



**MASO@ISE**  
Health Programme



## **CASE STUDY**

# **NAVIGATING A PERSON POST- TRAUMATIC STRESS AND BURNOUT DISORDER'S RETURN TO WORK**

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# Meet Mark

- A dedicated mid-level Northam Platinum Safety Manager
- Early 50s
- Considered as an expert in his field
- Go-to person for institutional memory as he has worked in Northam Platinum for 20 years.
- Situation:
  - Recent diagnosis: **burnout and PTSD**, after having to manage a major incident at the mine which involved several underground staff losing their lives. Mark was very traumatized by this event and worked even harder afterwards to improve mine safety. Eventually he became very depressed and after seeing Psychiatrist it was recommended that he be **admitted for treatment**.
  - Now: **preparing to reintegrate** into his professional life he is read to go back to work, but....



# Part 1: Mark's Fears and concerns as an employee

**Question:** What is Mark's **main concern** as he prepares to return to his work place?

- a) Fearing the stigma associated with his condition.
- b) Worried about his professional skills being outdated.
- c) Concerned about maintaining his social life.
- d) Anxious about receiving too much support from his manager.

**VOTE NOW**

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**DISCUSS**

**WHAT ELSE IS  
HE  
CONCERNED  
ABOUT?**



# Part 1: Mark's other Fears and Concerns

Mark will be grappling with a range of fears and concerns around:

- **Fear of Triggering Traumatic Memories:** Mark may worry that returning to his work environment could trigger traumatic memories related to the workplace accident that led to his PTSD. The sights, sounds, or even the routine of his job may remind him of the event.
- **Challenges Balancing Work and Self-Care:** Finding the right balance between work responsibilities and self-care is essential for Mark's well-being. He may worry about neglecting self-care routines or not having enough time to manage his mental health effectively.
- **Fear of Discrimination:** Mark may have concerns about workplace discrimination related to his mental health condition. His work culture has always been a very macho one where you are expected to suck it up and carry on. He is worried that after his "breakdown" he won't be given the same opportunities or that he'll face discrimination in promotions or job assignments.



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# Meet Sibongile

Mark's boss

Rising star at Northam Platinum  
– recently promoted as Head of  
Mining Safety Department

Only been with the organization  
for 5 years

Still a bit uncomfortable in her  
new senior managerial role



# Part 2: Manager's fears and biases

**Question:** What would be the best approach for Sibongile, as his line manager, to help Mark when he returns to work ?

- a) Ignore the situation to respect Mark's privacy (Pretend nothing happened).
- b) Get him back into the saddle as soon as possible – send him out to where the accident happens so that he can confront his fears.
- c) Encourage open communication and flexibility.
- d) Recommend him taking additional time off for complete recovery.

**VOTE NOW**

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**DISCUSS**

**WHAT ELSE  
MAY SHE BE  
CONCERNED  
ABOUT?**





# Sibongile's fears and biases

Sibongile will be grappling with a range of stigma and prejudice

- **Perceived Weakness:** She may view burnout and PTSD as a **sign of weakness**, and individuals experiencing it might be stigmatized for not being able to handle stress.
- **Lack of Understanding:** She may not understand the **difference between burnout and laziness**.
- **Blaming the Person:** There can be a tendency to **blame the individual for not managing their work-life balance effectively**.
- **Dismissal:** Burnout may be **dismissed as a temporary phase** that doesn't require attention or support. (Just get over it)

# Part 3: Creating a supportive working environment for people with mental health conditions

**Question:** What step can Sibongile take to create a supportive work environment for Mark?

- a) Suggest that the team avoid discussing his mental health issues to prevent discomfort.
- b) Apply the same working requirement and expectations to the whole team.
- c) Organize mental health awareness training for the team.
- d) Increase his workload gradually based on a strict schedule.

**VOTE NOW**

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**DISCUSS**

**WHAT ELSE  
SHOULD  
SIBONGILE  
DO?**



# Part 3: Creating a supportive working environment for people with mental health conditions (cont.)

- 1. Peer Support:** Sibongile can encourage her colleagues to provide emotional support and mentorship to Mark during his transition. She can assign a peer mentor if feasible to help him navigate challenges.
- 2. Regular Reviews and Adjustments:** Sibongile should continuously evaluate Mark's progress and the effectiveness of the transition plan. Sibongile must be prepared to make adjustments or accommodations as needed.
- 3. Confidentiality and Trust:** Sibongile must maintain confidentiality regarding Mark's mental health condition and treatment. She must foster a trusting relationship by demonstrating empathy and respect.

# Part 3: Creating a supportive working environment for people with mental health conditions

- 1. Communicate openly and empathetically:** Start by having an open and honest conversation with Mark to understand his needs, concerns, and preferences regarding returning to work. Ensure a safe and non-judgmental environment where he can express his feelings and expectations.
- 2. Develop a gradual return-to-work plan:** Work with him to create a personalized plan for gradually reintegration into the workplace. This plan should consider his comfort levels, triggers, work responsibilities, and any necessary accommodations.
- 3. Educate colleagues and supervisors:** Educate colleagues and supervisors about PTSD and its potential impacts on an individual's work performance and behavior. Encourage understanding, patience, and a supportive environment to facilitate a smooth transition back to work.
- 4. Encourage self-advocacy:** Empower Mark to communicate his needs, boundaries, and preferences as he reintegrates into the workplace. Encourage him to voice concerns and request necessary accommodations.

# Part 4: If Sibongile feels she needs professional support around supporting Mark at the workplace

**Question:** Which expert is best placed to assist Sibongile to either improve her efforts of integrating Mark into the workplace or deciding if she needs to be considered for a disability grant?

- a) Social Worker
- b) Medical Doctor
- c) Psychologist
- d) Occupational Therapist

**VOTE NOW**



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## **DISCUSS**

**WHY IS IT  
UNLIKELY THAT  
AN  
OCCUPATIONAL  
THERAPIST WAS  
INVOLVED IN  
MARK'S CASE**




# Part 4: If Mark is still not coping

If Sibongile is uncertain if she has the correct strategies in place to support Mark or if she or Mark feels they are not working, **she can refer Mark to such a specialized OT who will then:**

- a) Conduct a comprehensive assessment of Mark's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social functioning to understand the specific challenges he faces.
- b) Work with Mark to identify any barriers or limitations that may hinder his successful return to work. This includes assessing the impact of PTSD symptoms on his daily functioning.
- c) Design a customized return-to-work programming which may include the OT negotiating with employee/employer regarding accommodations in the workplace in compliance with legal requirements etc.
- d) Asses if he should be boarded

# Take home message

- **Mental Health Support is Vital:** Comprehensive mental health support in the workplace is essential. Employers should prioritize employee wellbeing, offer resources and create a stigma-free environment.
- **Individualized Approaches Matter:** Everyone's mental health journey is unique, and solutions should be tailored to the person's specific needs and circumstances.
- **Continuity of Care is Essential:** Maintaining a continuum of care, including ongoing assessments, adjustments and access to resources to support individuals in their recovery journey is important.
- **Inclusivity and Understanding Are Key:** A culture of inclusivity and understanding is essential. Educating staff about mental health, reducing stigma and promoting empathy can create a more supportive and inclusive work environment for everyone.



It is not a choice  
It is the law  
It is also the right thing to  
do

Various laws govern the employer employee relationship between when an employee has a diagnosed mental health condition including

- Mental Health Care Act 17 of 2002
- Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995
- Employment Equity Act 28 of 1998

Thank You

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