

# Experiencing a Workplace Job Action Disruption

## You have been given this handout following the occurrence of a workplace job action disruption (or strike) that has impacted you and your colleagues.

Striking employees returning to work can be both a challenge and an opportunity to an organization. At the core of the successful return-to-work by employees is the ability of all parties to re-establish trust and the healing of any relationship ruptures that occurred either before or during the strike action.

Re-engagement of striking and non-striking employees can be a delicate balance as both sides may be in various stages of exhaustion from the emotional and physical demands that the workplace disruption has created.

The restoration of a positive workplace environment is not a one-size-fits-all solution. After a strike, organizations will need to review important factors such as addressing the backlog of work, any changes in the business process and productivity, client and stakeholder reactions, and the impact of possible fractured working relationships that may have emerged or deteriorated during the strike.

As with any stressful event we will experience a range of reactions in both ourselves and our colleagues. Becoming more aware of how we communicate both in our words and actions and the impact this can have on our colleagues can be a good starting point. Recognizing and respecting the individual differences that can arise during and post-strike events will be evidenced in the words we choose, and our body language. Knowing our own "hot-buttons" and taking responsibility for the management of our own reactions will allow us to respond in a more appropriate manner.

Our ability to enhance workplace restoration will in large part be based on our positive re-engagement at work and with colleagues. Being focused on the "we" and less the "me" and

being realistic that it can take time to heal any fractures, are important considerations. Our willingness to be responsible for our words, actions and encouragement to colleagues to do the same, can lay the groundwork for our own and our organization's recovery.

Some employees and work teams may not experience any significant post-strike effects, while others may be more impacted.

Here are some of the common reactions you or your colleagues may experience:

**Physical reactions:** Physical exhaustion, headaches, loss of appetite, sleep difficulties, gastrointestinal problems.

**Emotional reactions:** Anxiety, distress, anger, irritability, sadness, guilt, resentment and distrust.

**Behavioural reactions:** Tearfulness, feeling disconnected, excessive vigilance, withdrawal or isolation, increased tendency to blame or criticize others, increased consumption of alcohol or medication.

**Mental reactions:** Loss of concentration and productivity, forgetfulness, indecisiveness, confusion, distressing dreams and memories.

### Are these reactions "normal"?

Absolutely. These are normal reactions that we can all experience when we have experienced distressing situations. Research has shown that when you acknowledge these stress reactions and take care of them, they usually diminish within a few weeks. Most people recover after acute stressful events and they return to normal or close to normal functioning, either on their own or with the assistance of a mental health professional.



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## Do these reactions always occur right after the event?

Not always. Some individuals don't experience these reactions until later, but this isn't the case for most people. Whether these reactions occur right away or later, they are generally experienced by almost everyone who goes through a distressing situation.

## Is there any way to avoid these types of reactions?

You can never avoid them completely. Even individuals who are well-informed and well-prepared can have acute stress reactions in such situations. Remember that these are normal reactions.

## What can you do?

- **Pay more attention** to your feelings and reactions than to the event itself.
- **Don't judge or blame yourself.** Don't criticize yourself for having these reactions. Be patient. Think about how you would support a friend in this situation and then treat yourself and colleagues the same way.
- **Try to reduce other sources of stress** in your life for a while.
- **Take the time to talk** about your physical and emotional reactions with someone close to you like a friend, spouse/partner or family member. You can also turn to coworkers you feel comfortable with.
- **Let your family, colleagues and friends know how they could best support you** during your period of recovery. If they are doing something unhelpful, give yourself permission to let them know.
- **Get some physical exercise.** No matter how light it is, try to stay active.
- **Restore your balance and keep things in perspective**
- **Take time to rest** and maintain good sleep habits.

## What should you do if your stress reactions don't diminish from week to week?

It's better not to keep your stress and concerns all to yourself. People close to you don't always know how to help, despite their best intentions. If these reactions have not diminished from week to week, don't hesitate to contact your organization's Employee and Family Assistance Program to meet with a professional. If you take good care of yourself, ensuring that you obtain the support you might need, you will gradually regain your normal sense of self and resume life activities.

## What have you gained from your experience?

After some time, once things have calmed down, it can be useful to ask yourself, "What have I learned from this experience?" After a strike, most people learn something about themselves or others. You may make some interesting discoveries.

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For more information, to book a counselling session, or to access any of your EFAP services our Client Services Representatives are ready to speak with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

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