



HR Links

Inside this Issue

July-August 2005
Volume 2 Issue 5

- 2** HR Comings and Goings
What's Hot
- 3** How's Work Going?
- 4** Improvements to the Health and Dental Plan
- 6** Commissioner's Corner: A few words about the Corporate
- 8** The July-August Feature: The Corporate HR Plan
- 9** HR Vision, Mission and Values
- 10** The Five HR Goals
- 11** The HR Plan: Next Steps
- 12** The HeRo Award Engagement in the Public Sector
- 14** Anxiety in the Workplace
- 15** Introducing the New Healthy Workplace Program Coordinator

Public Service Commission
1700 Granville St., 4th Floor
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 2Y3

It's Summertime and the Living is Easy!

At least that's the dream inherent in every summer. As you get ready to leave for the cottage or wherever else your heart desires, we've pulled together a little light reading for you, so you're ready to hit the ground running in September.

Our feature section this month, focuses on the *Corporate Human Resource Plan*. With only five main goals and 39 strategies, you'll want to be aware of how this five-year plan will help government become a preferred employer – not only for new employees, but for those of us who already work here. Links to the full plan and the two summaries can be found at: <www.gov.ns.ca/psc>.

You will also find articles on government's employee engagement model, the new workplace wellness coordinator, changes to the government's consolidated health and dental plan and what's happening with the review of government human resource policies.

I am particularly pleased, this month, to launch our new peer recognition corner. Check out **HeRoes** and see who the summer heroes are. Please remember to take a moment to recognize someone you work with. If being recognized for the work we do is important to us, then let's make it happen!

See you in September!

Colleen

Members of the HR Links Editorial Board are:

Jane Allt
Michelle Collins
Vanessa Hammock
Donna Hendy
Jeannette Sanchez-Smith

Editor
Colleen Gareau
gareauc@gov.ns.ca
902 424 7280

Publication Statement

HR Links is published 10 times a year on the first business day of each month. The July-August and December-January issues are combined.

The editorial board welcomes and actively solicits articles and story suggestions from members of the HR community and its partners. Please send your submissions to hrlinks@gov.ns.ca by the middle of the month for editing and layout.

We love to hear from you. Keep those stories coming.

Check out The HeRo Award on page 12.

Watch for upcoming features on Diversity and Workplace Health.



HR Comings and Goings

Margaret Garnier has joined the PSC's Innovation and Growth Team. Margaret may be a familiar face to some of you as she completed a casual position last summer with the Diversity section. Margaret began on May 24 and will continue through to September. Margaret is a welcomed addition to support the training and development division and is being kept very busy in light of the new electronic LearnNet system. Margaret graduated with her Bachelor of Commerce with a major in

marketing and the certificate in HR management from St. Mary's University.

Bev Barter has joined the Staff Relations group at the PSC providing administrative support. She is a very welcome addition to a very busy team! Welcome aboard Bev!

Sheila Sanderson is the PSC's new policy analyst with Planning & Coordination. Sheila joins us from the Dept of Health and is the

project manager for the HR policy review.

Michael Johnson, a participant in the Leadership Continuity Program from Agriculture & Fisheries, began work with the PSC on June 20 in a six-month assignment. Reporting to Commissioner Rick Nurse, Michael will be working on the *Corporate HR Plan*.

Please send staff changes to any member of the editorial board.

What's Hot

Diversity Round Table: Providing advice and guidance to the valuing diversity initiative

There was a meeting of the Diversity Round Table on Thursday, June 23 where reps learned about the *Diversity and Social Inclusion in Primary Health Care* Initiative that is being led by one of the round table members, Sharon Davis-Murdoch. The round table is made of stakeholders from across the public service including, for example, representatives from the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs, the Disabled Persons Commission, the Nova Scotia Government Employees Union and the Canadian Union of Public Employees. In total, there are representatives from 20 departments, agencies, boards and commissions.

For more information on the roundtable, please contact Charlie MacDonald at: macdonc@gov.ns.ca or 424-6916.

Leadership Programs: Which one's the right one?

At the request of the HR CSUs, Theresa MacIsaac, Valerie Hearn, Kenene Doherty Fergusson and Debbie Thomas have produced a brochure that helps employees and their managers determine which leadership programming best meets their development needs. Check out the jazzy brochure at: http://www.gov.ns.ca/psc/training/Leadership_flyer_web.pdf

Human Resource Policy Review

Planning to initiate the Human Resource Policy Review has begun. Sheila Sanderson has joined the Public Service

Commission's Planning & Coordination Division as a Policy Analyst to assume the project manager role for this review. The project will involve collaboration across the HR community to assess existing human resource policies, including those in Manual 500, highlight policy gaps where changes or additions may be needed, and prioritize policy initiatives, including the development of new policies. Over the summer months, a work plan and a policy inventory will be compiled to guide the review. HR CSUs and PSC staff will be asked to provide their input on policy needs. Sheila will be contacting HR Directors and PSC Executive Directors to discuss a process to facilitate consultation with their staff groups. Any questions or suggestions can be relayed to Sheila at 424-5901 or sandersh@gov.ns.ca.



How's Work Going

The 2005 Employee Mini-Survey is now complete and results are available on-line. Thank you to those who participated.

To see the results, please visit the employee survey website at the address below or speak to a representative of your human resource corporate service unit (HR-CSU).

www.gov.ns.ca/psc/survey

**Results will
be available
on July 20,
2005**



Improvements to the Province of Nova Scotia Health and Dental Plan

Effective 01 July 2005

Please note: Employees will receive the following copy of the Qs&As from Blue Cross along with a new benefit card. For questions, they are directed to contact their HR CSUs at the or Medavie Blue Cross toll free at 1-800-667-4511. Employees in the HR community may contact Cathy Rankin at 424-1167 for more information. Please note that the changes will not apply to CUPE Highway Workers, Adult Corrections, or EDC bargaining unit employees at this time.

This brochure provides a brief description of the benefit changes of the Province of Nova Scotia's Health and Dental Plan.

What has changed?

The Province of Nova Scotia Health and Dental Plan has not been changed for many years. To bring benefits in-line with current costs and services, a number of changes have been approved. These will come into effect July 1, 2005.

Please refer to the following for specific changes. If you have questions, please contact your HR CSU at the Province of Nova Scotia or Medavie Blue Cross toll free at 1-800-667-4511.

How will this change my vision benefit?

You are now entitled to receive reimbursement up to \$150 once every two calendar years.

What changes were made to my physiotherapy benefit?*

Benefits have increased to \$500 per calendar year. Your physician must be aware of your physiotherapy treatment. This information is provided by your physiotherapist when completing a claim form for submission to Medavie Blue Cross. Benefits cover usual and customary costs.

What changes were made to my chiropractor benefit?*

Benefits have increased to \$500 per calendar year. Your chiropractor's office will be required to complete a claim form for submission to Blue Cross indicating the type of treatment, date of service, etc. Benefits cover usual and customary costs.

What changes were made to my massage therapy benefit?*

Benefits have increased to \$500 per calendar year. Your massage therapist's office will be required to complete a claim form for submission to Medavie Blue Cross indicating the type of treatment, date of service, etc. A physician referral must be indicated on the claim form. Benefits cover usual and customary costs.

***There is an overall combined maximum eligible for the above practitioners, including other practitioners such as chiropodist/podiatrist, occupational therapist and acupuncturist, to a combined maximum of \$1,500 per calendar year.**

What changes have been made to my psychologist benefit?

A new combined benefit of \$800 per calendar year has been introduced for services provided by an approved psychologist and/or a social worker. Both must be approved Blue Cross providers. The social worker must carry a Masters of Social Work (MSW) and be licensed and registered. Services provided in a hospital are not eligible.

What other changes have been made to my other practitioner benefit?

Coverage for approved, licensed naturopathic doctors, osteopaths and homeopaths to a maximum of \$300 per practitioner in a calendar year has been added to your plan.

What is my coverage for molded arch supports benefit?

Orthotics prescribed by an orthopedic surgeon, physiatrist, rheumatologist or the attending physician are eligible up to \$200 per participant each calendar year. For children less than 21 years of age, the maximum eligible is \$300 per calendar year.

I require a new wheelchair/hospital bed. Has our coverage changed?

Rental of wheelchairs, standard hospital beds, etc are eligible. If you plan to purchase prescribed medical equipment, pre-approval from Medavie Blue Cross is required. There is no longer a lifetime maximum benefit. Assessments are made based on medical condition and approval for purchase is at the discretion of Medavie Blue Cross.

I require a new hearing aid. Has our coverage changed?

Hearing aids are eligible once every five calendar years to a maximum of \$750, when prescribed by an otolaryngologist or clinical audiologist.

Have there been any changes to our drug coverage?

You are now required to pay an amount equal to the professional fee (dispensing fee) for each eligible prescription. These fees may vary from pharmacy to pharmacy. Any amount paid by you (the subscriber and all eligible dependents) is limited to an annual cap of \$425, per person. Once the cap is reached, you will not be required to make additional payments towards the professional fees for the remainder of the calendar year.

The change to eligible over-the-counter drug products means that only life-sustaining over-the-counter medications will continue to be covered. For example, insulin is considered life-sustaining and is available over the counter. This is covered.

Have there been any changes to our dental coverage?

Dental-recall exams and related services such as x-rays and polishing have been changed to one per calendar year for anyone 18 or over.

Coverage for fluoride applications for anyone 18 or over has been removed.

We have introduced a maximum reimbursement of \$1,000, per person, per calendar year for all basic services.

We have a separate maximum reimbursement of \$1,000 per person per calendar year for major restoration services.

There is a maximum reimbursement of \$2,000 per lifetime per person on orthodontic services.

Q. Are there any changes to the coverage for part-time employees?

In addition to the benefits listed above, dental coverage is now available and mandatory for all permanent, part-time employees who are eligible and are enrolled in the Health Plan and work a minimum of 40 per cent of a full-time employee.

Q. Has coverage changed for the accidental dental benefit?

Yes. There is no maximum limit for accidental coverage.

Additional Information:

- Maximum reimbursements will now be based on the calendar year in which the service is provided;
- Services rendered and paid for after July 1, 2005, will be eligible for the new plan maximums for the remainder of 2005.

Commissioner's Corner

A few words about the Corporate Human Resource Plan

by Rick Nurse, Public Service Commissioner



People, not bricks and mortar, technology or machinery, are the key to an organization's success. This is especially true in organizations dedicated to the service of others.

In turn, our efforts as public servants and the quality of the service we deliver is directly influenced by how we feel about the work we do; by the way we are treated by those we serve and by fellow public servants; and by our ability to influence and to balance our work lives. We want our efforts to contribute to something meaningful and worthwhile, we want to be appreciated and fairly rewarded for our efforts; and, we want to continue to experience a supportive work environment where personal and professional growth and development are assured.

Choosing a career and creating a workplace where this complex set of hopes and expectations can be met isn't easy. But, if we don't try, it will never happen.

With this in mind, the provincial government's 2004-2005 business plan called for the implementation of a human resources strategy. And, that strategy is described in the recently released *Corporate Human Resources Plan*.

The plan begins with an acknowledgement of and a thank you to all who contributed to its development – front line staff who attended forums in New Glasgow, Bridgewater and Halifax, leadership development program participants, representatives of the human resources committee and other professionals and advisory bodies and key labour leaders, to name a few.

Then, the plan proposed that public service values must be

understood to be the foundation of a renewed commitment to our individual and collective approach to public service. These core values are respect, integrity, diversity, accountability and the public good. The HR Plan goes on to suggest that to achieve our public service mission – to make a difference in the lives of all Nova Scotians and to contribute to a healthy, prosperous and self-sufficient Nova Scotia – we must pursue five key goals.

First and foremost, we must continue to focus our efforts on making a difference through (maintaining) a skilled, committed and accountable public service (Goal 1).

We must strive to be a preferred employer, to be a

safe and supportive workplace, to be a diverse workforce and, to be a learning organization (Goals 2 to 5.)



Behind this group of five goals are some 20 specific objectives, numerous strategies and measures of success - to guide us from

where we are to where we want to be. The goals and objectives of the plan will not be achieved overnight or without a real commitment and effort from ALL parts of the public service: front line staff, elected officials, labour leaders, and management. I believe that if we pursue this plan with a focus on those things we have in common – a desire to serve and a belief in the value of public service, values affirmed through this plan – and a desire to make working within the provincial public service a rewarding and fulfilling experience, the five goals of this plan can indeed be achieved.

In fact, while employee surveys and other consultation processes tell us we have work to do, they also confirm that we have our strengths as an organization and that progress is being made. When you read the *Human Resources Plan*, I hope you'll see that we are not starting from zero, but that many of the strategies are already being successfully pursued across our organization or at the

departmental or divisional level. I hope you will see that the commitment to change is real as evidenced by this quote from Premier Hamm: "I am very proud to have worked alongside so many skilled and dedicated public servants throughout our province. This plan is a reflection of government's continued and evolving recognition of their professionalism and is designed to ensure the availability of high-quality public servants that will meet the needs of Nova Scotians for years to come."

I hope, finally, that you will search the plan for a place to help with its implementation. First, I ask you to read it and discern for yourself if the values the plan establishes are indeed your public service values. I believe your answer will be YES!

To read the plan, please go to www.gov.ns.ca/psc and watch for more information as we roll out presentations across departments and throughout the regions beginning this month.

New Groupwise Distribution Lists

There are now four new distribution lists on Groupwise for you to contact appropriate members of the HR community. These are:
PSC_ALL
HR_Directors
HR_Managers
HR_Community for the above three groups plus HR CSU staff.

Contact Lisa Palermo for info.



July-August Feature:

The Corporate Human Resource Plan

This summer, the Government of Nova Scotia is releasing its five-year human resource plan to guide the continued development and future availability of a knowledgeable, dedicated, diverse and service-oriented workforce to meet the public service needs of Nova Scotians.

Within the next few years, the job market will be facing a labour shortage as many of us retire and there are fewer people entering the workforce.

Because of this labour shortage, we must be ready to meet the different expectations of various generations in the workforce, to plan effectively for succession management and to retain our skilled and knowledgeable employees, among other things.

The government must be competitive in a market that will be the tightest since the 1950's, a market that will see Nova Scotia competing on a global basis for skilled workers. Over the past five years, immigration has accounted for 70 per cent of the growth in Canada's workforce as our birth rate has not matched the pace of the number of skilled workers leaving the workforce.

The plan provides the strategies for these and other challenges and serves as one example of government's commitment to understanding the causes and reasons behind the workplace concerns and interests of public servants, to responding to them, and to keeping employees informed of these responses

The Context

In its annual *Business Plan for 2004-2005*, the Government of Nova Scotia retained a focus on "a healthy, prosperous, and self-sufficient Nova Scotia."

The business plan includes priorities that reflect a commitment to the health and well-being of its citizens; to learning, prosperity, and accountability; and to protecting those things that Nova Scotians value—our environment, our community, our families, our seniors, and the wonderful diversity and culture of our people. These values are cited as core values, to guide the decision making and

business planning of elected officials and public servants alike.

Within this overarching context, and building on a sustained commitment to public service excellence, government's Business Plan also called for the implementation of a corporate human resource strategy—a strategy to guide the continuous development and availability of skilled, dedicated, and responsive public servants.

The Call to Public Service

While government's Business Plan will continue to anticipate

the public service needs of the citizens of Nova Scotia, the *Corporate Human Resource Plan* will guide the continued development and future availability of a knowledgeable, dedicated, diverse, and service-oriented workforce to meet these needs and to act, always, in the public interest and for the public good.

The plan will help us attract and retain individuals who want to serve the citizens of Nova Scotia. Will everything identified in the plan be accomplished in one or two years? No, it will not. However, by implementing a plan to attract, retain, and recognize people who are truly interested in public service and a plan to foster a workplace where core values are reflected in our actions, we will indeed contribute to a prosperous, healthy, and self-sufficient Nova Scotia.



Consultation behind the Plan

Before getting into the details of this plan, it is important to thank the many people who contributed to its development and to the thousands of public servants who influenced its focus and direction by expressing their perceptions and concerns through the 2004 Employee Survey. It is our hope that as you read on you will know that your voices were heard.

The earliest draft of this plan was developed by the Human Resource Forum and the broader human resource community. More recently, key advisory groups, representing finance, IT, policy, and communications professionals, helped by providing reactions to draft vision, mission, and values statements. As well, discussions were held with staff involved in our Leadership Development Programs; and a number of front-line focus group sessions were held in Bridgewater, New Glasgow, and Halifax.

They also told us that these values must be reflected in our workplace and work life. We were reminded that our vision and plan must contribute to a positive and mutually respectful relationship with the community we serve; to creative and fair employment practices, free of political or

bureaucratic bias; to the recognition and celebration of outstanding performances by

Focus group participants concluded that our corporate values must include *references to such things as public trust, the public good, respect, integrity, non-partisan decision making, diversity, leadership, and accountability.*

empowered staff; to the availability of development and career opportunities; and to a balanced work life and a supportive workplace.

We also shared earlier drafts of this plan with a number of key labour leaders and heard similar advice from them. More recently, the plan's content and focus were influenced by the results of an organization-wide employee survey, distributed to 8,100 public servants, which resulted in a 53 per cent response rate.

Survey results told us that many respondents did not believe that our hiring processes are merit-based and objective; they did not believe that they could express concerns about wrongdoing in the workplace without fear of reprisal; and they expressed doubts about department leadership and about the likelihood of a meaningful response to their concerns and perceptions.

That said, it is also noteworthy that at least 60 per cent of respondents provided favourable responses to 20 of the 48 questions asked. In particular, survey results suggest that employees are generally satisfied with training opportunities, government's approach to workplace safety, and their relationships with immediate supervisors. Our challenge will be to build on these strengths. This *Corporate Human Resource Plan* is one example of government's commitment to understanding the causes and reasons behind the workplace concerns and interests of public servants, to responding to them, and to keeping employees informed about these responses. Again, we wish to express our sincere thanks to all those who, by one process or another, contributed to the development of this plan.

Human Resource Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

To contribute to a prosperous, healthy, and self-sufficient Nova Scotia by delivering high-quality public services... in other words achieving ***Success through People.***

Mission

To provide leadership and programs that assure Nova Scotians of a skilled, service-oriented, diverse, and accountable Nova Scotia public service.

Values

To complement the core values expressed in government’s corporate plan, corporate human resource values have been identified to guide our decision making and actions, as well as the way we interact with one another and with those we seek to serve.

These values are:

Respect

We value a workplace culture where people **respect** one another in their interactions with co-workers and members of the public.

Integrity

We value a workplace culture where personal and professional **integrity** cause us to behave in a non-partisan and ethical way and to make the best use of the resources entrusted to us.

Diversity

We value a workplace where **diversity**, in all its forms, is encouraged and recognized for its contribution to a more creative, rewarding, and productive public service to our broader community.

Accountability

We value a workplace where **accountability** for our actions, our interactions, the objective and wise use of resources, and responsibilities for our successes and failures is

reflected in how we conduct ourselves. We are accountable to the citizens of Nova Scotia, to our co-workers, and to our many partners in service delivery.

The Public Good

We value the very special relationship we have with the citizens of Nova Scotia and are committed to developing and delivering services that are in the public’s interest, are for the **public good**, and to be a professional public service that is deserving of the public’s trust.

The Five Human Resource Goals

This human resource plan has five key goals. Each goal is further defined by specific objectives and strategies. The plan also begins to identify measures of success, which will evolve as the plan is implemented and tested over the next five years.

Goal 1 To make a difference through a skilled, committed, and accountable public service

Goal 2 To be a preferred employer

Goal 3 To be a safe and supportive workplace

Goal 4 To be a diverse workplace

Goal 5 To be a learning organization

Experience tells us that it can take years to truly change workplace cultures or environments. However long it might take, attitudes that are reflective of our shared values and a commitment to action, which are intended to foster a more humanistic work environment, are essential pre-conditions.

Goal 1

To make a difference through a skilled, committed, and accountable public service

By ensuring retention and recruitment of skilled and responsive individuals who choose public service as their way to make a difference, we will continue to be an informed, empowered, and valued workforce, recognized for our contributions to a healthy, prosperous, and self-sufficient Nova Scotia.

Objectives

- Fairness and access
- Service excellence
- Public opinion
- Consistent policy application

Goal 2

To be a preferred employer

The competition for, and the need to encourage, good people to renew their

commitment to public service is intensifying. To be competitive, government must remind the people we seek that a career in public service is worthwhile and rewarding. Potential candidates must be encouraged to consider this career option; and public servants must experience a workplace that reaffirms their commitment to service.

Objectives

- Raise awareness of opportunities
- Equitable and easy access
- Accountable and committed employees
- Welcoming culture
- Career advancement

Goal 3

To be a safe and supportive workplace

Employees of the Nova Scotia Government must be assured of a safe and supportive workplace if they are to live up to their full potential and respond most effectively to their respective public service roles.

Objectives

- Surpassing OH&S regulations and policy
- Reduce workplace injury and illness
- Enabling corporate volunteerism
- Culture where concerns can be expressed
- Raising awareness of wellness programs

Goal 4

To be a diverse workforce

The Nova Scotia Public Service strives to be a workplace that is reflective of the diverse community it serves and to create a more respectful and inclusive public service.

Objectives

- Adopting a broad diversity philosophy and culture
- Increase numbers and distribution of designated groups
- Services in both official languages

Goal 5

To be a learning organization

Being a learning organization involves a leadership philosophy that organizations are living organisms that can learn from their environments and experiences, and apply that learning systematically across the organization.

Objectives

- Best practices
- Individual development mechanisms
- Investment in professional development

Next Steps

A plan with the best of intentions is just a plan. We will not become the organization we want to be overnight, but we need to set our sights on our preferred

future and make a real commitment to action and change.

Buy-in and Champions

For the plan to succeed, it needs the support of all public servants and the commitment of senior leaders and managers throughout government. Positive labour-management relations with a shared focus on the quality of work life will also be central to this plan's eventual success, as will a stronger and positive relationship with the public we serve. A shared commitment to the overall goals of the plan and the workplace values that are central to organizational change will also be preconditional to the plan's success. It is also important that today's human resource professionals and managers make a commitment to the plan's success by actively seeking a leadership role in the development and implementation of strategies to achieve one or more of the identified goals.

Patience and Perseverance

We will not become the organization we want to be overnight, but we have many strengths on which to build. This plan is designed with a vision of a public service that is united in its commitment to high-quality service and to the health, prosperity and well-being of Nova Scotians. We need to take action on this plan and commit to the sustainability of whatever we

prepare to do. We must keep an eye to the high cost of not taking action now to create a more humanistic workplace. It may well take as much effort to say yes to the status quo.

Communication

We know that communication helps to build relationships, promotes mutual understanding, and is an important ingredient in enabling employees to contribute to organizational success. For these reasons, government-wide communication will be an important step in implementing the plan, not only in the introductory phase, but over the long term. Because communication is a participative process rather than a distributive one, a communication plan will be developed that focuses on creating interactive opportunities, such as presentations, lunch-and-learn sessions, and online video streaming.

Progress Reports

Finally, we will need to monitor and report on our progress. To that end, a companion document on corporate human resource plan performance measures will be developed by the Public Service Commission's Evaluation and Audit Division for use in future progress reports. We will also keep you informed of our progress on a regular basis.

Watch the PSC website for more information.



Engagement in the Public Sector: The next generation of employee surveying

by Carrie Hotton
Evaluation and Audit, PSC

“Regular surveys of employees and of internal organizational climate are just as important as regular surveys of external clients and stakeholders for well-performing organizations in both private and public sectors.”

- Harwood, 1998

We recently took part in a cross-jurisdictional project to develop a common employee engagement model for the Canadian public sector. The model includes a



The HeRo Award

(Many thanks to Margaret Melanson who provided the name for our new peer recognition award. Quite appropriate, don't you think!)

The HeRo Award for July and August goes to all HRAs (Human Resource Assistants) across government. These front-line clerks who make sure that we all get paid have been struggling with the new HR/SAP system. New systems always mean growing pains and HR professionals could not get their work done without the work of our HRAs. Their work is transactional and process oriented, and in being front line employees, often take the 'hits.'

Margaret says that: “In the TPW/Finance CSU, we have 10 HRAs who have been dedicated to ensuring all staff are paid - they've been working many overtime hours and struggling with the new system.”

**Congratulations to HRAs in all departments.
You are our HeRoes!**



definition of employee engagement, an outline of key measures of engagement and a series of 20 employee survey questions. The model was recently presented to Public Service Commissioners at their annual conference, held this year in Edmonton in June.

Many jurisdictions in the Canadian public sector are using employee surveys as a way to gather employee input and measure employee engagement. A common question that comes up when looking at survey results is "How do our results compare to other similar organizations?" Information from existing models of engagement is heavily weighted with data from private sector organizations. Commissioners at last year's PSC Commissioner's Conference, discussed the need for a common set of employee survey questions, a consistent way to measure employee engagement, and a way to share results. They initiated a cross-jurisdictional project, with employee survey professionals from several jurisdictions, to

develop a model of employee engagement.

A project team was created with employee survey representatives from the Governments of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Alberta, and the federal government. A lot of research was conducted as part of the project, examining existing models of engagement, such as those with the Government of Alberta, AON, Watson Wyatt, Gallup, Towers Perrin, and Hewitt (to name a few.) Existing survey tools used in the provinces and in the federal government were also reviewed, and research conducted at the Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada supported this project as well.

Keeping it simple, practical, and methodologically sound were principles that the project team kept in mind. In a five-month period – with the help of many email exchanges, tele-conferences and a couple of in-person meetings – a comprehensive proposal was

prepared for the 2005 commissioner's conference.

There were many successes with this project:

Timeliness- the proposal was developed within tight timeframes

Approach- very collaborative and consultative

Results- the first Canadian public-sector model for measuring employee engagement

Evaluation success- strengthens the role of evaluation within the Government of Nova Scotia and within human resources

Best practices exchange- opportunities for cross-jurisdictional best practices exchange

Benchmarking and performance measurement- opportunities for cross-jurisdictional best practices exchange

Source: Harwood, Paul de L. Employee Surveys in the Public Service: Experience and Success Factors. Canadian Centre for Management Development. 1998. <http://www.myschool-monecole.gc.ca/Research/publications/pdfs/82-eng.pdf>

The Employee Engagement Model



Anxiety in the Workplace

by Wanda Pierrynowski, RSW
EAP Consultant

Last year, the Nova Scotia Government Employee Assistance Program (EAP) reported that 49 per cent of new cases presented with psychological concerns, including stress, **anxiety**, depression, grief, loss, abuse, anger, and self-esteem issues. The Canadian Mental Health Association states that “anxiety disorders are the most common of all mental health problems and it is estimated that they affect approximately one in 10 people.”

Anxiety: the state of feeling nervous or worried that something bad is going to happen.
Oxford Dictionary

A person can experience anxiety for many reasons. Employees calling EAP have presented the following workplace concerns which can create anxiety: job security, safety, work loads, unhealthy work environment, demands of technology, unclear communication, work place re-organizations, career options, critical incident stress at work, work conflicts, harassment, and performance expectations.

Anxiety can become a problem when it is so severe that it interferes with a person’s enjoyment of life. When a person experiences an overwhelming sense of dread and fear for no apparent reason or excessive worry, this is considered an anxiety disorder. The Canadian Mental Health Association reports that “an anxiety disorder can turn a person’s life into a continuous

journey of unease and fear and can interfere with their relationships with family, friends, and colleagues.”

Anxiety affects a person in three ways: physiological, behavioral, and psychological. Physiologically, anxiety may affect a person through bodily reactions such as muscle tension, increase in heart palpitations, sweating, queasiness, dry mouth, shortness of breath, or dizziness. Behaviorally, anxiety may interfere with their ability to act, express themselves, or deal with certain everyday life activities. Psychologically, anxiety can create a personalized state of apprehension and uneasiness for the person. In extreme cases, anxiety may cause one to feel detached from oneself and even fearful of going crazy or dying. (Bourne, 2000)

Anxiety is treated successfully with either counselling and/or medication. Medication can help relieve the symptoms of anxiety but does not deal with the cause. EAP can assist employees through referrals to professional counsellors to help determine the cause of their anxiety.

Anxiety is one of the many possible presenting problems an employee may be experiencing and EAP staff has noticed an increase in anxiety-related cases over the past several years. When anxiety becomes a problem for an employee it may affect their work performance in the following ways: quality and quantity of work; attendance problems; safety practices; work attitude; physical changes; behavior; and the employee’s relationships with work colleagues.

It is important for managers to recognize signs and symptoms of a troubled employee and how these are exhibited in the workplace. A manager’s or supervisor’s role is to evaluate work performance and put measures in place to improve the employee’s performance. Managers/ supervisors may feel that they know what may be causing the employee’s problem but **it is inappropriate to try to diagnose**, as that is the role of doctors and professional counsellors. Once a work performance concern is identified with an employee it is important for managers to respectfully deal with the situation and document the concerns, prepare for a discussion with the employee, consult with EAP staff, conduct a follow-up interview, and if necessary initiate a formal referral to EAP.

The *EAP Supervisor Training Program* offered through the corporate training calendar offers managers/supervisors skills to constructively confront employees re: work performance issues.

For more information on Anxiety Disorders:

- Bourne, Edmund J. *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*. California: New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2000.
- Canadian Mental Health Association, www.cmha.ca



Introducing: Our New Healthy Workplace Program Coordinator

with files from Ghada Swin-Zrein

Joan Parks-Hubley, the PSC's new coordinator for Healthy Workplace Programs, is excited about her new job and it shows. In a way, she has been preparing for this position her whole life.

Parks-Hubley, a Dalhousie Masters of Social Work graduate, brings a wealth of work experience to her position. She's been a psychiatric social worker who has also taught social work. A former human resource development manager and OH&S consultant, she has also trained government employees in workplace violence prevention, wellness promotion and harassment prevention. But within both her personal and professional lives, she became increasingly aware of how difficult it is to achieve true work-life balance.

"As a former director of child care programs for the province, I have a very good understanding of parents' necessity to balance the needs of a growing family with work," said Parks-Hubley. "I've also dealt with the other end of the life span as the primary caregiver for my two elderly parents, both of whom have passed away. These experiences give me a special sensitivity to different kinds of work-life balance issues."

Besides her home life with family and friends, Joan has discovered that volunteerism has added an

unexpected richness to her life. She and her husband, Frank Hubley, run a weekly reading group at the assisted living facility where her father spent his final years. Joan says that while running the reading group has sometimes been time consuming, it has benefited her greatly.

"As my Dad grew more and more incapacitated, it helped me to be able to give back to the home and to the other residents," she said. "It gave me the strength to weather some very difficult times. It has been a positive experience for all involved."

She talks about the importance of considering the whole person in designing new healthy workplace programs. "I take a holistic approach to the way I view a person. Social, physical, cognitive and other factors – you have to look at all aspects of a person, especially if you're going to design programs to meet their needs."

In order to design the best programs for Nova Scotia government employees, Joan is now qualifying as an excellence professional with the National Quality Institute. She is also researching programs with, and picking the brains of, the brightest people in this field so that she can create the best programs here.

Joan feels that this is a great time to be working in health promotion.

To Joan, creating a healthy workplace goes far beyond traditional occupational health and safety or individual health practices. It is also about improving the psycho-social work environment. It involves recognition that what happens at work has a direct impact on employee well-being away from the office.

She is encouraged by the fact that the provincial government has recognized creation of healthy workplaces as a priority. In fact, it is codified in the government's new *Corporate Human Resources Plan* as its third stated goal of providing a safe and supportive workplace for employees.

Joan is also encouraged by the senior management support for initiatives in this area.

"We are lucky here. Our commissioner, Richard Nurse, really believes in what we're doing and he has demonstrated that he is a supportive leader for healthy workplace programs."

Using her broad background and with management support, Joan says her new job helps make her feel that she's making some difference in people's lives.

"There's an anonymous quote I carry around with me. 'To love what you do and feel that it matters – how could anything be more fun?' I honestly believe that. I hope to help others believe it, too."