



HEALTHQUEST

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOCUSING ON
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND CONCERNS.

ENERGY MANAGEMENT: A NEW ANSWER TO DOING MORE WITH LESS!

In these days of economic restraint, "Doing more with less," is an all too familiar a phrase in the workplace. For most of us, it means handling heavier workloads. The experts are saying that workers are not as productive as they could be, but workers are saying that they are working as hard as they can.

Is it possible that we need new solutions to our productivity problems?

Contrary to popular belief, pushing ourselves longer and harder may not be the best way to accomplish more. In fact, the experts have produced evidence that may cause us to think otherwise. The option they offer to working harder is working more effectively. Understanding and accepting the fact that we have to change the way we work may be the vital key to coping with increased pressures and heavier workloads.

One thing that can have a major influence on the way we work is energy management. And for most of us, energy management is something new. In fact, it's something we've never even thought about before. We've all heard plenty about time management and stress management. And it's likely that we are going to hear more about energy management in the future.

Anne McGee-Cooper is the author of the book *You Don't Have To Go Home Exhausted!* And a leading authority on "Energy Engineering." She first became interested in the subject when her Dallas-based firm found that teaching clients how to manage their time was not enough. She says that they could teach their clients how to budget time for a big project, but if the client didn't have the necessary energy, the project dragged on and on, or was done in a mediocre way.

McGee-Cooper also points out that energy management is not the same as stress management. "Although stress can definitely be a factor in low energy," she says, "getting stress under control does not necessarily result in sustained high energy levels and increased motivation."

The good news is that anyone can learn how to work more easily and effectively.

ENERGY STRATEGIES

Here, gathered from the ideas of experts, are many energy strategies worth considering:

- ▲ Match your energy to the task. Prime time - when most people's energy level is at peak - is between 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon. Yet it's surprising how many of us waste at least some of this time on trivial tasks. One way to avoid this trap is to plan your next day's work at the end of the previous day. You'll likely find simple, repetitive tasks less boring if you do them at a time when your energy level is lower. For instance, Sue, an assistant for a firm of chartered accountants, found she didn't mind updating loose-leaf services or doing filing near the end of her workday.
- ▲ Approach each project as though you are doing it for the first time. Many of us lack energy and enthusiasm for our work because we have been in the same job for a number of years. Consequently, we are like Judy, who finds it draining to think of teaching the same subject from the same textbook for another year. Or Dan, who can't stand the thought of typing one sales report more.

Most people's jobs are repetitious - even the jobs we view as glamorous. For instance, have you ever stopped to think how many times an actor says the same lines, or how many times a professional singer must sing the same songs? Yet they must keep their enthusiasm high to please their audiences. How do they do it? They simply treat each performance as if it was their first. And this is a rule that each one of us can apply to his or her own work.

- ▲ Replenish your energy. Dave was running behind schedule on the preparation of some financial statements. Instead of taking at least a short break to renew his flagging energy, Dave decided to push on. Although his conscientious attitude seemed commendable, it actually proved to be counter-productive. In fact, Dave wasted time doing one of the statements twice, because of careless errors. He didn't even realize that his inefficiency had been caused by a below-average energy level.

"Using breaks as periodic energy replenishment and as rewards for completing a segment of work, you can maintain a good level of productivity and motivation throughout the day," says Anne McGee-Cooper.

- ▲ Focus on the positive aspects of each workday. Julie, a customer service manager for a large organization, reviews all the negative events of the day in her mind each evening. She also discusses them with her husband over dinner. Julie won't find her work as draining if she chooses to think about the positive events of each day. And she will do herself, and husband a big favour if she makes a point of looking for some pleasant and amusing anecdotes during her day to lighten up the dinner conversation.
- ▲ Take one day at a time. Many of us put needless pressure on ourselves, then go home from work exhausted because we are continually thinking about what we have to do this week, month or even this year. Proper planning and scheduling of important projects can get them off our minds and on to the pages of our planners or wall calendars. Then we can tackle these projects one at a time when the scheduled time arrives.
- ▲ Visualize yourself working more effectively. Visualization is a technique often used by athletes to achieve success. In other words, they simply imagine a winning performance. Psychologists tell us that visualization works because the human brain can't tell the difference between a real experience and one imagined. In this way, visualization actually serves the same purpose for the athlete as practice.

Similarly, we can use positive visualization to change our behaviour and attitude. For example, Dave, the hurried and harried executive who was having trouble completing his financial statements on time, could benefit from visualizing himself working in a more relaxed, confident manner. Eventually Dave's behaviour will conform to the self-image he visualizes.

- ▲ Avoid the midday slump. Anne McGee-Cooper points out that most people either lose energy or overlook the possibility of boosting their energy during lunch. For instance, do you turn lunch with a friend or co-worker into a gripping session? Do you make poor food choices that leave you feeling sluggish for the afternoon? Do you eat a sandwich at your desk while continuing to work? Ask yourself, are my lunch time habits energy draining?
- ▲ Balance work and leisure. After a very stressful or busy week, try to devote at least one day each weekend to rest and relaxation. Then, when you return to work on Monday, you won't be running on empty. If there are times of the year when you are particularly busy, you might want to plan ahead. In other words, take good care of yourself so that you enter this busy period with abundant energy.
- ▲ Try synergy. This theory is based on the premise that an enthusiastic attitude toward one area of life will spread to

other areas. For instance, Sherry felt bored and tired by Wednesday each week. In fact, she just dragged herself into work for the remaining two workdays. However, last winter, a friend persuaded her to take art lessons - something Sherry had always wanted to do. And, believe it or not, Sherry's high-energy attitude toward painting has sparked a more energetic attitude toward her job.

But the benefits of energy management reach beyond better performance in the workplace. "The real return on working on managing our energy is long-term health and well-being," says psychologist Peter Jensen, Ph.D., in his book *The Inside Edge*. "That's the real payoff."

Now that you've read this piece, are you asking yourself, "Could this work for me?" Do you see yourself in any of the situations noted above or are you in a unique situation that may need to have a unique solution? Would you like help in trying some of these ideas, so you don't have to go it alone?

One of our EAP counsellors would be happy to discuss these and other options you have. You can work with your counsellor to find the methods best suited to your life. Working together can make it easier for you to find ways to manage your energy more effectively.

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP counsellors to arrange a telephone or in-person counselling session.

All contact between you and your counsellor is completely confidential.

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