on the ability of co-workers to function effectively.

*"Each person in a team needs to do several other jobs so the team members can rotate tasks. If one person is doing a poor job, it affects several areas."*  
CEO–Manufacturing Sector

Participants from the information technology and communications sectors stressed that employees in these sectors need to be motivated to collaborate with their co-workers. Participants expressed the view that Information technology is a "knowledge-based" industry. The productivity of employees in this sector is, therefore, highly dependent on their ability to think clearly, problem-solve and share knowledge and information with other employees. Employees who exhibit symptoms such as stress, burn-out or depression cannot think effectively and their productivity is reduced as a result.

*"IT is knowledge work. People need to be motivated to collaborate with each other. This is dependent on information sharing."*  
CEO–Information Technology Sector

*"You need cognitive skills. You cannot perform if you are not comfortable."*  
CEO–Communications Sector

Participants from the retail sector considered that employees who exhibit symptoms poor mental health have great potential to reduce the productivity of other employees. Participants noted two forms of disruptive behaviour; active and passive. Active disruption manifests itself in the inability of employees who exhibit symptoms such as stress, burn-out or depression to meet the requirements of their job. Passive disruption may manifest itself in the form of disrupting workflow, displaying confrontational or overly critical attitudes in meetings or displays of anger or frustration that may frighten or intimidate co-workers. One participant summarized such attitudes as, “always viewing the glass as half empty instead of half full.”

*“An individual who is unable to conform to organizational needs is very disruptive...either by not doing their job properly or influencing the behaviour of others.”*

CEO–Retail Sector

*“Office morale can be affected by someone who thinks negatively, is more critical than complementary, who “thinks the glass is half empty.”*

CEO–Manufacturing Sector

#### **4.3.1.2 Recruit and Maintain the Most Talented Personnel**

Participants stressed that organizations need to build a reputation for ensuring that they do as much as possible to ensure that the symptoms such as stress, burn-out or depression are minimized and that employees that do suffer from such conditions are provided with the necessary assistance and support. One participant from the non-for-profit sector expressed the view that desirable candidates may choose not to take up a post at an organization that has a reputation for disrespecting and ignoring the mental health of its employees.

*“You cannot recruit and keep good staff if a company has a reputation for not addressing the issue of mental health.”* CEO–Not-for-Profit Sector

Participants considered that talented employees who do not receive the support and assistance they need to relieve symptoms of poor mental will be likely to leave an organization, either because their needs are not being addressed, or because their performance has fallen below the standard acceptable to the organization.

*“If employees are stressed, they will leave.”*

CEO–Information Technology Sector

Some participants also noted that talented employees who are abused by managers who behave irrationally or inappropriately due to conditions like stress, burn-out or depression will be all the more likely to seek employment elsewhere.

*“People will not stay at a company where managers are acting irrationally or screaming at their employees. A company needs a good reputation for respecting its employees.”* CEO–Not-for-Profit Sector

Other participants considered that the ability of their organization to remain competitive and to maintain profitability and long term growth is dependent entirely on its ability to retain the most talented workforce. These participants emphasized that the loyalty of employees needs to be nurtured by making employees feel, not only that they can fulfil their full potential but also that their contribution to the organization can “make a difference”.

*“Retaining a talented workforce is critical to remaining competitive. Employees need to feel loyal and believe “anything can happen (be achieved)”.*  
CEO-Information Technology Sector

#### **4.3.1.3 Maintain the Highest Standards of Customer/Client Service**

Some participants described the financial services sector as a people-based industry which involves a great deal of direct personal contact with the customer. If employees who deal with customers on a daily basis exhibit symptoms such as stress, burn-out or depression, their ability to meet the needs of their customers is reduced.

*“We are a people business. Our service is delivered by people rather than machines. Employees with mental health problems impact directly on customer satisfaction levels”.* CEO-Financial Services Sector

To support this view, these participants also cited research which proves a direct link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction.

*“There is a direct link between customer service, employee satisfaction and employee mental health”.* CEO-Not-for-Profit Sector

#### **4.3.1.4 Remain Competitive**

Participants from the energy industry stressed the importance, in their organization, of the ability to negotiate contracts in order to remain competitive. These participants stressed that employees need to be “in top form” mentally to be an effective force in the contract negotiation process.

*“Successful contract negotiation is critical to maintaining a competitive edge. Contract negotiators have to be in “top form” mentally”.* CEO-Energy Sector

#### **4.3.1.5 Retain Profitability and Long Term Growth**

Participants considered that the ability of their organization to remain profitable and grow in the long term is dependent on its ability to maintain high standards of

customer service. Standards of customer service fall when employees begin to exhibit symptoms such as stress, burn-out or depression.

*“You need to treat people in a courteous way if you want them to come back. We are very focused on customer service”.* CEO-Retail Sector

#### **4.4 Role of Senior Management in Promoting Mental Health**

Participants were asked to articulate the optimum role that CEOs and other senior managers would play in promoting the mental well being of employees in their organizations.

Many participants considered that senior managers should take ultimate responsibility for putting Employee Assistance programs in place which adequately address the mental as well as physical health of employees. Participants cited the examples of exercise facilities, subsidized counselling or psycho-therapy sessions and stress control programs that address the mental health of employees.

*“Take a look and see what can be achieved by programs like exercise facilities and stress control programs. It all starts at the top with me”.* CEO-Retail Sector

*“Implement better health programs to include subsidized or free therapy and access to psychologists who can detect illness and treat it”.*  
CEO-Manufacturing Sector

Furthermore, participants considered that it is also the responsibility of senior managers to ensure that employee who have a managerial role are trained not only to identify symptoms such as stress, burn-out or depression in their direct reports, but also have the tools to ensure that employees who exhibit these symptoms receive the necessary treatment.

*“Provide leadership in training managers to spot mental health problems in their subordinates”.* CEO-Not-for-Profit Sector

*“There needs to be appropriate training courses for supervisors”.*  
CEO-Manufacturing Sector

Participants stressed the need for CEOs and other senior managers to ensure employees in a managerial role are held accountable for the mental well being of those who report to them. One participant related how he meets with his team of vice-presidents and, working with them, uses the results of employee surveys to identify business units whose employees may be particularly at risk from conditions such as stress or fatigue. The vice-presidents who head up such units are then accountable to the CEO for ensuring that the mental health issues of those employees are addressed.

*“I sit down with the VPs and go over the results of employee surveys to identify business units with high stress levels”. Then we work out what is causing this. Is it lack of resources etc.? Be seen to hold senior management accountable for maintaining good mental health among employees.”*

CEO-Financial Services Sector

Some participants also suggested that senior managers encourage employees to be pro-active in educating themselves about the issue of mental health in the workplace. These participants also suggested that senior managers make the necessary funding and time available for managers to attend courses and access written materials that will help them to become more knowledgeable about employee mental health issues.

*“Educate managers on the subject of employee mental health. Encourage managers to inform themselves through reading, lectures and courses.”*

CEO-Manufacturing Sector

Some participants considered the CEO and other senior managers to be responsible for minimizing the stigma that is often applied to employees who have experienced mental health challenges. These participants emphasized the need for employees to understand that disorders such as depression result from a bio-chemical malfunctioning in the brain and are not necessarily indicative of a lack of commitment or a failing of character on the part of the sufferer.

*“Ensure that the stigma of mental health problems is minimized. For example, (employees need to understand) that depression is caused by a faulty brain bio-chemistry and not a failing of character.”*

CEO-Information Technology Sector

Participants emphasized the need for CEOs and their management teams to instil a corporate culture which ensures that employees are respected and that mental health is an issue that is taken seriously.

*“Create a climate of respect and consideration for employees.”*

CEO- Information Technology Sector

One participant considered that a CEO should take the time each week to address human resource issues. Participants also stressed how important it is for CEOs to instil and foster a culture that makes employees feel that their contribution to the organization is valued. Employees will perform at their best if they feel part of the organization.

*“Communicate the message that people are valued. Spend some time each week on human resource issues and do not treat these issues as of secondary importance.”* CEO- Not-for-Profit Sector



*“The role of senior managers is to motivate employees to do their best and make employees feel part of the organization.”* CEO- Energy Sector

Some participants also emphasized the power of CEOs and members of their management teams to act as behaviour role models which set an example to the rest of the organization. These participants stressed a need for senior managers to be caring and attentive, and not to behave in an irrational or erratic manner.

*“Senior managers’ role is fundamental. They provide leadership and instil core values into the organization. They act as a behaviour role model.”*  
CEO-Manufacturing Sector

*“Senior managers’ role is to be role models for how others are expected to behave because people align themselves with role models.”*  
CEO-Retail Sector

#### **4.4.1 Perceived Level of Senior Management Commitment**

Participants were asked to rate the commitment of senior management to preserving the mental well being of employees in Canadian organizations. Participants had the option of giving a rating of *excellent*, *very good*, *good*, *fair* or *poor*.

No participants gave a rating of *excellent* or *very good*. The remainder were equally divided between those who gave a rating of *good* and those who gave a rating of *fair*. One participant gave a rating of *poor*.

#### **4.4.2 Suggestions for Obtaining Senior Management Commitment**

Participants suggested a number of strategies for securing the commitment of senior managers in Canadian organizations to maintaining the mental well being of employees.

Overwhelmingly, participants stressed that senior managers need to have a desire and a commitment to maintaining good mental health among employees in their organizations. This desire will be fuelled by an understanding of the impact that employees with poor mental health have on their organizations.

*“Top management needs to understand the size of the problem and have the desire to fix it”.*  
CEO-Manufacturing Sector

Participants believed that senior managers would need to understand the magnitude of the effect that employees with mental conditions such as stress, burn-out or depression have on the profitability of their organizations to persuade them to take the issue of mental health more seriously. Senior managers would need to understand the detrimental effect on their “bottom line” of increased absenteeism or the increased cost of health claims related to treating mental conditions.



*“Don’t rely on altruism. In reality, there are too many pressures. Senior managers need to be shown the impact on their “bottom line”. Then they will come to grips with mental health issues.*

CEO-Manufacturing Sector

Furthermore, participants emphasized that senior managers need to understand the dollars that can be saved by their organizations by reducing the amount of money spent on disability claims due to mental conditions and work days lost through absenteeism.

*“Show them what they stand to add to the “bottom line” when absenteeism and disability payments are reduced”.*

CEO-Not-for-Profit Sector

Participants suggested that quantitative data be made available to convince senior managers of the magnitude of effect of poor employee mental health on their organization and the potential improvement to their ROI of a workforce whose mental health allows them it function at its best.

*“Provide executives with solid research to show the relationship between mental health and performance”.*

CEO-Information Technology Sector

Some participants emphasized the utility of data both internal and external to their organization. Other participants stressed the need to concentrate on building an internal data set because definitions of what constitutes poor mental health may vary from one research effort to another. Employee surveys were cited by many participants as an effective means of harnessing data internal to an organization where the definition of mental health could be held consistent across all business units.

*“The effects of poor mental can be hard to verify and difficult to prove”.*

CEO-Health Care Services Sector

*“Mental health is often subject to conjecture. Outside statistics are not always considered reliable. It is more effective to use in-house employee surveys.”*

CEO-Financial Services Sector

Participants suggested that human resource specialists should be utilized fully in the research and data collection process. Participants also recognized that research that would clearly demonstrate the effect of poor employee mental health on the profitability of an organization requires considerable human and financial resources. For this reason, participants considered that the collection of reliable research data will be considerably more challenging for small and medium-sized than for larger organizations.

*“Use employee survey data to make senior managers understand the impact of employee mental health on their organization. HR has a big role to play here.”*  
CEO-Manufacturing Sector

*“It is more challenging for small and medium sized businesses which have fewer resources to devote to the issue.”*  
CEO-Not-for-Profit Sector

Some participants noted that many senior managers still feel a great deal of discomfort in openly admitting that employees are at risk from mental conditions like stress, burn-out or depression. These participants also expressed the view that senior managers are afraid that such an admission could be used by competitors to damage the reputation of their organization. These participants considered that many senior managers are reluctant to discuss the issue with their staff. Coaching will be needed to “get over that hurdle” and persuade senior managers to discuss the issue openly and candidly.

*“Get more of a comfort level among CEOs for discussing the issue frankly. Provide coaching to CEOs in discussing the issue openly.”*  
CEO-Communications Sector

Participants also stressed a need to make CEOs aware of the importance of work/life balance. Particularly for female employees, home and family are also significant sources of mental health problems that may compound with pressure experienced in the workplace.

*“CEOs need to understand that employees are dealing with external forces. These external forces can be greater for women.”*  
CEO-Retail Sector

Some participants also suggested that peer pressure be brought to bear on senior managers who do not yet understand the potential impact of poor employee mental health on their organization. These participants expressed the view that CEOs and other senior executives are more likely to be influenced by their peer group than by individuals at lower levels of seniority. CEOs need to act as champions of good employee mental health to their peer group. Participants also suggested that CEOs share best practices with the peers in other organizations.

*“CEOs like to listen to other CEO experiences. You need to have CEOs that will champion good mental health.”*  
CEO-Healthcare Services Sector

*“Show CEOs examples of best practices from other organizations.”*  
CEO-Not-for-Profit Sector

## ***Appendix A: Introductory Letter***



*Affiliated with the Centre for  
Addiction and Mental Health*

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Toronto, Ontario M5H 3T4  
Direct Line: 416 598-5790  
[bill.wilkerson@gpcinternational.com](mailto:bill.wilkerson@gpcinternational.com)

September 10, 2003

Dear \_\_\_\_\_;

As part of an international corporate leadership strategy on mental health, the Bank of Montreal is generously sponsoring a confidential survey of CEOs on mental health and the workplace.

This survey is the first of its kind and will attract international interest. We are most grateful to BMO CEO Tony Comper and his EVP-Human Resources Rose Patten for their support. GPC International has been commissioned to do the work.

This survey, in fact, is in preparation for a CEO conference being hosted for the Roundtable by CIBC CEO John Hunkin on November 12<sup>th</sup>. The findings will be released at that time.

We are now canvassing CEO's who would be willing to be interviewed confidentially for this survey face-to-face or by telephone. We would be most grateful if you would do so.

Two things about this request:

First, the confidentiality will be absolute. A number of the undersigned will also participate.

Second, by being interviewed for the survey, we are not asking you – or ourselves for that matter – to become an expert on this topic. The objective is to get a perspective of how business leaders perceive this subject – as a business issue – and what information you feel is needed to authenticate the subject as an actionable business topic.



Your intuitive and qualitative judgment will be most helpful plus any anecdotal insights you might offer with respect to your own firm's experience in promotion and management of employee mental health issues.

We might note that Mr. Hunkin's meeting on November 12<sup>th</sup> will focus specifically on corporate leadership in mental health. In fact, separately, you may well receive an invitation to attend.

I hope you will help us out on this. We have presumed to instruct the researchers to call your office to see if you would be able to set aside 25 minutes. In all, we hope to interview 25 to 30 CEO's from different sectors.

Many thanks in advance.

Best regards,

Bill Wilkerson  
Roundtable Co-Founder and CEO  
416-598-5790

**Signed With:**

R. Jamie Anderson, Deputy Chairman  
RBC Capital Markets

Colum Bastable, President and CEO  
Royal LePage Ltd.

John Evans, MD, Chairman  
Torstar Ltd.

Hershell Ezrin, Chairman and CEO  
GPC International Ltd.

David Kerr, Chairman  
Noranda Inc.

Rose Patten, EVP- Human Resources  
Bank of Montreal

Tim Price, Chairman  
Brascan Financial Corporation

Honourable Michael Wilson, Chairman and CEO  
UBS Global Asset Management (Canada) Co.



## ***Appendix B: Interview Guide***

## Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health

### Interview Guide

Good morning/afternoon. I'm \_\_\_\_\_ of GPC/GPC Research.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. As explained in the letter that was sent to you, the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health has commissioned GPC Research, an independent research consulting firm, to conduct a series of one-on-one interviews with Canadian corporate executives.

This interview will take no more than 30 minutes to complete.

FILL IN NAME AND TITLE (TAKEN FROM CLIENT LIST) IN THE SPACE BELOW:

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What do you consider to be the main employee challenges that your industry sector currently faces? Probe: Why do you say that?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What do you consider to be the main employee challenges that your own company currently faces? Probe: Why do you say that?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. To what extent do you consider that the mental well being of those employed **in your industry sector** is currently at risk from mental conditions such as stress, burn-out, feelings of frustration, isolation or depression. To give your answer, please use a 5-point scale where 1 means you consider that the well being of employees is not at all at risk and 5 means you consider that the well being of employees is at great risk from these kinds of mental conditions. CIRCLE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE.

1 – No risk at all.....	1
2 .....	2
3 .....	3
4 .....	4
5 – At great risk .....	5
Don't know .....	98

4. Probe: Why do you say that?

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5. Now, I would like you to tell me to what extent you consider that the mental well being of those employed **in your corporation** is currently at risk from mental conditions such as stress, burn-out, feelings of frustration, isolation or depression. To give your answer, please use a 5-point scale where 1 means you consider that the well being of employees is not at risk at all and 5 means you consider that the well being of employees is at great risk from these kinds of mental conditions. CIRCLE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE.

1 – No risk at all.....	1
2 .....	2
3 .....	3
4 .....	4
5 – At great risk .....	5
Don't know .....	98

6. Probe: Why do you say that?

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7. And which groups of employees would you say are most at risk from mental conditions such as stress, burn-out, feelings of frustration, isolation or depression? Would say it is mostly senior management, mostly middle management or that all employee groups are equally at risk. CIRCLE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE.

Mostly senior management.....	1
Mostly middle management.....	2
All employee groups equally at risk.....	3
Don't know .....	98

8. Probe: Why do you say that?

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9. Has this changed in any way over the past five years? If so, in what way?

Yes.....	1
No.....	2
Don't know .....	98

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10. Compared to five years ago, would you say that senior management is much more concerned, somewhat more concerned, somewhat less concerned, much less concerned about the issue of the mental well being of employees, or about the same? CIRCLE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE.

Much less concerned .....	1
Somewhat less concerned.....	2
About the same .....	3
Somewhat more concerned.....	4
Much more concerned .....	5
Don't know .....	98

11. Probe: Why do you say that?

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12. Now please tell me what impact that employees with mental conditions such as stress, burn-out, feelings of frustration, isolation or depression has or would have on your organization's ability to do the following. To answer, please use a 5-point scale where 1 means it has no impact at all and 5 means it has a great impact. FOR EACH OF 12a through f, CIRCLE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE. RANDOMIZE ORDER OF Q12a through Q12f

- a) Remain competitive
- b) Control operating costs
- c) Recruit and retain the most talented personnel
- d) Provide high standards of customer or client service
- e) Maintain a productive workforce (i.e. minimize lost work days)
- f) Maintain profitability and long term growth

1 – No impact at all .....	1
2 .....	2
3 .....	3
4 .....	4
5 – A great impact .....	5
Don't know .....	98

13. And which one of these factors do you consider would be the most impacted by employees with mental conditions such as stress, burn-out, feelings of frustration, isolation or depression? CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE ONLY

- a) Remain competitive
- b) Control operating costs
- c) Recruit and retain the most talented personnel
- d) Provide high standards of customer or client service
- e) Maintain a productive workforce (i.e. minimize lost work days)
- f) Maintain profitability and long term growth

14. Why do you say that [INSERT RESPONSE FROM Q13] is most impacted by these kinds of mental conditions?

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15. Are there any other business areas within your organization that would be impacted by mental conditions such as stress, burn-out, feelings of frustration, isolation or depression?

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16. Why do you say that?

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17. What role do you see yourself or other senior executives playing in promoting the mental well being of employees in your organization?

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18. How would you rate corporate Canada's commitment to preserving the mental well being of employees? Would you rate that commitment as excellent, very good, good, fair or poor? CIRCLE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE.

- Excellent .....1
- Very good .....2
- Good .....3
- Fair .....4
- Poor .....5
- Don't know .....98

19. And what, in your opinion, needs to happen in order to secure the commitment of top management in an organization to preserving the mental well being of that organization's employees?

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20. Do you have an Employee Assistance Program?

- Yes .....1
- No .....2
- Don't know .....98

21. Is mental well-being one of the areas it covers?

Yes .....1  
No.....2  
Don't know .....98

Thank you very much for your time. Before we conclude, I have one more thing to ask. When we put our report together, we would like to use some quotations to support our findings. May we have your permission to quote you by name or would you prefer to remain anonymous? CIRCLE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE

May quote by name.....1  
Request anonymity .....2