

A photograph of three men performing a human pyramid on a grassy field. The man at the bottom is standing and holding the shoulders of the man in the middle. The man in the middle is standing on the shoulders of the bottom man and holding the hands of the man at the top. The man at the top is standing on the hands of the middle man. They are all wearing swim trunks. The background shows a line of trees and a clear sky.

# BALANCE

WELLNESS MAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY

JUNE 2018 | VOLUME 3 | NUMBER 4

## Mental Health Awareness Supporting a Co-Worker

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How Does Your  
Neighbourhood Score?

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Be a Flower;  
Connecting to Nature

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Could Your Mindset  
Use a Tune Up?

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How to Ask for  
What You Need

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# editor's MESSAGE



Wellness means something different to everyone. As we have seen over a few of the recent Balance covers wellness means something different to everyone. This issue's cover was provided by Karen Wurr, Case Manager at the Disability Benefits Plan. We asked Karen why this photo means wellness to her; here was her response:

*Growing up, I, like many other kids, thought my Dad was the strongest person in the world! He not only worked hard at a physical job but had many successes in sports like wrestling, acrobatics and weightlifting. Besides sports, being active was just a way of life for my family. Rarely did activities need to be planned or structured... life just happened, simply.*

*Looking back at these pictures, it strikes me that I don't recall my family ever mentioning "working out" or "going to the gym". Meals were focused around getting the family together around one table and not a certain diet plan; and de-stressing meant engaging in something you loved rather than doing "nothing".*

*This resonates with me now as I wonder when and why the shift happened to where my interpretation of Wellness became more strict and rigid. I pressured myself to eat a certain way, felt exercise meant going to the gym and saw relaxation and self-care as indulgent. This shift happened unconsciously, over time and hasn't served me well.*

*Seeing old pictures of my family reminds me of times when I was my best self both physically and mentally. It's a reminder to stop over-complicating Wellness in my life and get back to the basics that served my family well in the past. Although I may not be able to spontaneously spring into a 3 man handstand in the park like Dad, I strive to reclaim some of that simplicity in tending to my own wellness.*

There is a lot to learn from the story and the history in this photo. Take this opportunity to look back at your own life, the life of your family and friends, and see how wellness has evolved over the years, the positive and the negative, and find what works best for you.

Thanks for sharing this amazing image Karen.

**Robyn Braha**  
Wellness Coordinator



The  
Manitoba  
Teachers'  
Society



**BALANCE**  
mind body spirit  
THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY

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# Mental health awareness

## *Supporting a co-worker*

By **Shannon Gander** [www.lifeworkwellness.ca](http://www.lifeworkwellness.ca)



In the March issue of Balance magazine, I addressed the question of, “what can I do to protect my mental health and avoid burn out?” On the heels of mental health awareness week in May, it seems fitting to share another question I am asked by audience participants, “how do I support my co-worker if they are experiencing mental health concerns or mental illness?” I love that people are asking this question

and it’s understandable if you don’t feel confident on this topic. Over time, my hope is that we all become increasingly comfortable with these types of questions and conversations.

Whether I am training leaders or staff, where I find individuals get stuck is in knowing what the exact “right” thing to say when someone opens up about their mental health or discloses they are experiencing a mental illness. There is often fear that

you could harm someone by saying the wrong thing and therefore may find yourself changing the subject or avoiding the person altogether, which maintains mental health stigma in our culture. If you have not had your own experience of mental illness, you can’t know what this feels like and can’t expect yourself to know. That’s perfectly okay. What you can do is maintain your awareness on the difference between lack of

understanding and judgment.

If, when someone opens up, you are able to shift into listening posture, maintain non-judgment and engage your compassion – this person will more than likely feel supported by you. In my experience, most people don't want you to "do" anything other than not treat them differently for opening up to you. It is always a good idea to ask the person if they have supports. If this is not the case, you can direct them to your Employee Assistance Program (which is quickly accessible and confidential) or in the case of an urgent situation, Klinik crisis line 1-888-322-3019.

Brene Brown, the shame researcher has a wonderful short video that I show participants (you may want to have a look: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzvYm2DNzS0>). It is a great demonstration of empathic listening, shows its simplicity and in her true fashion, Brene does this with humour and grace. Her take home message is this: "if I share something with you that is very difficult, I would rather you say... "I don't even know what to say right now, I am just glad that you told me".

In my observation, if, as a listener you quickly move to a place of judgment – pay attention to this. Sometimes this is due to a lack of understanding and can be in part a fear of how to respond. I have also witnessed this as a response that comes from feeling a bit burnt out oneself. Our nervous system when overloaded can trigger worry and self-focus such as, "what does this mean for me? Do I have the energy to be a support or could this mean more work for me?" If this sounds familiar, this may be a signal for you to explore what's going on for you. When we are in a good place, rarely do we respond to someone else's situation with overwhelmingness and/or judgment. Your self-awareness is key to your well-being and to those around you.

The most important thing that we can do for friends and co-workers is to reduce the stigma that surrounds our mental health. To support you further, I have adapted some information from the Mental Health Commission of Canada and the Canadian Mental

Health Association, on best practice in supporting a co-worker:

### 1. Practice compassion

This means being kind, suspending judgment and recognizing the common humanity of our mental health - it is fluid over our lifetime. Today, your co-worker may be struggling, tomorrow it may be your friend, and next month, this could be you. That's how mental health is, it can change for better or for worse depending on the stress in our lives, the amount of support that we have and the additional life events that are thrown our way. Compassion is a fundamental human right for all.

### 2. Suspend assumptions

There are a lot of myths and assumptions that people make when it comes to mental health and mental illness. I am often educating people on the traits that they assume 'belong' to someone experiencing mental health concerns (weak, lazy, unmotivated, etc). We can all have times in our lives when we may not be able to contribute to the level that we usually would like to. This is human nature and depends very much on how we are doing at the time. This can absolutely be about our mental health, however, is not a statement of character.

### 3. Be open to learning

The saying "knowledge is power" is so true. No one can truly understand what it is like to have a panic attack or a bout of depression if this is not their personal experience. The goal is not to pretend that you know or be an expert. You can, however, learn (which, personally, I think is good for everyone) but particularly important if someone close to you is having a difficult time or has been diagnosed with mental illness. Even though this person may not feel up to talking openly, they will care that you cared enough to learn more.

### 4. Be supportive without taking on the role of counselor

Support can look like checking in with your co-worker, "hey, how are you?" If they are struggling and share something with you, your best



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role is to just listen with empathy. This means acknowledging without expectation to fix or take on the situation in a way that is not helpful to you or your colleague. If they are not connected to resources, you can help by directing them and maintaining your role as their peer.

### 5. Above all - be inclusive

Reducing stigma, without question involves connection and when people are feeling different or that others are judging them, they will very quickly pull away from friends, co-workers and their community. When you say 'good morning', say it to everyone. When you are going for coffee, ask who wants to come along. When you wish people a 'great night', say it to all. Our greatest need is to belong; we can all have a positive impact on that.

*Shannon Gander is a Mental Health and Resiliency Specialist and Director of Life Work Wellness. She is a trained counselor, mediator and has a background in corporate health and wellness. Shannon is passionate about teaching people skills for increasing their resilience to stress, reducing mental health stigma and in helping each person see their role in organizational wellness and healthy workplace culture. When she is not delivering workshops or training, she works as a counselor at a local community health clinic in downtown Winnipeg.*



# Vocal hygiene: Dispelling vocal myths (Part 2)

By **Caitlin Buchel, RSLP, SLP (C), M.Cl.Sc. , Buchel Speech & Language Group**



"I never eat dairy because it makes my voice phlegmy." "Acidic foods will ruin your voice." "Cold water makes me lose my voice." This article is the second part in our series on dispelling vocal myths. As a speech-language pathologist, I've heard them all. We need to be careful that we do not blindly follow advice based on these myths. Instead, let's discuss them and find out if they are based on any underlying truth.

## **Myth 1: "Dairy makes me phlegmy"** **"Acidic foods ruin your voice"** **"Honey heals your voice"**

I often have teachers tell me that certain foods make their voice better or worse. This is interesting as, depending on the individual, there can be a kernel of truth.

First, some quick anatomy and physiology...don't stop reading – it will be brief! It's important to understand that the food and liquids that we swallow never touch our vocal folds or our larynx (voice box), unless we are actively choking. While food/liquid and air initially share a pathway through our body, our swallow protects our larynx by closing it off and sending food/liquid into the esophagus (food tube). So, you may ask, how could eating a certain type of food possibly affect our voice?

Many teachers talk about dairy making their secretions thicker or phlegmier. With more phlegm, one might reason, comes coughing, thicker mucous on the vocal folds and voice difficulties. However, despite multiple studies over the years, there is no scientific evidence to suggest that this is the case.

Another question comes up around acidic foods like citrus and tomatoes. As with any other foods, in an otherwise healthy person, the foods we eat never

contact our vocal folds and shouldn't affect our voice. The exception here is for people with reflux. If you have been diagnosed with reflux or think it may be an issue, eating acidic foods can make that worse. And when you have reflux, it can actually spill into the larynx and damage the delicate structures there.

## **Solution: Know your body and avoid personal triggers**

There is no need to avoid dairy to "save your voice". That said, while there is no scientific evidence that dairy increases phlegm, if it seems to cause your voice trouble then try staying away and see what happens. It certainly won't negatively impact your voice. As for acidic foods, know your body. If you have reflux or suspect you might, discuss with your doctor and try avoiding foods that are known to promote reflux and acid production.

## **Myth 2: "Cold water makes me lose my voice"**

"I avoid cold water when I'm sick because I've heard it makes your voice worse." This is a comment I have heard from a number of teachers in our treatment sessions. The thought is that somehow cold water "freezes" the vocal cords and makes it harder for your voice to work.

As we discussed in myth 1, fluids that we drink never actually come into contact with our vocal folds or larynx unless we are choking or have reflux. So, the temperature of fluids cannot affect or "freeze" our vocal folds. Some people find that drinking cold liquids makes them tense up all over. This might be the only way that it might affect your voice as muscle tension in the face, head and neck can negatively impact the voice.



## **Solution: Drink up at a temperature that feels good**

There is no "right temperature" at which to consume fluids. Whatever temperature is comfortable, and will encourage you to drink more, is the right temperature for you. If cold water does make you feel cold and tense, then perhaps drinking room temperature water is better for you. That said, there is no reason to avoid cold fluids in general as they will not harm or damage your voice.

*Caitlin Buchel is the owner and managing clinician of the Buchel Speech & Language Group, a private speech-language pathology (SLP) practice offering services in Winnipeg, and throughout Manitoba.*

# Financial literacy: Your options when debt stress strikes



By Brian Denysuik, Creditaid [www.creditaid.ca](http://www.creditaid.ca)

Today we know that consumer debt is at an all-time high and it is not always clear what we can and should do if we find ourselves approaching or in this position.

It can be a lonely, frightening and a stressful time in our lives. We often feel that we are struggling alone but I can assure you that you are not alone, 60% to 70% of Canadians feel just like you do.

What I like to suggest is a strategic approach to making some headway with your finances. The tough part is to try and figure out a good starting point. The advertising we see and hear can be very confusing. We have trustees advertising that they will “rescue you from your debt”. Yes they might, but going there first is like booking an appointment with the surgeon before going to see your family doctor to figure out what is wrong.

I like to suggest the following if you are starting to feel like debt is impacting your overall wellness.

## 1. If you are carrying balances on your credit cards, stop using them immediately.

- a. Summarize what interest you are paying on each card and start making larger payments on the card with the highest interest rate. Continue doing this until it is paid in full and then move on to the next card. Keep in mind that you still need to make minimum payments on the other cards.

## 2. Talk to your financial institution to see if they have any suggested solutions.

If you do use equity in your home or obtain a consolidations loan keep in mind that you need to change some

habits. If you were accumulating credit card balances there is a good chance that you are spending more than you make. A detailed budget with tracking will help you figure this out. If you don't figure this out, you will end up running up those card balances in short order.

## 3. If your financial institution can't assist you then a next step is to select a credit counselling organization to help you evaluate your entire financial situation.

This should also be an organization that does face to face counselling and is local. These organizations must be licensed by the Province of Manitoba and you can always confirm this with the Consumer Protection Office of Manitoba.

- a. A credit counselling agency will start by recapping your entire financial situation.
- b. They will help you by providing you with honest advice on all possible solutions.
- c. Solutions could include:
  - i. A discussion around tracking your spending with a few suggestions to free up some cash flow to address debt issues
  - ii. A consolidation loan
  - iii. Using equity from your home
  - iv. Selling your home
  - v. A debt repayment program where your interest rates are reduced to as low as 0% and you repay principal
  - vi. A consumer proposal or bankruptcy
- d. The implications to all possible solutions should be explained in detail along with any impact a program might have on your credit rating. If you are looking at meeting with a trustee you will want to know beforehand the difference



**It can be a lonely, frightening and a stressful time in our lives. We often feel that we are struggling alone but I can assure you that you are not alone, 60% to 70% of Canadians feel just like you do.**

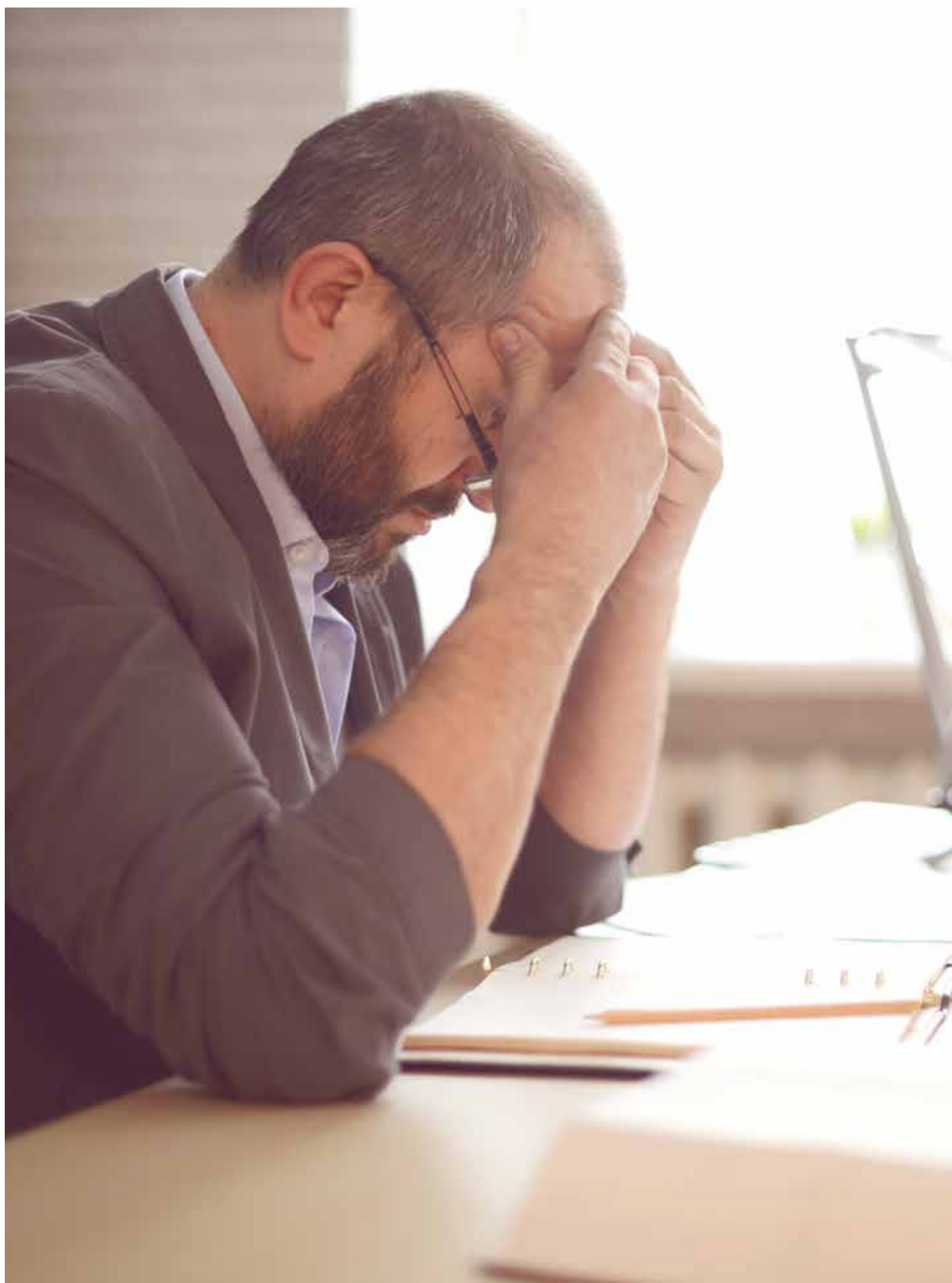
between a consumer proposal and a bankruptcy and what choices you have as well as the related implications.

I want to assure you that there is always a solution to debt struggles. The sooner you seek help and guidance the more choices you will have in finding the right solution. We have a tendency to put it off and believe that it will resolve itself. I really wish this was true. You don't need to struggle with the worry and anxiety, a solution can be found and it will relieve a tremendous amount of stress from your life.

One of the greatest pleasures I have in my work day is seeing a person's shoulders sink with relief when they see that they do have options and an ability to make a choice in their life around their finances.

So don't delay, ask for help, if you don't like the answers keep looking and make sure you are 100% comfortable with the person or organization you choose to help you.

*Brian Denysuik is a local credit counsellor and registered insolvency counsellor at Creditaid who has been in the financial services industry for over 35 years.*





# Could your mindset use a tune up?



By Marianne Farag, *Sublimity: Pathways to Peace*

Our attitudes, outlook and thoughts affect our day to day peace of mind. Are you prone to: worrying, tension, and fixating on what upsets or distresses you? We are what we think and our thoughts have very real impacts on our health and wellbeing. The good news is, you can learn to steer your thoughts in the direction of calmer waters and hence influence your level of tranquility and contentment. It's really all a question of habit.

## The power of habit

A habit is a routine or behaviour that is repeated regularly, and tends to occur unconsciously. At one point in time, a habit is a choice you make (like having a muffin every afternoon, or jogging at a certain hour of the day), then you stop thinking about it but continue doing it, on a regular basis.

From the moment the alarm goes off in the morning till the moment we get into bed at night, our lives are governed by habit. The steps we take and the order in which we take them to get ready to set-off for work, what we do immediately when we arrive at work, where we eat lunch, how we conduct ourselves in meetings and interactions with work associates and supervisors, our final steps when we get ready to leave work, how we spend our after work hours, how we communicate with our children, family and friends, all take place in a habitual way. Which means, they are routine. We don't have to think about them, they come to us automatically.

Think of how much conscious thinking and mental processing you go through when you learn something new like driving a car or a new computer software program, or the rules of a game or the steps to a dance, or a new procedure that is to be followed in your work. Through repetition and practice, that which was once new and required mental effort, over time, becomes automatic. Ever had the experience of driving somewhere and once there you wonder how you got there?! Yes, you were

paying attention to traffic signals and road signs, but it felt so automatic and you did it while perhaps reflecting on something, or paying attention to a radio program, or conversing with a passenger.

## Habit in the workplace

In the context of the workplace, you may be shocked to learn that everything you say and do, and how you mentally process the communication and behaviour of others, is absolutely a matter of habit! Every habit/behaviour is preceded by a trigger. In and of themselves, triggers are neither 'good' nor 'bad'. Rather it's our reaction to them (depending on whether they push our buttons) that determines how we respond. For instance, while one person might react to a frustrated employee who is struggling to understand something as a trigger to be helpful, in someone else, it might be a trigger to react impatiently.

Although we are creatures of habit, we can choose to change them. Ask yourself, could your workplace habits use some tuning up? Are your current workplace habits sometimes creating tension, conflict and disagreements? Are you having to reach for the antacids, comfort food, and punching bag to sooth your triggers? If so, there are steps you can take to cultivate new habits such that your interactions and how you interpret what comes your way is less disruptive to your wellbeing and that of others.

## Become aware of your triggers

Self-examination and self-observation is a good first step to become aware of your triggers. Challenge yourself on why you react negatively to certain situations/people (i.e., your triggers). Delve into your stress triggers to identify what makes them stressors.

## Set goals and have a new habit plan

Before you can change a habit, you need to articulate your goal and a plan of action. For example, if your goal is to

be open to exploring the ideas brought forward by team members/colleagues instead of dismissing them from the get go, write down all the steps you will take to put this new habit into practice including how you will deal with moments that you know are likely to be difficult for you to resist the urge to be dismissive. The act of writing down plans enables you to think through the points at which you might quit/give up and how you could overcome this and persevere.

## Rehearse and role play

Apart from developing a habit plan, it helps to practice through rehearsing and role-play – i.e., rehearse so it becomes second nature when faced with the stress trigger. What you are essentially doing is choosing a certain behaviour ahead of time, and then rehearsing it with yourself (like you would a presentation you are going to deliver), so you are more likely to put the new habit into practice even when a trigger occurs.

## Practice self-discipline

At first it may be a struggle to stick with a new routine. It will take time; there will be lapses, but self-discipline and a willingness to keep trying are the only way that a new pattern can eventually replace the previously imbedded impulses.

## The catalytic effect

Changing unhelpful routines brings meaningful improvements in the quality of your workday. By learning new routines, you empower yourself to take control of your wellbeing in the workplace. This in turn starts a chain reaction of spillover benefits: from being in a better mood, to being more productive, not to mention the potential for influencing behavioural changes among co-workers.

*Marianne Farag is an Inner-Peace Specialist with Sublimity: Pathways to Peace.*



# A fire. A bear. And one lost dog.



By Danielle Fullan Kolton, PhD, The Manitoba Teachers' Society

It was a dark and stormy morning at our cabin in the woods. The dogs were walked, the coffee was brewing, and one glance at the fireplace confirmed it was a cozy kind of day, earmarked for wool socks and a good book. I summoned my deepest camp skills and created a masterpiece log cabin fire lay. Standing back to admire it, I struck the match, and it was quickly ablaze.

Brilliant.

I walked to the kitchen to fetch my coffee precisely when multiple hard-

wired smoke detectors screamed. Smoke poured and billowed throughout the cabin, and I panicked. WHY IS THIS HAPPENING? I flung open doors and windows and scrambled to find the cause: a closed flue.

Not so brilliant.

As I ran between smoke detectors waving a damp rag, it occurred to me that one of my dogs was missing – likely bolted out of an open door due to his terrible, horrible, no good, very bad fear of fires.

Then I saw him; the bear, that is:

Rumbling through the trees 30 feet in front of our cabin, oblivious to my crisis and too close for comfort from our open front door. I took inventory of this catastrophe: A fire, a bear, and one lost dog, all before 7:30 a.m.

Flash forward to order restored, and I had three choices:

- 1) Be in a dark and stormy mood: "This day sucks."
- 2) Call my husband and yell at him for closing the flue without telling me: "My husband sucks." (see choice 1).

3) Reset and return to my tranquil cottage morning: "Back to my coffee and book."  
Deep breath in...

## **Suffering is optional.**

### **- Anonymous**

Suffering is optional: three simple but loaded words. I suppose that in that moment I could have chosen to suffer. After all, the morning saga brought tranquility to a screeching halt: my adrenaline pulsed, the coffee was cold, our cabin was smoky, and my dog was loose in the wilderness. It seemed a far way from lazing on the couch with my book.

## **Was it a bad day or was it a bad five minutes that you milked all day?**

### **- Unknown**

Truth be told, the morning saga was little more than a 20-minute ordeal. Kind passersby returned our dog, the sun came out, and I reheated my coffee. The bear moved on after stripping the raspberry bush, and the smoky cottage held its rustic aroma with no harm done. The comedy of my hysterics in the situation was not lost on me.

The hyperbole of recounting my momentary distress is intentional. As this cabin spectacle exemplifies, unexpected things happen, but our response to them is a choice. Rationally we all KNOW this, but our unconscious interpretation of events drives pesky emotions that fuel how we respond. I am not proud to say that I beelined to blame – Q: Who's fault is it? A: My husband's. Naturally, it was not my fault (even though I did not check the flue).

A day in the life of a teacher can go off the rails in so many possible ways: Lessons go sideways, colleagues disappoint, parents yell, feedback is upsetting, the copier dies ... [fill in the blank]. Consider the last time you experienced the unexpected: How well were you able to bounce

back from the emotion/confusion/uncertainty?

Humans generally react to the unexpected with a negative residue that drives resentment, bitterness, disengagement, or demotivation (Dethmer, Chapman, & Warner Klemp, 2014). When things go sideways, we mistakenly assume that our story, our interpretation, OUR truth is THE truth. Invariably we recycle emotions because past moments of pain trigger us the most and play on a cognitive-emotional loop (Dolan, 2014). Sadly, negative memories stick like Velcro and the good stuff dissipates rather quickly.

In The Happiness Hypothesis, John Haidt (2006) maintains that the ability to reframe our automatic, stressful thoughts can restore well being. Yet, this psychological flexibility is difficult, because it is more strenuous for our brain to be thoughtful, deliberate, and analytical than it is to be reactive, impulsive, and emotional. It is easier to tell ourselves a story than it is to challenge how we see ourselves and the world around us and to consider alternative interpretations to a circumstance.

While the brain gets us into this mess, it can also get us out. Hendricks (2009) shares his deceptively simple Drift-Shift model to help restore a state of living in a non-reactive, non-triggered way. The next time that something unexpected happens, try this:

1. Notice the stories you **drift** to which only cause drama and self-inflicted misery:
  - Victim: "This always happens to me."
  - Villain: "He, she, that is so ... mean, aggressive, etc." and
  - Helpless: [Sigh] "I guess my day is ruined and there is nothing I can do about it."
2. **Shift:**
  - Breathing: Take a slow, deep belly breath. This breaks the pattern of shallow breathing and interrupts the chemical cocktail of fight, flight, freeze, or faint that we feel in intense moments of reactivity.
  - Consciousness: Become curious by asking:

- What happened (instead of what's wrong)?
- Why would a reasonable, rational, decent person do that? (instead of stories)
- What am I pretending not to notice about my role? (instead of whose fault is it?)
- What can I learn (instead of how can it be fixed)?

## **To choose or not to choose: That is the question.**

### **- William Shakespeare**

In a roundabout way, I chose to reframe my smoky cabin fiasco. After apologizing to my husband for a hysterical and accusatory phone call, I learned that the winds had been blowing in through our chimney, hence the closed flue. He did not expect me to build a fire so did not mention it. Turns out there was no conspiracy theory of wishing fire failure on me. When the unexpected happens, I am still a work-in-progress on the Drift-Shift strategy, but I do know this: the stories I tell myself always need a check and balance with a little breathing and intentional curiosity.

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# Keith's corner: Be a flower; connect to nature



By Keith Macpherson [www.keithmacpherson.ca](http://www.keithmacpherson.ca)

You can't force a flower to grow. If you try, you will soon discover that your efforts are helpless. No matter how hard you try, a flower must grow at its own pace and in its own time. Such is the way with human life. Although many of us find ourselves forcing our way through the daily grind, we quickly come to realize that the practice of forcing life to happen often leads to greater levels of stress and anxiety within us.

If our most natural state of being is one of inner peace, why is it that so many of us have found ourselves in the complete opposite? As we can see from the news reports, anxiety and depression levels are at an all-time record high. It seems that somewhere along the way, many of us have disconnected from the inner peace that resides within each and every one of us.

What would it be like if instead of rushing to an imaginary finish line, you were to emulate the ways of nature? What would be different if you lived your life like a flower lives? Instead of forcing and rushing your way through life, you spent more of your time in the present moment, listening for the inner cues to take action at the perfect time? Can you imagine your life to be that of allowing life to unfold more naturally than striving and forcing each moment?

In the mindfulness framework that I have put together in my upcoming book, *Making Sense of Mindfulness*, I suggest that we accomplish more in our lives by trying less. To the conditioned mind that we have programmed through years of believing and being told that to be a success in the world we must push to get ahead, this approach of trying less may be a terrifying practice. However, to our



natural state of being, this is where our freedom resides. Although there will be moments of forgetfulness and falling out of the present moment, to return back to presence is just a decision.

Decide to practice being present, calming your mind and taking cues from your inner intuition and you will discover that the rat race of rushing and forcing your way through life is no longer effective. For the one who lives in the present moment discovers the flow of life moving through them. Be a flower and creatively expand from the place of your present moment awareness.

## Connect to a state of being

Here are a few tips to connect to this state of being:

1. Spend a few minutes each day

connecting with nature. Take cues from this natural teacher of presence.

2. Journal a page of writing daily without editing or over-thinking. Just let your brain dump out onto the page.
3. Connect with plants in your home and school environment and notice their natural ability to be present. Let them remind you of this natural state you can also operate from.

*Keith Macpherson is a motivational speaker, yoga instructor, life coach and recording artist. To connect further with Keith Macpherson and to sign up for his daily inspirational email and other free gifts, visit: <http://www.keithmacpherson.ca>*

# A practical guide for caregivers: Proactive self-care



By Wendy Sutton, *Where Next? A Path for Caregivers* [wherenxt.blogspot.ca](http://wherenxt.blogspot.ca)

How many times have you heard that the solution to stress is to eat healthier, exercise more and get more sleep? Do you ever feel guilty that this isn't working for you?

Stress and anxiety are symptoms of problems that exist in our daily lives. Nutrition, fitness and rest are all excellent ways of dealing with these symptoms however they won't solve the problems themselves. Problem-solving is proactive self-care.

Take charge. Too often we feel we have no control. Become proactive rather than reactive. We may not know what's ahead but we can learn where to find information and services. We can have all the documents in order that give us the authority to support and if necessary act for our parents. We can be assertive. We can insist and persist to get results. We can identify as caregivers and recognize the value of the work we do. We provide 80% of the care for seniors in the community. We save our health care system and government millions of dollars annually. We are entitled to be consulted and included in the care of our parents.

Be a proactive learner. This can be difficult for us. We are teachers. We know stuff. However, in this situation we need to admit that we have no idea what we are going to need to know. We don't even know what questions to ask. The good news is that we are experts at learning and we have resources. Read or reread the caregiving articles in the 2016-2017 Balance magazines.

Although you cannot change your family or any of the other people you will encounter along this journey, you can be proactive about how you communicate with these people. Again, we have strong skills here. We

just need some strategies to apply these talents to our own families and to other professionals. Don't be surprised when the input of patients and their families meets resistance in the health care system. Inclusion of families is basic in the work we do. Not always so in other systems. Anticipate resistance and be prepared to handle it. Ask people who work in the system for tips on how to get the best treatment. Of course you will also encounter angels along the way. Keep some thank you cards handy.

Download these strategy sheets from *Where Next? A Path for Caregivers*.

- Dealing with Difficult People
- When No is not an Acceptable Answer

## More tips for caregivers

Set a distinctive ringtone on your phone to let you know it's the parents. Set boundaries for non-emergency calls (no later than 9 pm and no calls at work). Have a plan at work that allows you to accept all calls from health professionals and social workers in privacy.

If you are concerned about your parent's health, arrange for a **Patient Care Family Conference** with the doctor. This is an appointment (up to one hour) to discuss about the care, condition and treatment of patients with serious and complex problems. The patient may or may not be present. See the Manitoba Physicians Manual p. 148 for more details.

Is the doctor reluctant to share information with you because of PHIA? Use the Patient Advocate Agreement from the S.A.F.E To Ask website.

If your parent has been prescribed a blood thinner, you can arrange for the blood tests to be done at home. The fee for this is a tax deductible medical



**Be a proactive learner. This can be difficult for us. We are teachers. We know stuff. However, in this situation we need to admit that we have no idea what we are going to need to know. We don't even know what questions to ask. The good news is that we are experts at learning and we have resources. Read or reread the caregiving articles in the 2016-2017 Balance magazines.**

expense. *Note: Antibiotics can have side effects for those on blood thinners.*

Be proactive about your emotional well-being. Reach out for all the help you can get. Find a support group or a counsellor, ask a friend for help, meditate, join a yoga class. You have nothing to lose. You don't have to stick with anything that's not helpful.

Aim for a mind as peaceful as possible in a body as healthy as possible under current circumstances.

Proactive Self-Care is 8th of a series, *A Practical Guide for Caregivers*.

Links to previous issues of Balance and direct links to the resources in each article can be found on the 4Teachers page of Where Next! A Path for Caregivers.

*Wendy Sutton is the creator of Where Next? A Path for Caregivers. She is a retired teacher from River East Transcona School Division.*







# How does your neighbourhood score?

By Mel Marginet, Green Action Centre

How did you pick the neighbourhood you live in? Was it finding your dream house, wanting to be away from the hustle and bustle of the city, or was it the catchment area to ensure your children could attend a certain school? Did the walkability of the neighbourhood play a role?

A 2015 report from Centre for Cities examined the question of “Why do people live where they do” and the results were analysed in CityLab by Richard Florida (November 2015).

Looking further into the key differences between city dwellers and suburbanites, he found:

*City dwellers placed greater importance on proximity to restaurants, leisure, and cultural facilities, public transit, local shops, and living close to their workplace. Suburbanites and those in rural hinterlands placed higher value on the cost of housing, the size and type of housing, safety and security, good schools, green space, and being close to family and friends. They were also more likely to live in the neighborhood where they grew up and were much less concerned with being close to where they worked.*

Deciding where to put down roots, especially when considering the well-being of our family, is a big decision. How interesting, then, that this migration to the suburbs since the 1950s might be playing a pivotal, negative role in our overall health as a society. How is this possible? Didn't we move to the suburbs for cleaner air, safer surroundings and more space?

Ironically, by creating neighbourhoods further away from our places of work, school, grocery stores, and community facilities we have created a built environment more dependent upon families having a car for their daily travels. Many of us may find that our families have more than one car, maybe even one for every driver in our household, as the nature of our neighbourhood makes us so dependent upon them for our daily

lives. As a result, that clean air may not be as clean as we think it is, especially around school zones with so many children being dropped off by car, as opposed to walking and biking there.

The wide-open space away from the city centre, the dream of a majority of families since the Second World War, may be at the heart of the negative health outcomes we face as a society, tied to inactivity. Jill Barker wrote in the Montreal Gazette:

*The key to incorporating more exercise into your daily life is to ditch the car in favour of more time spent commuting on foot or by bike. To do that you need to live in a neighbourhood that makes it easy to walk or cycle to shops, friends, work, school and play. (How easy is it to be active in your neighbourhood?, March 27, 2016)*

So, how does your neighbourhood score? Simply visit WalkScore.com and type in your address. The website will rank your residence from 1 to 100. Scores of 90-100 are a Walker's Paradise, while those from 0-24 are Car-Dependent, with a car required for almost all errands.

And while we'd like to say that walkability of a neighbourhood doesn't matter, that we can have a gym membership or play on sports teams to be active, and involve our kids in recreation, the reality is that the Walkscore of neighbourhoods can, and are, being used to predict health outcomes:

*Increasing levels of walkability decrease the risks of excess weight. Approximately doubling the proportion of neighborhood residents walking to work decreases an individual's risk of obesity by almost 10%. Adding a decade to the average age of neighborhood housing decreases women's risk of obesity by about 8% and men's by 13%. (“Walkability and Body Mass Index,” American Journal of Preventative Medicine.)*

A new word I learned this year is Obesogenic, meaning tending to cause obesity. More and more, we can use the built environment as a predictor of health.



**The wide-open space away from the city centre, the dream of a majority of families since the Second World War, may be at the heart of the negative health outcomes we face as a society, tied to inactivity.**

I first heard Obesogenic used by Jeff Speck in his spectacular TED Talk titled The Walkable City, which I highly recommend. He highlights how the downward trend in everyday activity and neighbourhood walkability correlates with the rise in obesity, diabetes and asthma.

What does all of this information mean? Should you list your house for sale and move to a more walkable neighbourhood? The average person moves houses about 10 times in their lives, so I do hope you will give the walkability of a neighbourhood substantial consideration if a move is in your future.

Recognizing, however, that we have attachments to our homes, our neighbourhoods, and our decisions for living there, perhaps a move is not possible. If you typed in your address and found a poor Walkscore ranking, you can connect with your neighbours and local municipal representative on what infrastructure is needed in your area to make walking and biking for everyday errands easy and safe, especially for children. Municipalities are becoming increasingly aware of the impact of local transportation options on greenhouse gases and human health. Speak out to say you support infrastructure to ensure healthy, sustainable travel is accessible to everyone in your neighbourhood – all ages and all abilities!



# Colour me happy: *The joy of sketchnoting at work*

By Nancy Clarke-Shippam, M.Sc., S-LP

I recently reflected on what brings me joy at work. Full disclosure: I love my job. My day-to-day work includes finding new and innovative ways to deliver clinical services to students. I get the opportunity to support individuals with complex communication needs; helping students who are non-verbal to communicate. I am surrounded by colleagues who challenge and inspire me to push the limits of my learning and strive for excellence every day.

But all was not rosy. One aspect of my work that my introspection revealed as

needing attention was my experience during professional learning events. As any educator knows, we are perpetually wielding the double-edged sword of teaching and learning; juxtaposing our own learning needs within a full teaching day. Whether it is a workshop, a professional learning community, or part of a monthly staff meeting, there are endless ways in which we squeeze in our own professional development.

## **The struggle is real**

As educators, we generally hold a deep

appreciation for new learning. So, I found myself surprised by my diminishing enjoyment during professional learning events. I noticed that once I received the presenter's handout, my brain would slip into idle. With the day's learning already in my hands in the form of a photocopied Power Point presentation, I was disempowered as a learner. I would default to checking email, answering texts, and scrolling my Twitter feed under the guise of productivity and multi-tasking. In reality, I was checked out. And I didn't feel good about that. If I was

going to infuse more joy at work, I had to start here. I needed to become more empowered in my learning and I was determined to re-ignite my enthusiasm for it.

### Learner, know thy self

As a recovering scrapbooker, I am drawn to colourful displays of thoughts and ideas on paper. I am also a visual learner. I did some self-study on visual note-taking and I soon stumbled upon what seemed to be the perfect blend of purpose and penchant — the sketchnote! I gathered up a few markers and couldn't wait to get to my next professional learning event. Two years and dozens of sketchnotes later, I am hooked on the joy and creativity that goes into each one and the learning that comes out!

### What is a sketchnote?

Coined by some as graphic note-taking, sketchnoting is a visual representation of learning that involves listening, processing, synthesizing, and organizing information in a creative way using elements such as text, drawings, shapes, and colour. For the record, artists need not apply. If you can draw a straight line and a circle, you can sketchnote! As Mike Rohde (2017), puts it: "Sketchnoting is about ideas, not art."

### How to sketchnote

The materials needed to create a sketchnote are as simple as having a pencil and a piece of paper. However, I will confess that I have amassed quite the collection of writing tools since I began sketchnoting. Some days, all I use is a black Sharpie. Other days, I roll in with a wheelbarrow full of brush-markers and paint pens. Add to this a piece of paper and you're ready to sketchnote.

Like anything else, practice makes progress. There are countless opportunities to practice during the work day. You can sketchnote during staff meetings, planning meetings, workshops and any other time where listening and processing are required. To build your skills, you can add in one new element each time you create a sketchnote (e.g., a new shape or a new drawing).

Whether it is your first sketchnote or your hundredth, you will continue to cycle

through the basic steps of sketchnoting and you will start to develop your own style. I keep my sketchnotes displayed on my desk and I refer to them often. They are prized artifacts of my learning and they far outshine the musty old conference handouts that now lay dormant in boxes, awaiting their fate with the paper shredder.

### Benefits

There are many benefits to sketchnoting. It can help us stay relaxed, mindful and focused. Sketchnoting can improve long-term retention of newly learned information. It can lead to forming new connections with people, as admirers of your work invariably come over to take a photo of your sketchnote and inquire about what you have created. I always enjoy it when colleagues share their learning as in the example below (my Twitter handle is @WIPitup):



For the same reasons sketchnoting works for adults, it can also be an effective (and free!) strategy to introduce with students. One of my colleagues on the Teacher-Led Learning Team recently Tweeted his first attempt at using sketchnoting with his students as a method to share their learning about the Treaties.



### Evidence

If you're a data-driven decision maker, you'll be pleased to know that the research is on sketchnoting's side. Dual Coding Theory, for example, is a long-standing theory of cognition which proves that learning happens best when we process information both verbally and visually (Paivio, 2014). In another study, doodlers showed a 29% increase in retained information when compared with subjects in the same study who did not doodle (Andrade, 2010). Sketchnoting has also been credited with deeper learning (over factual memorization) because it is precisely during the process of synthesizing and organizing information that sketchnoting requires, that conceptual learning takes place (Williams and Eggert, 2002).

Overall, there are many tangible reasons for sketchnoting. It can lead to increased focus, social networking, enhanced learning, and creative expression. Its benefits are observable with both teachers and students and it's free! Less empirical, but equally important, sketchnoting is fun! Will sketchnoting work for you? There's only one way to find out! Grab a Sharpie and a piece of paper and give it a try!

Coming up in the next issue: Sketchnote banners: How to make your words stand out.

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# Yoga practice: Vrksasana, the tree pose

By Tally Young



When we think of repetitive movement in our day to day functions there is no surprise as to how many aches we acquire due to the slumping motion of forward movements. To counter balance we want to re-teach the body how to stand tall. So that we can inspire the correct muscle movement to create stability in our trunk.

First step, becoming reacquainted with our core. Right now sit tall where you are, exhale so deeply that the belly button physically moves back to the spine. Hold it there for 10 seconds.

Do you feel it?

On the next breath, as you have

fully exhaled, lengthen the belly button up towards the head from the waistline of your pants. Hold for 10s.

Can you really feel it?

## Achieving the tree pose

We are going to use a gentle form of the above action to apply to our posture of Vrksasana, or the Tree. You will need a mat and maybe a wall for balance. So set up next to one just for comfort.

1. Place your feet hip distance apart with your toes moving forward. Press firmly into the mat and lengthen through the top of your head. Feel the space through the torso, namely belly button rises

and gently moving to the spine, then the neck softly moving towards the back of the body.

2. Place your hand onto your hips to help keep the hips level. Lift the right knee until it makes a 90-degree angle in the leg. Turn the knee to the right and place your foot onto the calf.
3. Hold the posture for at least 5 breaths working your way up to 15.
4. Move to the opposite side following steps 1 – 3.

When finished, lay on your mat and take in 20 deep breaths in the space of savasana.

# Getting things done. How to ask for what you need.



By Sofia Costantini

As a single mom I always felt I needed to be super woman so that I could prove to myself that I was self-sufficient and able to do everything on my own. I rarely asked for help so there were very few people who ever offered support, I figured it was because they were too busy with their own lives that they didn't have time for me. It made me sad because there was no one around to assist, ask if I was ok or pat me on the back for all the hard work I was doing.

Do you find that sometimes you need help but it's hard to ask because you don't want to be a bother to anyone so you keep it to yourself? Do you become a little resentful because you're doing everything on your own?

It occurred to me that I didn't like to ask people for help because my mom used to find the most round about way of asking me if I could help her with something. I remember getting annoyed with her approach so I found ways to make it difficult for her to ask me again. I know, I was being difficult but to be honest I wish she just would have said: "I need your help. Would you be able to drive me to the doctor's office tomorrow morning at 9:00am?" This request is very specific and I can easily reply yes or no versus the long drawn out scenario:

**Mom – "Are you busy tomorrow?"**

**Me – "Not sure, why?"**

**Mom – "Oh nothing, just checking."**

**20 minutes later...**



**Mom – "Do you have to be anywhere in the morning?"**

**Me – "Mom, What do you need?"**

**Mom – "Don't worry about it."**

And it went on and on.

The other justification I made was if I start asking people for help I would begin relying on others and then I would become weak. It was a false assumption. Just because I can do something doesn't mean I have to do it all the time. Having others help me or do it for me can benefit everyone in the long run. It can build relationships, communication and mutual respect if done in the right way.

## How to ask for what you want

Consider using the following to ask for what you want:

1. Use "I" statements and be clear about what you want or need.
2. Make sure to ask if they are able to do this for you.

People are more willing to help out if they feel they are not being persuaded but invited or asked to help you.



# wellness FORUM

Please join us for The Manitoba Teachers' Society's 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Wellness Forum

**Save the Date**  
**Saturday, November 24, 2018**

The 2018 Wellness Forum planning committee is pleased to offer this exciting event for the sixth year in a row!

The event will include training in wellness programming, guest speakers, and opportunities for Wellness Chairs to network and plan with their colleagues.

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