

Tough at the top?

Essential stress-management strategies for business survival



In today's business world, most wind sector executives expect to be available 24/7 and to work an 18 hour day on average, but Cognitive Neuroscientist and Business Improvement Strategist Dr Lynda Shaw believes that executives and top management are becoming increasingly isolated and are struggling to cope with the pressures.



Dr Lynda Shaw

It is widely acknowledged that to have executive level of success you have to have a certain personality, drive and clear thinking, but Shaw argues that the increasingly fast pace of life this decade is causing executives to neglect their mental and subsequent physical health.

Dr Lynda Shaw says: "As executives are responsible for most high level strategic decisions in the corporate world, it can be incredibly intense, and dealing with this level of continued pressure can be detrimental to their own wellbeing and personal lives. Rising to the influential position of executive may seem the height of success and glamour on the surface with the wealth, authority and influence that goes with it, but the flip side is executive's are increasingly sleep-deprived, stressed and lonely at the top.

"Sleep is more important than food in the short term for survival but long term sleep deprivation is also known to be linked to high blood pressure, heart attacks, stroke and obesity. A lack of sleep and unpredictable sleeping patterns also affect your mood and behaviour tending to make us very irritable and short tempered, causing a strain on relationships. A severe lack of sleep will leave you energy-less, unable to do the things you enjoy in life which can be a part of the downward spiral leading into depression."

Modern technology allows us to be available constantly 24/7 which has advantages but it also has huge disadvantages, as we are increasingly unable to switch off and relax without thoughts of work. Shaw says: "In evolutionary terms, the brain hasn't structurally evolved for many thousands of years but one thing we do know is that the human brain adapts brilliantly. It adapts all the time. It is, however, vital that we don't feel overwhelmed, for if we do cortisol the stress hormone plays havoc on neurotransmitters and our mental and physical wellbeing. In my opinion, it is incredibly important to seek respite from work on a daily basis, even if we love or are very driven by what we do."

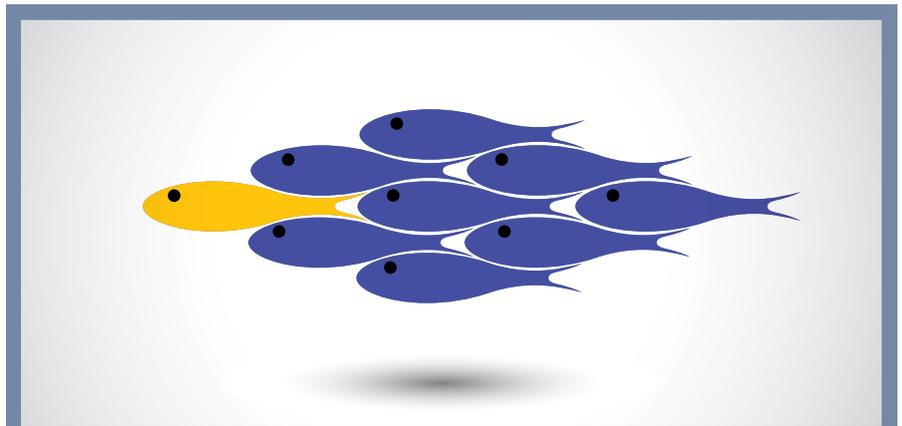
“It can also be very lonely making cut-throat decisions that can affect any number of people within an organisation. We get to the top because we are able to make those sorts of decisions but there is a tendency for executive’s to get caught up on the strategic side of a company and to lose touch with the company’s operations and staff, not to mention their own families and friends.”

Top management can often be unaware of what’s happening further down in the organisational hierarchy and oblivious to the hours of hard labour invested by more junior colleagues. The recession forced companies to streamline their operations, bottom line cuts were made and unemployment rose. Shaw believes as a result, uncertainty and a lack of trust are common amongst the UK’s workforce. “Executives need to rebuild these relationships and regain the trust and commitment of their employees to move forward. After all, the success of any company is down to the combined efforts of all employees and not just the members on the board. Having better staff relationships is also important to stop the isolation of the modern executive.”

Dr Shaw believes another way to reduce isolation of the executive is for them to join relevant networking groups. “High flying networking groups can be of huge advantage to executives. The executive’s success makes finding someone to confide in very difficult, but the business world is also about connections, and talking to like-minded individuals can be very beneficial especially in reducing isolation.”

Shaw argues that living the fast life is not going to help the already sleep-deprived and possibly lonely executive and that stress management is key to survival. Dr Shaw provides some stress management tips for the executive.

- 1** Ensure fun and humour is in your life. Laughter is said to reduce stress hormones such as cortisol and epinephrine (aka adrenaline). Humour of course will also distract you from the stressful situation.
- 2** Avoid smoking, drinking alcohol or taking pills or drugs to cope with day to day stress. They may make you feel better in the short term but they will cause harm to your body in the long run
- 3** Plan in and don’t rearrange family time and fun with friends
- 4** Leave work at work when you can. Practise turning off your BlackBerry or disable work emails during the evenings and at weekends, so that you’re not constantly distracted by thoughts of work during your ‘downtime’
- 5** Make sure you find the time to relax and unwind so if you have to plan downtime into your schedule! Even on a



How to be a good leader

Dr Lynda Shaw provides 10 top tips...

1. Communication

Whether it’s walking into a meeting, talking to a colleague, addressing an audience, or even answering the phone, in order to have strong leadership presence, you need to have an authoritative voice to sound convincing and credible.

2. Passion is powerful

You don’t have to force a smile every moment of the day however, it’s important to treat everything as an opportunity and to be passionate about what you do.

3. Engagement

Stand tall, make steady direct eye contact and use pauses to position yourself as thoughtful and confident. In addition never put your hands in your pockets because you won’t be able to convey true enthusiasm and energy.

4. Role model

To help your colleagues do well, inspire them. Also celebrate successes, boost morale and recognise when people need a break. These will all show that you care.

5. Delegating

Sharing the work load is essential. The art to delegating is sourcing your colleagues according to strengths, weaknesses, what they enjoy doing and how good they are at devoting their effort and time to complete tasks effectively.

hectic day, just 10 or 15 minutes where you can read a book, go for a walk, watch a bit of TV or listen to some music will help recharge your batteries. Step away from the desk!

6 Keep active and make time for exercise – this will boost your energy levels, improve concentration and ultimately help you get things done more efficiently. Do exercise you enjoy rather than one that is a chore so you are more likely to do it. Go

6. Trust and honesty

This is a double edged sword. Your staff needs to have faith in you but the same applies to you. Generally speaking if you can trust your colleges and you are highly ethical they will follow suit. This comes from being ethical and committed to them and your work.

7. Personality and a sense of humour

As well as displaying a good level of sociability, colleagues seek a sense of enjoyment when their leader can inspire. Keep things light, fresh and creative for high productivity and morale.

8. Firm but fair

A good leader is able to make firm but fair decisions by listening to all sides and then trusting their experience and instincts.

9. Clear rules and instructions

Construct a code of conduct. This shows employees what you expect of them and breaching this can result in consequences.

10. Be negotiable

It’s very important to listen to others within your team. They might have some great ideas which could strengthen the business as a whole. If they have a good idea, tell them and reward these ideas and never take credit for their work. This improves the employee’s self-confidence and they are grateful to you in recognising this.

for a walk with friends

7 Make sure you fully enjoy the time you spend away from work, by doing things that you will really look forward to. Don’t over-plan but have a social event such as a family day out or cinema trip in your diary so you feel you have done something with the feel good factor.

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