



Maren Gamble

What happens when leadership becomes the learner in mental health training? In this episode, IHSA President and CEO Enzo Garritano shares what he discovered by stepping into the learner's seat and why mental health training is more than a simple requirement. It's leadership in action. It's time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. Welcome to the IHSA podcast. I'm your host, Maren Gamble. Welcome back to the podcast. Enzo.

Enzo Garritano

Thank you very much. I appreciate being here, Marin,

Maren Gamble

I think that during this podcast I'm going to ask you to wear two different hats at different times throughout the questions.

Enzo Garritano

Just a typical day then, is what you're asking me for.

Maren Gamble

Well, yeah, I think we're going to reduce it to two.

Enzo Garritano

Alright.

Maren Gamble

One of those is going to be the CEO of IHSA hat, and the other is going to be the leader as a learner hat. Neither one of those is a Type 2, Class E hard hat, but both are pretty important.

Enzo Garritano

Absolutely.

Maren Gamble

Absolutely. First, let me ask you a few questions as the CEO about occupational mental health in general, what role does mental health training and policy play into the bigger picture of occupational health and safety?

Enzo Garritano

That's a very big question right now. I think we're at a point now where we just don't know yet exactly where. However, because we are in the starting steps of this kind of journey around mental health in the workplace and trying to better understand some of the concepts, some of the issues, recognition, all those kinds of things around mental health that in the last year or two, more particularly at IHSA in the last few years, three years or four, that we've gone on board with regards to resources and trying to cater those resources to different people like the employer, the worker, the supporter. But I think what we have to realize now is that if we don't start, we're never going to understand how it truly fits and we won't really move the needle on mental health within the workplace either, or at least the support for mental health in the workplace.

So I think we're on the beginning of the journey. So saying that we need to really increase our awareness and knowledge on the subject of mental health to start, all the workplace parties have a job or have a role within mental health within the workplace, whether it's the owner of a company, a manager, a leader, the workers, the supervisors. So whether they want or not, the interactions that we all have on a daily basis really contribute towards improvements in mental health or supports in mental health, or perhaps detracting from one's mental health. So we all have to kind of understand those areas, and unless we start to learn about them and increase our awareness around them and then cater our policies towards them, we're really not going to make, again, we're not going to move the needle in the subject. So we have to really treat, I think as we start from a global perspective, we have to treat mental health like we do any other risks within the workplace.

Again, with the context that we're learning about the subject, we're better understanding how to recognize—or better understanding what the support roles are out there and the support resources are. So again, starting addressing it, using your systems that you understand around risk to create some policies, at least at the starting point. Those policies may be very basic, but as time goes on, those policies and the procedures that support them or practices support them and the training that supports it can change over time. But I think right now it's about saying mental health is an important item. The mental wellbeing of our staff and our workers is important, and we need to really increase that awareness now. So the policy doesn't have to be complex. It's about getting started, I think is the main message.

Maren Gamble

Awesome. So one of the things that I heard through your response there is this idea of integrating mental health awareness and mental health policy into the programs and occupational health systems that we already have in place in our company. Really looking at this opportunity, not as an opportunity to create some separate piece that you can set somewhere to have operating on its own, but rather to leverage the systems we have and improve mental health in the workplace through treating it as an integrated part throughout everything we do.

Enzo Garritano

Absolutely. And again, we don't know how the mental health subject in general really impacts those other areas of health and safety, like the traumatic issues that occur and risks that exist in the workplace or what the outcome is, and are they seated in some sort of element of mental health. So I think again,

because we have to integrate those, the idea is to integrate them because I think we're going to find out through time that they are so linked that we can't have them sit in silos by themselves. Mental health and workplace risk factors, how we deal with both on the physical occupational illness kind of exposures, production. I mean all those things fit into one another. And mental health is again, not truly understanding the full scope of the mental health kind of subject. I think we are going to miss something if we don't start looking at it and understanding that one who's having maybe a difficult day, maybe contributing to some risks in the workplace or the why. If we're starting to do an investigation, we have to start looking at was mental health an element of the why and how to prevent in the future? So again, that integration piece is very important. So thanks for bringing that up.

Maren Gamble

Well said there. And I think that's also a perfect segue into kind of the next hat that I'd like you to put on Enzo, which is your learner hat because the next thing we're going to talk about is the eLearning program, *Opening the Door to Support*. This program is relatively new to IHSA's eLearning catalog. It contains six modules. The modules cover breaking down stigma, looking after yourself, identifying red flags, leading by example, communicating support, and supporting others, as the main sort of topic modules. Now when it comes to this program, I was wondering if you could give us a little insight into what led to creating this program. Who was involved in creating this program?

Enzo Garritano

Sure. So again, the issue of mental health as a subject has been coming up over the past number of years, and we've identified some certain gaps and simple tools for industry to use to, again, to move the needle with awareness, to move the needle with how to approach the subject of mental health, how to identify where people may be having challenges and understanding that we took on a project, well, a couple of projects. One was the *Working Minds for the Trades*, which is a virtual instructor led program that on the topic, again with similar, I don't want to say the same, but similar learning outcomes with regards to who you are as a supporter, what resources are available, how to recognize, but in this case here, utilizing an e-learning platform and scenario based to really bring home the message of and to illustrate what's actually happening in the industry.

This is really, everyone can see themselves if they're in the sectors that we serve, construction and transportation, utilities. You can see yourself in the conversation and the scenarios that are put forward in the opening door to support. So it really is scenario based. It really is about what we may see on a day-to-day basis and working through those challenges and being able to identify resources, identify to those subjects, how do we work within that as an individual and as a supervisor, as a leader, how can we work and make things better from a mental health perspective because again, such a big subject, we need to have some sort of format and structure to it. And this eLearning program takes you through that structure. So it really helps from that perspective. And I just say undertook that responsibility to come up with this resource to help the industry out with the support of the funding that we get through WSIB to the ministry to us. So it certainly is something that we look forward to people using and to being able to improve again, their outcomes and their colleagues outcomes.

Maren Gamble

Excellent. I think when I took this program too, one of the things that stood out for me as well was the fact that it is so, and it did resonate with me in terms of experiences that I've had in the field as well. So I think that is something important that you captured there, is that it is so story-based, approaching it from real life scenarios.

Enzo Garritano

Just to jump in for a second because I think the why I didn't really talk about the why we haven't talked about the why is this subject such a...why are we even spending time on the subject? Our system partners at the Institute for Work and Health just released some preliminary information in regards to the subject of suicide, which again, the element of mental health and suicide go hand in hand. And substance abuse also has a big part within that kind of realm of topic. We just got some information, preliminary information within Ontario and some estimates in regards to suicides in Ontario in those individuals in the sectors that we serve. And it's estimated that death by suicide is about a three times greater number than traumatic fatalities in the sectors we serve. And if you start to over and if you bring in death by drug or overdose, it's about an eight-time factor over traumatic fatalities in the sectors we serve.

Yes, they're not occupational per se as the traumatic injuries or fatalities are, but the impacts on the workplaces that IHSA serves, again, mainly in the construction sector, in this case, three times greater and eight times greater when you superimpose suicide and drug related deaths for those that identify as being in the construction sector. So that's significant. That is huge. And I don't think we truly see that number for what it is. They are people, they're individuals that served yesterday at the workplace, and when we have a traumatic death, it's absolutely tragic and we don't want to see those happening. And to highlight the fact that the rate is that much greater from suicide and suicide and drug use or drug overdose is just, it's alarming. And it's something that we all have to, as leaders and as supervisors and as workers, we have to really raise our heads to it, open our eyes to it, and start to do something about it.

Maren Gamble

Those are incredibly powerful numbers. I think that speaks to the "why" powerfully for creating this program as well as the full awareness piece around occupational mental health and mental health in general. In terms of this program, I also appreciate that IHSA did work with various partners in developing it. I know that Mental Health Innovations was involved. We engaged key stakeholders, really worked to get a variety of different perspectives and experts involved so that we were making sure that we were creating just a resource that was grounded in fact and expertise and as current as it possibly could in terms of content

Enzo Garritano

And the importance of having those individuals from the industry and stakeholders who can speak to their experiences and is very important because again, we can, as I say, we can say what we want, but in the end, it's those who have lived experience that are the best ambassadors for the subject. And people will see and can relate back to I'm, I was in those positions working my way through my career, or I'm in that point now. So they can see those stories, they can understand that, hey, it applied to people just

like themselves, and that's a stronger story. That's a stronger point. So mental health innovations did a fantastic job. We continue to work with them around peer support as well, but we can speak about that a little bit later and certainly a big event that's happening next year. Also, I'd like to shout out a little bit later.

Maren Gamble

Okay, perfect. So we've talked a little bit about the course, but who's it intended for? Who takes this course?

Enzo Garritano

Yeah, really it's intended for leaders. And when I say leaders, it can be, again, workplace leaders, being it the owners of a company, a supervisor, anybody who's leading a crew, a lead hand. It certainly will not hurt anybody and workers included to take this course. It'll certainly open people's minds to, especially the resources that are available to them. And again, recognizing in the workplace that everyone has a role. So really it's for everyone in particular though, this one is really catered to those who work with and oversee the activities of other people.

Maren Gamble

Awesome. And in terms of IHSA deciding to have this product and distribute this product, what message do you think that choice or do you hope that that choice actually sends out to both our employees and our membership?

Enzo Garritano

I think taking the lead in opening the subject up further sends a message that, look, we as a workplace, we are community, in our case, 175 person strong community, that we are committed to encouraging people to understand the mental health subject, to understand that we all have a role in playing towards making it a better place. And mental wellbeing is an important element of that, of a good workplace. We spend an enormous amount of time together in a workplace, and we can't ignore the fact that our activities and our work both impact and support or take away from people's mental health and wellbeing. So saying that it's about maintaining a supportive work environment, making sure that our workplace can be the best it can, and it's also a learned topic. The message out there too is, look, this isn't just something that we want you to take a journey by yourself on this is, or that you need to be educated at a very high level, university, college, whatever. It's about saying it's a learned subject. There are certain things that we can do as individuals in the workplace to improve our health and safety and mental wellbeing outcomes. So it's about leading, it's about challenging ourselves, I would say, to move forward in this subject in a manner that also is respectful of other subject of mental health, and it's respectful of people's challenges. And it says that we care and it says that we are community.

Maren Gamble

That's a very powerful statement, and I can appreciate that perspective for sure. So we did say that it was sort of designed with the leader in mind, and one would argue that you in fact are a leader. So what made you take this course?

Enzo Garritano

This course? I think, again, I think everyone, whether it's a leader or a worker in the company, taking this subject on and trying to improve your awareness on the subject is critical here. I can't expect our staff to think that we're supporting them if I don't even understand some of the basics and what the resources are and what the awareness is on some of the challenges that I need to recognize in people in myself as well. And sometimes we deny the fact that we're not feeling good. Sometimes we deny the fact that we're having a bad day, but it impacts the way we work. It impacts the way we deal with people, it impacts the way we deal with subjects. So it's about, hey, it's about saying I want to learn as much as I can in the subject. And from there, as a health and safety association, we want to lead as well our industries, we don't want to just talk about it.

We want to be able to say, look, we're working through that as well. We want to make sure that any other place, we are a workplace and we have our challenges, all of us do, and we want to be able to support those challenges. So again, it's about that community-based piece and understanding that we all have an element in that community of supporting each other. And how can I do it without taking the course? How do I do it without learning more about the subject and about understanding the resources and about understanding even where I reside, like I mentioned earlier in the whole continuum of mental health and workplace and how it impacts the workplace.

Maren Gamble

Perfect. And when you sat down and took this course, was there anything that surprised you? Anything you particularly liked?

Enzo Garritano

Well, the scenario-based piece is, again, I come from the sector, from the industry construction sector as well, and certainly see those conversations that the eLearning program kind of takes you on in the scenarios that they look very familiar, right? It sounds familiar, your day-to-day operations with your crew and crews, and certainly the resources. I think the big surprise there is the resources that are being pointed to. Because again, throughout the program, yes, we might touch on and open up a resource or two throughout the program, but there's also additional resources. And the ones that are there are really there as impactful resources. They're not there to give you a library of things to hopefully find something that's effective or that works for you. I found, and that's what took me a little longer to go through the program clicking on those resources and you start to get immersed in those resources and you start to run through them in detail and notice how much they add to the learning.

So that's some of the advice I would give is take a look at those resources. And again, this is, some people may take more interest in it and some people will take a little bit less, but for those who really want to get the most out of this program is click on those resources and run through them. Some of them throughout the program are repetitive, which is okay, but because they reinforce, but some of the resources as you go through them, they really, really tie in the subject and enable you to get the most out of the program. So that was a strong element, I think, of the program for myself.

Maren Gamble

So that said, did you do this program in one sitting? Is this like a half hour eLearning experience?

Enzo Garritano

Yeah, absolutely not. The program, I think we indicate, correct me if I'm wrong, I think it's a three hour program. Do we indicate it's that long or is it shorter? And this does not to be recorded. Is it 90 minutes or—

Maren Gamble

I think we say three hours now. We just updated it, but it's probably still undershot.

Enzo Garritano

Yeah. So getting back to, I guess the podcast, this program took me two sittings to complete. I think I took three hours in the first sitting and about two hours in the last part of it. And again, I did take my time to run through the resources very particularly, I think just to, again, out of interest and on the subject and out of where those resources took you, you didn't want to just cut them off. Some of them you do go through a little quicker as you see the gist of it. But some of the resources, again, to truly get the most out of it, you click through and really identify where those resources can add to your learning. So two sittings. For myself, I certainly advocate more than one sitting. It's a lot of information. It's a lot. And the subject is a delicate subject. They do speak to some subjects that may be triggering to some. So again, take your time with it, understand that you don't have to finish it today. I did it in two days, one after the other. And I think you don't want to spend too much time of a gap in between just to ensure that that learning continues more effectively if you do it within two or three days of each other, those two sittings or three sittings, whatever's more comfortable for you.

Maren Gamble

Yeah, I think that's really good advice for me. I did exactly what you said. I spaced it out. I spaced it out into four or five settings that were a little bit shorter, but I did try to keep them spaced enough so that I could process the information that I took in, but not so spaced that you start to lose the flow of the story and everything that's going on. So I think my advice would be the same as yours, Enzo is to just plan to take your time with it,

Enzo Garritano

And I'd say turn off your phone and any other interruptions. I thought that was an important element as well, is that when you're in the subject and you're going through it, if you keep on hitting the stop button, which I did not do, but I'm going to say if I did hit the stop button a lot, it would've taken away from the learning because you want that continuous kind of, you want to immerse yourself in the subject. And in the eLearning program, it's not about ticking boxes, it's about, and again, some may do that, but that's not what it's all about. It's about learning and increasing your awareness and being able to be that support in this subject as the learning outcomes are intended to be. So being interrupted and stopping and starting even through a two hour session, if you're sitting one two hour sitting, not going

to work for you, I don't think it'll work for you. I think again, having that continuous concentration and immersion into the subject would really be beneficial.

Maren Gamble

I think that's great advice. So how has taking this course shaped the way you think about supporting mental health in our workplace at IHSA?

Enzo Garritano

I think here at our workplace, I like to think of our workplace as a great place to work. And again, we want to be able to, as a leader of the company, again, is ensuring we can be successful in leading our staff. We can as individuals support each other. So I think supporting mental health in the workplace is an important element that, again, without that awareness, we just don't know sometimes when we see why are people acting that way today or what's the issue? Or it opens up our minds to the awareness that, look, not everybody's having a great day and they might need a different kind of support today. Or you put a subject off to a different day because they might not be in the right mode to discuss a certain thing. And if you want a truly great outcome in your work issues, make sure that everyone's in a state of mind that can support that. So you may put things off and understanding that that's the way we're going to get the best outcomes. So being able to recognize when it's not the best time and when people need support can lead to better outcomes from the business side as well. So you, you're really, you're again, taking a holistic view of improvement in the work environment, support for the workers, and then that'll lead to better outcomes from a work perspective, pure business side.

Maren Gamble

Awesome. If I asked you to sort of pick one actionable change that you've made since taking the course, what do you think it would be?

Enzo Garritano

The one actionable change is to be is, from what I've learned through the program is again, is to give me half a second. Sorry, I scrambled a bunch of notes on

Maren Gamble

It. You'd originally talked about self-reflection as a major takeaway.

Enzo Garritano

Yeah. Okay. So the one actionable change really that I've made since, again, is to not only look within and to understand my mental wellness and my mental health and where I sit in the continuum of mental health. And I think there's some great tools in there, including the continuum as far as assessing where you reside. It's also about being attentive to those around...again, understanding where people might be in that mental health continuum on an interaction basis. So to be more aware, that's the one thing that I've really picked up off the program is that awareness piece as to potentially where people are and being able to then direct, like I said earlier, a conversation or an activity or an issue in the right direction.

And in doing so, also to support obviously the worker at that point in which where I see they're at in order to support them in order to ensure that they're in a better place and feel supported. And again, from a business side to be able to do things well when the time is right and when the conditions are right. So again, it's about being a little more sensitive to and aware of where people are in the continuum right now. I think that's the biggest outcome or output that I got from the program.

Maren Gamble

It sounds like from your answer, Enzo, that it really reinforces why it's important for leaders to be taking programs like this themselves. It's not enough for them to sort of mandate this sort of thing throughout the organization without also taking it themselves because it's through this training that awareness grows and that opportunity as a leader and as a person is provided to you.

Enzo Garritano

And if I can say again, this is the start of the journey, this isn't the be all and end all. And I think we have to also understand that as leaders and as employees and workers, whoever's taking this program, this is a starting point, right? This is about saying we're increasing our awareness on a subject that we don't have a lot of expertise on and experience in, and it's going to evolve and we're going to grow, and IHSA is going to provide more content in the future to build upon programs like this and the *Opening Minds for the Trades*. So it's about, again, a starting point, starting block and breaking some ice and increasing awareness and opening some eyes. So this is what it's all about. So I don't think we have to feel that we have to accomplish everything or feel responsible to, it's about saying we're here to support, we're here to direct people to supports and resources that can help, but we're at a starting point. We're not at a point where it's a more mature subject, like the other areas of risk that we deal with every day.

Maren Gamble

Sure. That makes a ton of sense. So what advice would you give to leaders out there who are thinking of investing in mental health training for their teams?

Enzo Garritano

I think they're not going to be able to really get the most out of their staff, out of their workplace unless they undertakes some awareness and knowledge in the subject and support that awareness and knowledge throughout the workplace. Again, when you're working as a united group with a basic understanding of the subject, it will help with all other aspects of the business. I strongly feel that whether it's your production, whether it's your other risk reduction and prevention initiatives, again, it's that community based type of subject that everyone deserves support in. And as leaders, you can create that environment and you'll be nothing less than a better company for it. So that's a big message. It's about saying you will trust it, you will increase by increasing your awareness and those around you in your company, you will have better outcomes because you are taking on a subject that impacts so many other aspects of your business.

Maren Gamble

I really like how you said that because I think sometimes when we talk about new initiatives, they feel like additional work or one more thing to add to the plate. And I think what you just said is important because it helps to realize that this isn't, that is an opportunity to improve something that underlies the entire business and to support growth and efficiency and productivity across the business. So this isn't some new initiative to take a look at, see if you have time for, but rather an opportunity to grasp for your organization.

Enzo Garritano

And it's certainly something that is taken into the home after work. So you're supporting your staff not only in the workplace, but you're supporting your staff as again, as they go back to the community and do their things after work, knowing that that support is there and having that greater knowledge of where those resources are hopefully improves the outcomes of the workers, of your workers back in the home, back in their communities during the weekends and evenings and the whole nine yards. So it really is all encompassing, and again, because it's a subject that we're early in the stages of really going through every little bit helps I think at this point. And again, encourage everybody to start that journey. Don't be afraid of it. The resources are there. And it's not about putting all the responsibility on your shoulders, it's about awareness and how we can support people to get help without giving way too much of the e-learning program.

Maren Gamble

Wonderful. So I guess I'm about at the point where I'm going to ask you if you have any final thoughts, and I believe you did tease our listeners a little bit about an event you were going to mention as well,

Enzo Garritano:

Right, right. So Mental Health Innovations is again a key leader in the subject of peer support. There is an event coming up in 2026, the national conference May 12 to 14. It's in Ottawa at the Delta hotel in Ottawa. So if anybody's interested, the website is www.powerofpeersupport.ca. And certainly it's three days dedicated to the subject. And again, we don't have to recreate the wheel. There's a lot of work going on across the country as well in the subject. So I just say again, we lean on resources and try to pick up on things that other people do as well and utilize those for the benefit of everyone. So an opportunity for people to get involved in peer support, we know the importance of that. And again, the essence of the program of *Opening the Door to Support*, it's about looking after each other. And this conference, I'm sure will help do so as well in 2026. So look out for that.

Maren Gamble

Wonderful. We'll also provide that link along with the resources for this podcast if anyone's looking to find it. With that, thank you for listening to our episode on opening the Doors to support. If you have any questions about our podcasts or suggestions for topics you'd like us to cover, please reach out to us at podcast@ihsa.ca. And as always, be sure to subscribe and like us on your podcast channel and visit us at ihsa.ca for all your health and safety needs.

Announcer

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