



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Too Much Can Be Too Bad!

Smart workers are more productive than workaholics

Key learnings

- Workaholism is a deadly addiction that can impede organizational wellness
- The key is working smarter, not longer
- Needed time off prevents burnout and rejuvenates employee creativity and performance

Very often we observe friends who constantly check official mail when they are home on weekends. Very often we see people on a vacation constantly on their phones inquiring about the office. Some people are so passionately attached to their work they do not wish to see beyond. Hard workers start off to prove themselves, but unreasonably long hours of work eventually leads them to the 'me and my work' syndrome.

Dr. Harvette Grey, a psychologist, believes that "If you are doing a good job on the job, that's good, but to really do a good job, you have to have something other than work. We all want to make money, but not at the expense of relationships."

Take the case of Maria, a biotechnology graduate working for one of the most reputed firms. She is a topper in her graduation and a top performer at work. However, she takes time off to indulge in her favorite sport or visit old age homes with gifts. Maria believes "I could not maintain focus and energy if I worked nonstop. I would completely lose perspective."

The Busy Business

Working hard is not all that counts. Working smarter is the key to success. "Just 'staying busy' is not what your boss wants" says Steve Rothberg, founder of CollegeRecruiter.com. Most often one comes across individuals who are occupied with certain work. Whether the work performed is productive or useful is immaterial to these workers. Quite often unproductive activities exhaust the organizations savings and increase expenses.

In the past, employees who worked overtime were always looked up to by others. The reasons for the overtime could have varied from pending work, need for extra pay or even rework towards rectification. Seldom has the authentic desire to excel in the job been a motivator for the overtime.

Thankfully, this phenomenon is almost extinct in most workplaces. Employers and employees alike have understood the value of being smart workers by taking time off and tackling exhaustion.

The concern is 'Are the most hardworking employees the most successful ones?' Today, the unbearably hard-working employees are typically seen as 'self-centric',



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‘fiercely aggressive’, ‘self-doubting’ and ‘unorganized.’ Dreadfully hard-working employees offer dwindling returns to the organization.

Time Off

Employees who put in longer hours of work lose focus and eventually disorder and inefficiency creeps in. The most common ill-effects of working too hard are:

- Losing focus
- Long-term stress and fatigue
- Ill-health
- Diminishing creativity levels
- Workaholism
- Unbalanced personal life

"If you work all the time, you lose your edge" cautions Diane Fassel, author of the book **‘Working Ourselves to Death’**.

In practical terms, an employee immersed in trivial jobs and issues will be most unlikely to get imaginative. Creativity cannot come to an employee engrossed completely in mundane activities.

Most often, such employees are petrified of being branded as losers. Their constant work gives them a fallacy of being confident. In reality, confidence comes from belief in oneself and the work well done with integrity and awareness.

Yerkes-Dodson Law and Workaholism

According to the Yerkes-Dodson Law, “too little or too much stimulation is bad.” Similarly, a happy employee is the one whose work function is neither very heavy nor very light.

Workaholism is yet another obsession associated with people ‘who can’t stop working.’ Experts define workaholism as ‘exclusion of everything else in one’s life.’

Workaholism is a serious condition that results in lowered self-confidence, workplace morale and poor performance. Ironically, most employees flaunt the term proudly. World over and particularly in the U.S workaholics are on the rise. Workaholism is a very misconstrued addiction. People interpret work addiction as ‘working hard’. However, there is a distinct difference between hard workers and workaholics. Hard workers work hard on their jobs and relax once a task or project is completed.

Workaholics typically work long hours even when not required. Most often they are wedded to their jobs. Checking, rechecking and constantly thinking about the job even on the beach are the characteristics of a workaholic. Laptops and e-mail have simplified things for workaholics.

A study by the **Families and Work Institute** reveals



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- That one in three Americans bring work home at least once a week
- Americans take short vacations, 19 days per year compared to 42 days in Germany

Tell-tale signs of a workaholic

- The employee works for longer hours than required
- Neglects personal life; talks about work all the time, even at home
- A conspicuous absence of any hobbies or social life
- Calls office even on a vacation
 - (Or probably never goes on a vacation)

Stress-Free Organizations

Occasionally organizations prefer workaholics anticipating greater productivity. The truth is far from this expectation. Workaholics are bad team players as they are self-focused. The desire for fame prevents effective delegation as they want absolute credit for work performed. Excess workload often results in fatigue and stress that eventually leads to burnout. Other features characteristic of a workaholic are restlessness, flared tempers and negative vibes. These thwart positive workplace culture.

According to psychologists "There's a loss of physical and psychological health and eventually they [may] die of a stroke or heart attack."

Helpline

Organizations inadvertently create workaholics by over-stressing on performance, targets and rewards. Workaholics need careful handling.

Managers though can insist on /suggest:

Setting realistic goals within flexible time frames: Allotting extra time assists rational project management and avoids burnout.

Monitoring employee work: Mentoring aids in identifying employees overloaded with unnecessary work. Peer mentoring or coaching enhances team spirit, confidence and ensures people are not pushed beyond their limitations.

Respecting time-off: Managers can encourage time off with weekly sport sessions, hobbies or 'use-it-or-lose it vacation programs.' Employees who do not avail their yearly vacation leave lose it and are not eligible for cash reimbursement.

Positive work ethics: At Ernst and Young employees are denied access to official mail when on a vacation. Team calendars that specify the deadlines are common feature at E&Y. The calendars also include personal commitments. The benefits are dual. For one, a person who needs to leave early for a family reunion gets the support from his teammates. Secondly, a person who doesn't list personal commitments is invariably invited for lunch and chances for a team gathering are high.



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Wellness Programs: Qualified specialists can talk with employees about their health concerns, and offer stress management techniques to offset work overload. The CEO too can address teams and talk about stress-free workplaces and their impact on performance. Counseling by psychiatrists can help deal with workaholics better.

Workaholism can be dealt with patiently at all levels. Employees prone to overworking must develop hobbies and a social life, and nurture relationships. Most importantly, turn off the cell phone when it's your time off!