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Quarry manager burnout a wake-up call - loQ NZ

Bernie Napp - Tue, 05 Dec 2017

Burnout, depression and suicide among quarry managers has spurred the Institute of Quarrying New Zealand to tackle the issue.

Matt Webster, loQ NZ central districts branch chair, says four people died in the quarry sector in 2015, and one so far in 2017. Adding that to New Zealand's suicide statistics of 500-600 deaths a year highlighted the need to invite leadership coach Nigel Dixon to a branch meeting in Palmerston North on Saturday.

Speaking at Transdiesel's premises, Dixon shared his experience of burnout and depression, and spoke on the causes and symptoms, and how to return to resilience.

"There were about 50 of us there," Webster says. "I don't think anyone walked away without ticking one of those boxes."

"The stress on quarry workers is massive; we are trying to get that message across to the guys, otherwise you will fall over on the job. It's not unusual to pull huge hours, away from your family to be able to meet peak demands."

"From my perspective, if you feel there is the potential for burnout, you have to start a dialogue with your team to give them the tools to help them through it."

Mike Chilton, secretary for the branch, says the issue has had a negative side-effect on gaining and maintaining certificates of competency for health and safety.

"There are guys in their fifties and sixties who have run quarries for most of their working lives who don't want to go through more training, and CPD [continuous professional development]. It's just one more thing to do on top of an expanding work load."

MinEx CEO, Wayne Scott, says mental health awareness came to the fore in Australia last year with two high-profile suicides of quarry managers. They were working for large organisations in different parts of the country, and were well known in their field.

That spurred an Institute of Quarrying Australia campaign than ran for most of 2016. The result was a [field guide](#) for quarry workers to help them determine if they are at risk of burnout and depression. loQ NZ members have access to that programme.

Causes and symptoms of burnout and depression

Dixon says the effects of internalised stress can be emotional or physical, including diabetes, dietary or digestive complications. Symptoms include exhaustion, developing a cynical attitude to work, loss of effectiveness, and loss of emotional resilience.

"We behave our way into depression. It's a slow, gradual thing, and we drop into a hole."

[Christina Maslach and Michael Leiter](#) of the University of California, Berkeley, and Acadia University, respectively, list six elements that lead to burnout. They are the perception or reality of work overload, lack of control over work, lack of reward, lack of a sense of community, lack of fairness, and conflict of values.

Path to resilience

Dixon says that to have a life that is sustaining requires having an "inner world", that is, having the time to do things that are "good for your soul".

"If you are going to become resilient as a person, you need to know what you want to do with your own time."

He suggests "if your body is speaking to you, if you are emotionally fragile" to go to the doctor, find a mentor or coach, spend more time with friends and family, and taking quality time off work.

Lifeline New Zealand 0800 543 354

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