

I was empowered by Newkind 2019 to increase the GDH (Gross Domestic Happiness) of my local community by encouraging my employer to develop an implementation plan that guides and supports companies to foster a mentally healthy workplace, starting with our workplace. Once it is fully developed the strategy will hopefully include most GDH happiness indicators but at the moment it centers around the indicators of psychological wellbeing and community vitality.

I arrived at Newkind 2019 late due to work commitments and I was floored by the ability of every Newkinder to courageously take me in, show me a deep level of vulnerability and be their truest selves. At Newkind I experienced and learned about the need to love all parts of ourselves (especially the parts that we view as lacking) and the need for human connection that we have lost in the workplace due to technology and other global pursuits. Most importantly, I realised that you can have a mental health condition and still be a high achiever.

I noticed after a recent mental health episode in November 2018 that upon starting back at work that there is no manual on how to return to work after a mental health episode. For example, what to do when people ask how you are doing; want to know where you have been and what to do because you can only complete half of the work now compared to your previous self.

I learned at Newkind that being vulnerable and telling people about a mental health condition reduces the power it has over you. My first step into advocacy was disclosing my mental health condition to my manager and CEO before I attended Newkind.

Since Newkind I learned and experienced the importance of talking about your uncomfortable emotions, feeling the full range of emotions and most importantly sitting with someone else when they are expressing their heavier emotions and vulnerabilities. I now want to support people in my workplace to connect with and help others who are experiencing similar things. For the longest time I had advice from family, friends, mentors and colleagues to not disclose because it would ruin my career or reputation, being from a small town and working in the mental health field.

I have very slowly experienced the power of sharing my story. I am sharing the message that it is better to say something rather than nothing at all if someone at work is possibly experiencing anxiety or depression. I'm talking to the company that I work for about developing a workplace mental health strategy that we will start to pursue over the next few months, starting with workplace consultation sessions. On an individual level, it has created a huge internal drive and passion to support others to be vulnerable in the workplace.

Written by Lauren Hodge