



EAP SUPERVISOR ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

April 2024



DEER OAKS PRESENTS

Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series

Successful Approaches to Difficult Employee Conversations

Date: Monday, April 29, 2024

Time: 1:00 PM-2:00 PM CST

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OVERCOMING OVERLOAD

Tips on How to Slow Down, Get Organized, and Say "No"

There are a lot of worn-out people who work demanding jobs, then begin a second shift as soon as they head home.

This might include running errands, picking up children at various locations, and buying dinner before arriving home. Cooking, helping with homework, putting kids to bed, making phone calls, and paying bills may all be part of the second shift before falling into bed exhausted.

Many people live life as if they have two full-time jobs. Most people feel as though they are always working, even when at home. The emphasis on productivity usually found in the workplace has seeped into free time—and it's wearing people out.

Does life need to be this frantic and exhausting? Is it possible, in this stress-filled world, to balance work and personal life?

It is possible, but it requires changing the approach to work and to personal lives. Here are three suggestions as possible starting points:

1. Slow your pace and intensity to focus on what's important.
2. Make a work plan.
3. Learn to say no to urgent but less-important demands.

Slow your pace and intensity to focus on what's important.

The idea of slowing down is scary to some people. They're so accustomed to being in perpetual hyperspeed that they rarely think about using their time differently. However, living at too fast a pace is stressful and diminishes the quality of life. When people deliberately slow down, they are forced to decide how to use the limited time, because they are choosing to do less.

Instead of spouting energy in all directions simultaneously, focus that energy in one direction at a time. This enables you to be more thorough in what you do and to deliver more quality. It allows you to be more engaged and satisfied with your work.

Slowing down also forces people to be mindful of personal values. Truly important activities or people will get the energy they deserve, and lower priorities must wait. Here are some simple but effective ways to begin slowing down:

- Slow the pace at which you walk. Look around you, especially when you're outside. Glance at the sky and notice the shapes of clouds. Feel the breeze on your face.



- When you're eating, take smaller bites. Chew your food more slowly. Taste the flavors. Too often, eating is simply refueling, and not the enjoyable experience it can be.
- Choose your words more carefully in conversation. This will force you to talk more slowly and become more aware of what's being said. Search for words that clearly communicate what you mean.
- When you're driving, ease up on the accelerator. Leave a few minutes early so that you don't have to weave in and out of traffic, tailgate, or get worked up over slow drivers.

As you develop new rhythms for living, even more techniques will occur to you. People who choose slower ways of living often find they enjoy life more, feel less stressed, and believe it or not, get more done. They're also more satisfied with their work, because they're attending to the things in their lives that are most important.

Make a work plan.

Most people spend too much time on unnecessary things. This means the truly important matters get pushed aside. If this happens often enough, you find yourself moving from one deadline crisis to another.

For instance, look at the case of Dan (his name has been changed for confidentiality), who sought counseling for his problems with stress.

Dan discussed how he spends most of his evenings and weekends at work, trying to stay ahead of his workload. His wife and children resented his employer because his work responsibilities left him little time at home.

When asked how he organized his daily time—how he prioritized his workload for a given day—Dan said he had no plan.

In fact, after being asked to keep an hourly log of his time at work over a week, he found that he was spending an average of two to three hours a day chatting with coworkers, checking email, filing documents, and answering the phone—none of which was essential to his main job description.

With practice, he turned that time spent on low-value activities into productive accomplishments. As a result, he rarely needed to work overtime and gained much more time with his family, and he achieved a sense of balance between work and life, which made his job more satisfying.

Effective work plans include events and commitments related to your personal life as well as your job. Start by writing down a list of work and personal events, projects, and commitments. Then, realistically estimate how much time each will take. Finally, plot your course of action to accomplish them.

By putting this all on paper, you make the plan concrete. To increase the likelihood that you'll stick with your plan, tell someone about it, and ask him or her to hold you accountable for it.

Learn to say no to urgent but less-important demands.

Slowing the pace of your life and making a work plan can be derailed if you don't learn to say no when necessary. There's no shortage of urgent requests. Some of these, no doubt, must be completed, but many, if not most, only seem important because they ask for immediate attention.

People who let their schedules be ruled by urgent requests from other people often look at these requests as obligations instead of choices. Here's an example, from a student, Gloria, who recently attended a stress-management workshop.

Gloria told the class she was stressed out because she had so many troubled people in her life who constantly needed her. Every day brought a new "emergency," as she called it, taking her away from her job, family, and other responsibilities.

Another student asked Gloria why she felt that she needed to be the caretaker for all of these people. "Because these people depend on me," Gloria said. "They have no one else."

"Why don't you occasionally say no to them?" another student asked. "Tell them you have personal commitments that keep you from helping at that moment." Gloria, beginning to cry, responded, "I don't feel like I have the option to do what's best for me."

Gloria is a classic people-pleaser. She rearranges her life to accommodate others, in hopes they'll like her and give her the respect for which she longs. The problem isn't her desire to help people, but her willingness to disrupt her life whenever someone makes a request. She doesn't give herself the option to say *no*.

It's perfectly acceptable to refuse urgent requests that come your way. Don't say yes when that small voice inside you screams no! Respect your own limited time and energy. If responding to a so-called emergency means you're inviting unwelcome stress or sacrificing more important priorities, simply decline. Elaborate explanations of why you can't accommodate requests aren't necessary.

Breaking free of overwork tendencies is more about changing what happens inside of you than trying to change your environment. The reality is that you live in a stressful, demanding culture. You can't do much to change that.

You can, however, change how fast you move and how focused you are on the work and personal priorities that are most important to you. That's a great start toward a satisfying balance between work and personal life.

Source: Gilles, G. & Morgan, H. (Updated 2023). *Overcoming overload* (B. Schuette, Ed.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

TIME MANAGEMENT AT WORK: COMMON DISTRACTIONS

Common Distractions, Obstacles, and Solutions

Distractions can be caused in many ways. For example, a big distraction faced by many is being interrupted by others, whether it's someone dropping by without an appointment, a telephone call, or even a scheduled meeting. Think about how many times you are interrupted and how much time you spend on those interruptions. You may want to track interruptions to determine how to better manage them. You may need to allocate more time in your daily time management plan for interruptions.

Here are some possible solutions for handling a distraction:

- Ask a person who is interrupting to explain what he or she needs. Give people an immediate response, or tell them that you will have to respond later as they see you writing down their question.
- For people who regularly stop by your office, stand up when they come in, and walk them out. Pick a logical destination such as the restroom, the water cooler, or the door. Do not let them sit down or lean on something so as to allow them to take a position in your work area.
- When phone calls come at the wrong time, let callers know you have only one or two minutes because you are in the middle of something. Answer their questions within the imposed two minutes, or politely cut the calls short by asking if you can call back.
- Have a written agenda for all meetings.
- Ensure 25 percent of your work day is not allocated and can be used for important distractions. Make certain the average time spent on distractions does not exceed this time allotment. If you can identify a pattern of important interruptions, consider scheduling time for them in your time management plan.

Email is a vital part of most businesses. However, the use of email can be distracting. Some people schedule two or three times each day to check and reply to email so they can focus on other tasks the remainder of the day.



There are many ways a work environment can be distracting. Examples include work environments that are cluttered, noisy, and either too hot or too cold. Here are some possible solutions:

- Keep your work area and files neat and organized.
- Work with those around you to establish noise guidelines.
- Keep a sweater or a fan in your work area.

Strive to remove self-initiated distractions from your workday. Examples of self-initiated distractions may include daydreaming, stopping for snacks, making personal phone calls, surfing the internet, sending personal emails, playing computer games, and engaging in other forms of procrastination. Consider completing lower-priority tasks on your time management plan if you need a change of pace.

Source: U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). (n.d.). Common distractions, obstacles, and solutions (p. 18). In Time management for a small business. Retrieved September 10, 2019, from <https://www.sba.gov>

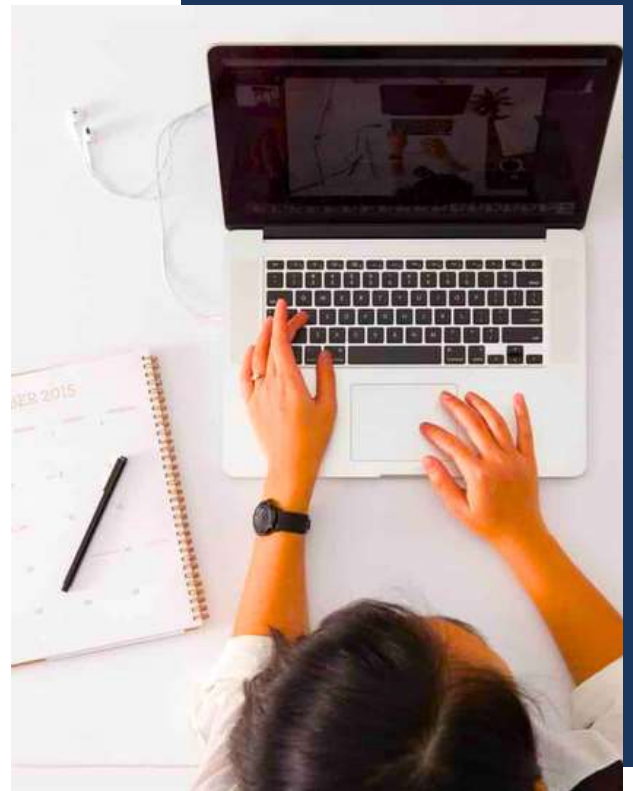
ASK YOUR EAP!

Q. I am making a formal referral of my employee to the EAP, but I don't think the counselor can be of much help. This employee has been under my supervision for over ten years. The issues with him remain disorganization and not caring about satisfactory performance. How can the EAP help?

A. Given the length of time you have known your employee, have a consult with the EAP and examine the history of his performance issues and how they have been managed. Do this prior to referral. Discuss issues in correcting his performance and patterns of behavior, and how you have responded to his conduct issues or failure to perform the job satisfactorily. Helping employees resolve long-term performance issues is sometimes best accomplished through this discovery process in a meeting with the supervisor so important insights can be gathered by the EAP prior to an assessment. Your employee may have problems that remain hidden and must be addressed, but improving performance may also require the EAP offering guidance to you on improving your supervision.

Q. My employee is involved in a divorce, and it has been very disruptive to his performance. There are legal and parental issues. I have suggested the EAP, but he hasn't reached out yet. How can the EAP help? Perhaps I can share this information to motivate him to participate.

A. Here's what you might want to share: 1) Emotional support: Taking advantage of the fact that the EAP is a safe and confidential space to express feelings and emotions related to the divorce. 2) Coping strategies: Learning effective coping strategies to manage stress, anxiety, and turmoil. 3) Time management: Organizing time to balance work responsibilities and personal needs during this challenging period, which includes learning how not to get overwhelmed. 4) Communication skills: Improving communication skills to help navigate difficult conversations, both at work and in personal relationships, including knowing how important it is to communicate with you and maintain transparency about the situation without oversharing. 5) Conflict resolution: Receiving guidance on resolving conflicts at the office or in personal relationships. 6) Self-care practices: Exploring activities to promote physical and mental well-being to counterbalance the stress of the divorce. 7) Goal setting: Helping the employee maintain a sense of direction and purpose. 8) Referrals: Directing to additional resources or support services, such as legal assistance, financial counseling, or support groups.



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