THE CATALYST

Showing Up: Stories of Thriving at Work

One in five people in Canada lives with a mental health challenge. Many of them are your colleagues, your managers, your mentors. They show up, contribute, lead — and they do it while navigating something most people never see. This Labour Day, we're telling their stories.

By: Jessica Ward-King | Posted: August 25, 2026



Lakshala Ganeshamoorthy

Lakshala Ganeshamoorthy, an educational assistant at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, lives with depression and anxiety. “I had to take a sick day for my mental health, and I emailed my boss to tell him I was having a hard time. He wrote back telling me to come see him the next day, and I was full of anxiety. I thought I was in trouble. But when I went to him, it was super positive, and he just asked how he could help.” According to Ganeshamoorthy, “you need a really good community and work environment to thrive.” She used to work in an unsupportive environment and immediately started looking for another job. She feels fortunate to have landed where she is now. “When I’m really down and alone at home, I go to work, and it’s [not long before those feelings are] all gone because of the community, the friends. We laugh. I know that others at work are on the same antidepressant as me, and we share our experiences. It really helps.”

Many adults spend a third of their lives at work: half of their waking hours. It can be difficult to be your whole self at work, especially if you are one of the one in five people who live with mental illness. The stigma of mental illness — that you are stupid, lazy, unreliable, or unstable — and the drive to succeed at work can make disclosure seem unwise. But mental illness affects how we show up to work, and simple accommodations can make all the difference in how well we are able to do our jobs. These are the stories of people who thrive at work while living with mental illness.

Ganeshamoorthy is open about her experience with mental illness at work, but she must show up every day for the kids she works with, whether she is having a good day or a bad one. “Sometimes things can really get under your skin, and you need to be able to say, ‘I need to take a break,’” she says. “It took me a long time to learn that. I thought I always had to be patient and calm. I always had to know what to do. But no. It’s OK to step back.” It helps to share your lived experience at work, because then others will share theirs as well. “Sharing some of your experience with your employer so that they understand what you are going through can help. There might be a little bit of judgment, but you don’t have to disclose everything.” Ganeshamoorthy asserts that working actually helps her mental health: “There is a lot of stigma that when you have mental health issues, you don’t do a lot, but that is not true. Being busy at work, and outside of work, helps me cope with my mental health.”



Meg Brunetti

Meg Brunetti is now a self-employed garden designer but was once a government employee. She left the public service in part because of her mental illness. “When I worked in government, I was masking all the time. Then I burnt out.” Brunetti lives with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), and she has found that flexibility is key to her success at work. When her children were young, Brunetti felt supported by her employer, who offered flexible scheduling. Brunetti valued the stable employment but found her time in government challenging. “I was writing cheques that I could not cash because my mood disorder is cyclical and unpredictable. You’ve got to try not to mask all the time and just be yourself,” she says. Now, as an entrepreneur, Brunetti is thriving, able to set her own schedule and be gentle with herself when her symptoms are bothersome. “Making mistakes and learning and going with the flow, being flexible to be yourself is so important,” she says.



Zachary Houle works as a technical writer for a government agency. He lives with schizophrenia and autism and is in recovery from addiction. He chooses not to disclose his mental illness at work because of the stigma that is attached to it. “I haven’t disclosed my illness at my day job. If they ask, I will tell, but schizophrenia is a big, scary thing.” He is aware of the consequences of disclosure: “It’s not that I am wearing masks or anything, but I am very conscious of office politics and how certain information will get used. I am trying to make sure that I’m not working against myself.” Houle has not asked for accommodations at work, asserting, “I don’t want special treatment. I have learned not to present as ‘abnormal.’ Once you say ‘I have a mental disability,’ people seem to resent you for that, for needing special treatment.” But Houle is gradually becoming more comfortable with the idea of disclosing his mental health concerns. He agreed to use his real name in this article and perhaps use this piece as a jumping-off point for a discussion with his managers. He had a positive experience disclosing his autism to an editor he worked with, and the relationship was enhanced by his disclosure. “Just having a stable day job when you have some big mental health disorders on your lap is a pretty big deal. And I was even sought out for my book-reviewing side hustle, just demonstrating the quality of the work I do. So yes, considering everything that has happened to me, I am thriving at work.”

At work, Houle says, “Representation matters. I attend a 12-step program where I get to tell my story, and people look up to me as someone who has succeeded. You need to look for role models at work.”

If your workplace is not psychologically healthy and safe, disclosure may not be the best option. Mental illness still comes with a lot of stigma, and disclosure can hurt your career. A study conducted at Simon Fraser University found that workplace culture, not specific policies, is what influences disclosure of a mental illness in the workplace. Employees at supportive workplaces were 55% more likely to disclose a mental health concern to their employer, and they were more

engaged, were more satisfied in their jobs, and remained at their jobs longer than employees in unsupportive workplaces.

According to recent research from Mental Health Research Canada, those hardest hit by mental health challenges are employed people in Canada in their early and prime working years. But work is also important to the recovery journey of people living with mental illness, as it provides identity and purpose. A 2025 study found that “employment fostered self-awareness, advocacy, and self-actualization” and that “workplace policies promoting self-awareness, advocacy, and peer support enhance job retention and well-being.”

This Labour Day, take a moment to recognize that your colleagues may have lived experiences that you will never see and that they are thriving at work anyway. If you are living with mental illness and wondering whether you can thrive at work, take it from Ganeshamoorthy, Brunetti, and Houle: if you find a welcoming community at work, are given the flexibility and stability you need, and pursue work that fills your cup rather than depleting it, you absolutely can thrive.

Resources, sources, and documents

A Manager’s Guide to Workplace Accommodations

Suicide Prevention in the Workplace

How to support health-care workers at work

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