

... how you can fight 'burnout' effectively?

YOU CAN'T LEAD a team very effectively if you're burnt out.

The symptoms aren't always obvious, but if you pay attention to your feelings and behaviour, you'll be able to treat the problem before it gets out of control.

Here's what to look for and what to do:

• **Fatigue/exhaustion.** If you find yourself often feeling worn out and tired, take a look at how much rest and exercise you're getting.

Be sure to schedule enough time in your day to take care of yourself physically.

• **Emotional exhaustion.** If you notice that you don't have the enthusiasm or drive that you once had, or that you don't even have the energy to get angry when it's appropriate, you probably need to take some kind of break to replenish your emotional reserves.

If you can't take a lengthy vacation, try spending some time away from work doing things that are meaningful to you — listening to music, being outdoors, visiting an art museum.

• **Isolation from other people.** Do you find that you're not paying attention to the accomplishments of those around you, especially people who expect you to provide advice and leadership?

Make a point of looking for their positive achievements and praising them for their contributions to the organization.

• **Feelings of being unappreciated.** When your own efforts aren't recognized or appreciated, your personal morale will suffer.

Look for ways to share news of your contributions with people who ought to know.

• **Obsession.** If you find yourself becoming too focused on a single project or area of your work, force yourself to take a break and do something different to restore your balance. ■

SOURCENOTE: Adapted from THE SECRET TO MOTIVATING YOURSELF AND OTHERS, by Susan Rempel, on the WCS Web site

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

To create the life you truly want, you need systems that automatically carry you down-stream toward your ultimate goals. Design your office, your home, your schedule and your relationships so they "conspire" to help you get there! Talk with loved ones so they actively support you! Eliminate clutter and replace it with equipment, furnishings and tools that make you smile, that energize you and keep you focused. Design a schedule that includes time for your most important daily priorities.

Manage your meetings with skill and style

by Odette Pollar

Studies show that managers spend over half their work time in meetings.

UNFORTUNATELY, these same studies indicate that meetings score within the top five of time-wasting activities.

Causes of meetings

Meetings, per se, are not a problem. It's when meetings are called for purposes that are best served in other ways that they become a time and energy drain. Look out for three types of meetings to avoid:

• **The social meeting.** Have you ever attended a meeting designed primarily to allow people to socialize?

There is no set agenda except perhaps to "talk things over."

When you leave, you have no notes, no work assignments and no problems solved.

• **The habit meeting.** "We always have a work group meeting on Friday." The reason for holding a meeting shouldn't be because you always do.

Think carefully in advance if it's really necessary.

• **The copycat meeting.** Just because the work team down the hall meets twice a week doesn't mean yours has to.

Some departments, depending on the nature of their work, may need to meet twice a week.

Other divisions can run smoothly meeting every two weeks.

Meetings are the most useful and productive when called with specific reasons in mind.

Meeting successfully

The success of a meeting can be greatly influenced by how much pre-work or planning you do as the organizer.

Keep these points in mind:

- **Focus on the purpose** of the meeting and what the desired outcomes are.
- **Invite only those** who are needed.
- **Create an agenda** and distribute it in advance.
- **Limit the length** of the meeting



and, when necessary, place a time limit on each agenda item.

• **Be sure the meeting site** is organized. Are the seating arrangements appropriate?

• **Can the speaker's visuals** be seen by everyone? Is all of the equipment available and in working order?

• **Stay on time and on track.** Keep tangential issues to a minimum and control interruption.

Skillful meeting management not only serves to keep participants on track, it is also an important skill for a manager to master.

Being able to competently manage this key performance area will help you and your team succeed. ■

SOURCENOTE: Odette Pollar is author of 365 WAYS TO SIMPLIFY YOUR WORK LIFE

Satisfied employees take less 'sickies'"

EMPLOYEES ARE MORE LIKELY to 'take a sickie' if they have a low degree of job involvement and are not satisfied with their jobs.

This is the finding of research by Professor Juergen Wegge of Ludwig-Maximilians-Universitaet, Munich, Germany.

Four hundred and thirty-six workers in a German civil service organisation were surveyed on attitudes to their jobs and the organisation.

Questions focused on two specific areas; workers' job satisfaction — i.e. In general "I am satisfied with my job", and their level of job involvement i.e. "My work means everything to me".

The results were then compared to their levels of sickness absenteeism for a year.

The results showed that there was a link between how satisfied workers felt with their job, their level of job involvement and the number of days taken off sick.

Workers with high job satisfaction and high job involvement had the least number of 'sickies'.

There was no significant difference in levels of absence between men and women or those who worked full or part-time.

Interestingly, both job related attitudes — job involvement and job satisfaction — showed a strong link that had not been researched before.

Job involvement of workers was only associated with absenteeism in a significant way if employees were also dissatisfied with their job.

This suggests a link between individual personality and job behaviour was more likely to be observed in situations when job satisfaction is low.

Professor Wegge stated, "Sickness absence costs the UK economy £10-12 billion annually so it is useful to investigate to what extent individual attitudes affect the number of absences." ■

SOURCENOTE: JOURNAL OF OCCUPATIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Leonard J Robertson

The way I see it...

Systems beat goals every time

IN A PREVIOUS ISSUE of Business Alert I wrote that "systems beat goals, every time."

That sparked considerable interest and requests to say more about this. The key is that goals are a 'destination' or target in the future.

Systems involve automatic, daily actions to get us there.

Two of America's great 19th century industrialists, Andrew Carnegie and John Rockefeller, both grew up poor, lacked formal education and yet built colossal empires.

They were roundly criticized but each achieved extraordinary success in their respective fields.

They were the two richest men in the world, and they prided themselves on working very little!

Rockefeller often took naps during important Board meetings, and went home for lunch and a nap every day.

Carnegie rarely worked more than three hours a day. The key to their amazing success

was not hard work, brilliance, education or 'luck.' The key is that they were each able to develop systems and organizations that created enormous wealth.

The same is true today. Bill Gates did not create Microsoft by being a brilliant software engineer. He built Microsoft by devising systems and partnerships that made his software indispensable around the world.

Remember his early vision of a "computer on every desk?" Well, look at your desk!

The fact is, that too many people are trying to create beauty while surrounded by chaos.

They are trying to achieve wonderful goals, but their energy and focus are on running errands or "swatting mosquitoes."

It's very hard to achieve great things when you're swimming up-stream all the time!

To create the life you truly want, you need systems that automatically carry you down-stream toward your ultimate goals. ■

SOURCENOTE: With thanks to Dr Philip E Humbert.

Accident-proof your workplace with these guidelines

It's far less painful — for morale and the corporate wallet — to prevent an accident than to recover from one.

TO IMPROVE SAFETY CONSCIOUSNESS in your company, ask these questions:

- Identification. Have I conducted a safety audit and identified hazardous tasks or equipment? Am I aware of which work activities are most likely to lead to employee stress or fatigue?

- Elimination. Have I eliminated unnecessary hazards and found ways to minimize those that can't be eliminated?

- Explanation. Have I stressed the importance of safety to my staff? Have I distributed appropriate educational materials

and prominently displayed relevant safety posters?

- Participation. Have I looked for ways to involve employees in the safety process—for instance, by asking workers to create their own lists of potential hazards I may have overlooked?

- Motivation. Have I created an incentive programme that will promote safety awareness and reward those who put safety first?

- Preparation. If the worst happens, do I have an accident plan in place and does each employee know what procedures to follow? ■

SOURCENOTE: —Adapted from "Winning the paper war: Keeping your workplace safe and healthy," by Paul Jarvie, in the New Zealand Herald

Dying for a compliment

You've heard the old expression "Don't speak ill of the dead."

IT MIGHT BE A BETTER WORLD — and certainly a happier workplace — if people would stop speaking ill of the living.

Or better yet, think about all the good things you'd miss about your employees if you never saw them again — and share those things before it's too late.

That's exactly what the **NEW YORK SUN** did for master showman P.T. Barnum just before his death in 1891.

The editors got wind of the ailing circus impresario's complaints that the press only says good things about people after they die.

So they did the unthinkable — ran Barnum's obituary while he was still alive.

The headline read: "**Great And Only Barnum. He Wanted To Read His Obituary. Here It Is.**" ■

SOURCENOTE: —Adapted from the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Web site

Should people tell the truth?

“OF COURSE”, you say. But what if the truth hurts?

Do you really want to know what employees think of your pet project or your management style? Probably not. But there's a difference between wanting to know something and needing to know.

You may not want to hear bad news, but as a manager, you need to hear it. And here's how you can convince employees to give it to you:

1. Hold your tongue. An employee has just shared negative feedback.

Your gut reaction is to breathe fire. That's why you should hold your tongue. Try to nod your head and look as though you're pondering this bit of news as you count to 10 and try to keep your composure.

If need be, simply tell the employee you'll have to give the comments more thought before you respond. Act as nonchalant as possible until you've had time to cool down.

2. Recognize the effort. Even if you can't bring yourself to do it immediately, always make a point of thanking the truth teller. And if the information was shared in front of others, make sure to offer your thanks publicly.

You want to send a message that a) workers aren't penalized for being honest, and b) you are a manager who values forthrightness.

3. Solicit additional info. People need to feel needed, so asking others for help is a real morale booster. If someone tells you a hard truth, ask for that person's input on how you should handle the situation. You aren't obligated to follow the advice, but you'll win approval points for making the gesture.

4. Reward your truth-tellers. If you want to create a culture of honesty, incorporate truth telling into your incentive and recognition programs.

And when promoting, give preferential consideration to those who are fearlessly honest no matter how high the stakes. ■

SOURCENOTE — Adapted from ENCOURAGE TRUTH TELLING, by Rick Brenner, on the Chaco Canyon Consulting Web site

Selling sense

Build customer relationships with practical news

Keeping in touch with your customers between sales is important. Calling “just to touch base,” though, can be a time-wasting exercise.

EVERY TIME YOU CALL a customer, you should have something of value to share.

Your conversation should be strictly directed at the customer and his or her needs: “I thought you'd like to know . . .” and not “I wondered if I could help you with anything.”

Try these ideas:

• **Industry news.** You're keeping track of the customer's market and industry in order to sell more effectively, aren't you? So call your customer when something changes that might affect his or her business: “I just read that one of your competitors is going out of business. I wondered if you needed to increase your order with us to take advantage of the opportunity to expand your market share.”

• **New company policies.** If your company changes the rules on purchasing procedures or financing options, let your customers know right away so they can plan accordingly. “We're going to begin offering a bigger discount on orders of \$1,000, and I thought you'd want to take advantage of this right away.”

• **Company changes.** Do you have a new CEO? A new salesperson? Have you acquired a new division? “Hi, I just wanted to let you know that Mr. Smith is retiring and our new CEO is looking over our price structure.

Here's what to expect . . .”

• **New products/services.** Of course you should let existing customers know directly when you launch a new product. Don't forget to update buyers about service plan changes and new options for making purchases, returns, or upgrades.

• **Brainstorm more ideas.** Get together with a group of people from different parts of your organization.

Generate possibilities for a sentence that opens: “I was just calling to let you know _____.” The more heads you have to help you develop ideas, the more good ones you'll have in store for future use. ■

SOURCENOTE — Adapted from WHAT TO SAY ON REPEATED FOLLOW-UP CALLS, by Art Sobczak, on SalesDog.com

Leadership

How to be an effective leader

A common definition of an effective leader is one who is able to wisely exercise influence over others for the good of the organization.

by Gary Vikesland, MA LP CEAP

TO BE AN EFFECTIVE LEADER at work means to persuade others to accomplish your goals, i.e., the company's goals.

Of course, we all know of negative ways to persuade others, which only results in temporary gain followed by a long-term drop in productivity.

However, what most people are not aware of are the characteristics that effective leaders utilize daily to motivate, influence, and persuade employees.

Simply stated, effective leaders engage in the following traits and behaviours to **DRIVE** their employees' performance.

DIRECTION: Leaders point the way for the organisation and for the employees.

Leaders help the organisation answer the question, “Where are we going?” Secondly, leaders help employees answer the question, “What are my goals?”

A leader cannot be effective until he/she knows the direction of the organisation.

Once the leader knows the direction of the organisation, he/she can assist in directing the energy of the employees.

RELATIONSHIPS: Leaders build productive and satisfying relationships with employees. Employees develop their desire to produce and their commitment for the organisation

primarily through the relationships they have with the leader(s) within the organisation.

Leaders, who create positive relationships with their employees, have employees who are more willing to accept their vision for the organisation.

INCENTIVES: Leaders create paths that employees want to follow, in order to achieve both their goals and the organisation's goals.

A leader first determines the organisation's goals, next he/she determines the employees' goals, and then matches and correlates how the employees can meet their goals at the same time the organisation meets its objectives.

VISION: Leaders talk about the current big picture and the future. Where will the organisation be in a year or two?

What is in store for a particular employee or department in the future? What are the company's current objectives?

A leader communicates vision in terms of both fact and dreams.

An effective leader does not “sugarcoat” the truth, but provides negative facts with plans for positive change.

For instance, “Even though the department did not meet its goals for this quarter, my goal is to create an environment from which the department can shrink the deficit for next quarter.” ■

The Institute for Independent Business

FOUNDED IN 1984 in the UK, the Institute for Independent Business (IIB) is now one of the world's largest international networks of business advice providers.

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WORDS OF WISDOM

"Volunteer nothing, but listen to everything. If you accumulate enough gossip, it becomes information, and enough information can reveal truth."

— Robert L. Genua

Selling

Cold-calling for phonophobes

Many small business owners are fearful of cold-calling and so miss out on what can be a very low-cost way to drum up customers.

With a little bit of training and some practise, cold-calling is a relatively easy task to master. Here's a summary of cold-calling tips;

Passion and motivation. If you're struggling to feel motivated, think about what's holding you back — it could be anything from a lack of training to a lack of belief in your product. Whatever it is, you need to tackle it. Take a hard look to see whether your fear stems from the fact that you don't know who your key customers, and what benefits you can offer them.

Tenacity and resilience. Knock-backs go with the territory, but if you're going to be successful you need to pick yourself up and start again. Your pitch won't appeal to everyone but, with the right attitude, knowledge and skills, you will win business.

Focus and belief. Focus on what you want to achieve from the call and avoid launching into an extensive sales pitch. If your aim is to book a face-to-face meeting, get their interest, gather information and ask for an appointment to discuss how you can help in more detail.

In the know. Before going near a phone

it's vital that you ensure you have an in-depth knowledge of your product or service. Equip yourself with the knowledge needed to answer potential questions and present a professional image for yourself and your business.

Understand the prospect. Research the prospect before you pick up the phone — What do they do? How do they operate at present? How big are they? And how can your product help them achieve more?

The competition. The final piece in the knowledge jigsaw is knowing the competition. You need to know what else is in the market if you are to build the respect and relationships needed to win business. Be able to demonstrate why your product is superior and know any weaknesses that may be thrown at you.

Getting past the 'gatekeeper'. You're unlikely to get a direct line to your prospect — you may need to go through colleagues or a secretary. Getting past these 'gatekeepers' is a skill in itself. Build rapport with them. Get to know their name and find out a little bit about them. Use this information when you call next time. ■

SOURCENOTE: Business 121

Market research

Designing a questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRES CAN BE USED to gather valuable information for your business.

Whatever you're researching, you'll get better, more meaningful results if you follow these tips for better questionnaires.

What are you trying to find out? A good questionnaire is designed so that your results will tell you what you want to find out. Start by writing down what you are trying to do in a few clear sentences.

How are you going to use the information? There is no point conducting research if the results aren't going to be used — make sure you know why you are asking the questions in the first place.

Make sure you cover everything you will need when it comes to analysing the answers. e.g. maybe you want to compare answers given by men and women. You can only do this if you've remembered to record the gender of each respondent on each questionnaire.

Telephone, Postal, Web, Face-to-Face? There are many methods used to ask questions and each has its good and bad points. **Postal surveys** can be cheap but responses can be low and can take a long time to receive, **face-to-face** can be expensive but will generate the fullest responses, web surveys can be cost-effective but hit and miss on response rates, and telephone can be costly, but will often generate high response rates, give fast turnaround and will allow for probing. ■

SOURCENOTE: These tips were kindly provided by INTELLIGENT INSIGHT, providers of business solutions.

Web sense

Choosing and using keywords

IT IS INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT to get top rankings for single keywords. You should think of using multi-word phrases.

Many people see 'keywords' as the single most important aspect of any site promotion effort.

Webmasters should spend time defining keywords; however, this task should be carried out with a number of other things in mind.

The 'Meta tags' within web pages are used by search engines to determine what pages are about — they are typically repetitions of the main words or subjects contained in the text portion of each page.

You will have an idea what search phrases you want to be associated with your site and hope for high rankings based on these ideas.

Simply placing keywords within the Meta tags and document text will not guarantee a good search engine ranking.

The most important point is to recognise that the Internet is growing at an exponential rate, with more and more competitors arriving online all the time, all competing for the same market on the search engines. You should think of using multi-word phrases (such as 'buy dvd online', or 'marketing services uk', and include the big-hitting words within the Meta tags, but with more of an emphasis on multi-word phrases.

Make sure your keywords appear in the Title and Description tags, within the text, and within 'header' (H1, H2, H3) tags. ■

SOURCENOTE: Business 121

For more information, please call Leonard J Robertson on 612 91814834