

Lorraine Mischuk,
CEO and Managing Clinician,
Maximize Human Capabilities



Managing Clinician at Maximize Human Capabilities

By Sherry Kaniuga

One of the most frustrating things for someone to be told when they have an injury or condition that's keeping them from working is 'it's all in your head'. Occupational Therapist Lorraine Mischuk's goal is to help people and their employers see that while that's usually not the case, what's going on inside that person's mind is actually an important factor to be explored.

"When someone has a back brace or a cast on their leg, that's really visible. But it's those invisible disabilities that are a really important component that's often ignored," says Mischuk, the CEO and Managing Clinician at Maximize Human Capabilities.

"A big part of whatever illness or injury you have is often a mental health factor. We're not just physical beings – it's not all just about bones and muscles and joints. There's so much more to how an injury might be affecting someone. That's where we really need to work to listen to people, break down those barriers and really look at everything they are experiencing emotionally."

Mischuk started the ergonomics and occupational therapy company in 1997 out of a drive to fill the need for a more individualized approach. After a few years working in hospitals, she became the province's first corporate occupational therapist, responsible for implementing and developing services for occupational therapy for staff at CN Railway Transcona Shops. The ideas that had begun to percolate there were later reinforced when she worked at a private clinic for a short while.

"I was really seeing the need to individualize the approach for each client. You could have 10 people lined up with the same diagnosis on paper, but it affects them in 10 completely different ways," she says. "It can be difficult for the powers that be to understand that."

To achieve this, Mischuk started Maximize Human Capabilities and developed a way of looking at things with a "whole person approach" – exploring not just the physical aspects of the person's injury, but really looking into the psycho-social, cognitive and spiritual aspects as well. Mischuk and the three other occupational therapists on her team all operate with this approach.

When they are off work recovering from a physical injury, people can often also have feelings of isolation, worry, self-doubt, fear, or undiagnosed anxiety.

"We really emphasize that integration of the physical with our emotional or psycho-social self, because it really affects everything. We see that mental health piece as a critical factor, at least 50 to 75 per cent of the time," Mischuk explains.

"But if you catch these things early, and find that puzzle piece

that lets you help them move forward, you can mitigate the problem. That's a big part of what we do in the 'whole person' approach."

Mischuk and her staff work with all types and sizes of employers, often meeting with the employees at their workplace to evaluate the situation.

"I always start by listening carefully to what my clients have to say. I take what they're telling me, and refer back to them in their own words. I'll say, 'you know how you told me about how this is affecting you not just at work but those things at home, or the financial worry you're experiencing?' I explain how it affects

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it all, and it's like a lightbulb goes on," Mischuk says.

Mischuk isn't keeping her approach a secret – far from it. She spent three years developing a workshop called "Psychosocial Risk Factors with Functional Assessment – Let's Get Started!" currently sponsored by the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, which she has presented to sold-out groups of other occupational therapists in cities across Canada, including an upcoming session in Halifax on November 6 and 7, plus two more in 2016.

Mischuk is also working on another way to help her clients – she is writing a book that tells the "amazing stories" of how some of the most inspiring clients she has worked with over her career have made huge leaps to overcome their own injuries.

"I actually have some amazing stories. My clients really inspire me, and I know their stories can help others too."

MAXIMIZE HUMAN CAPABILITIES
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