



Information Overload

Issue 30, February 2005

Welcome:

Welcome to this month's edition of Information Overload. This month we are taking a look at the subject of "health, wealth and happiness" we hope you enjoy reading.

As always, if you have any suggestions or would like to see us cover any other topics, we would love to hear from you. Just send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au.

Lorraine Bradshaw
Marketing & Training Coordinator

In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Are longer hours at work productive?
- Corporate Health Programs: An essential part of your package, or just nice to have?
- New Year hangovers cloud 2005
- A Thought to Ponder.

Are longer hours at work productive?

Do you regularly work long hours, is it "overtime" or are you just "at work"? Are you always productive during this additional time you are at work, or would you be better off having a "break" and coming back to work when you are fresh?

Another rather personal question - Are you paid for the additional time that you spend at work, do you get a bonus, or are you "salaried"? If you don't get paid for the overtime or extra hours that you do, there are a couple more questions I must ask, yes I know I am being very nosy aren't I!!! Why do you work longer hours than you are paid for? Is it "expected" of you, do you have too much work and not enough hours in the day or are you hoping to get ahead by becoming part of the fixtures and fittings? Well before you say yes to the above let me tell you about one of the many emails that has done the rounds of late concerned a gentleman who died whilst at work, not an uncommon occurrence you might agree. What was an issue was that it took several days before anyone noticed that he had passed away (I'm sure if the air conditioning had not been working, people might have noticed faster - but). The reason that no one noticed was a simple one - he was always the first in, and always the last to leave.

If you are hoping to get ahead by working long(er) hours there are several things to consider:

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Will your home and social life suffer because of the long hours you put into your working life? Of course there are many reasons why people choose to spend long(er) hours at work, you will be pleased to know that we won't be covering all of them in this issue for obvious reasons.

Will your health suffer as a result of additional hours, will you have time to exercise and eat properly or are you planning on eating on the run and kill two birds with one stone?

As we mentioned in a previous edition of *Overload* (Issue 25 – How Healthy Are You?), spending too many hours at your computer can be a killer, DVT or Deep Vein Thrombosis has become a problem for our modern technologically driven society and has claimed more than one victim. According to researchers at Sweden's Lindbergh University Medical Centre, one of the biggest killers of all time is stress. However, it is not the usual "stressors" of moving house, divorce and no money that can make the difference between life and death, according to the author Dr Dagmar Andersson. She says the biggest cause of heart attacks are the people you work with. During the study it became clear that 62% of those people who had suffered heart attacks, had them occur shortly after a run in with a co-worker, what was even more interesting was the fact that these co-workers had all done something "stupid". It was noted that one man collapsed at his desk because the woman at the next cubicle kept asking him for correction fluid – for her computer monitor (and you just thought that was an urban myth didn't you?), whilst another person had suffered a heart attack after her assistant shredded important company tax documents instead of photocopying them.

Whilst it could be argued that people can be more productive when working longer hours, after all they are at work, therefore "working" (or is that just another urban myth), another survey conducted by UK research group The Future Foundation found that whilst some people performed well, a considerable number of full-time employees were costing businesses money. According to the survey "Getting the Edge in the New People Economy" report which surveyed 700 managers and 2,500 employees across Australia, the UK, USA, Sweden, Netherlands, India and Hong Kong. According to the results of the survey, Australian managers reported that 50% of their employees performed to an acceptable standard, 20% were considered to be exceptional performers, with 30% of all workers not reaching acceptable standards in their day-to-day performances. This equates to \$1,118 for every full-time employee, based on the time their managers spend dealing with poor performers. This figure represents more than \$82 million a year for Australia's top 50 private businesses alone. *High cost of poor performers; Human Resources 22 February 2005 p6*

In the same Swedish survey as mentioned previously, it was also interesting to note that most people felt the need to "cover" for their colleague's mistakes. One woman spent a week re-building client records because a clerk had put them into the recycle bin on her computer and emptied it, thinking that the records would be recycled and used again. If however she had mentioned the problem to someone they may have been able to reconstruct most if not all the data from back up tapes, saving time, effort and Valium. She may have been busy, she may have felt "obliged" to do the work, but was she productive?

Corporate Health Programs: An essential part of your package, or just nice to have?

We spend between one third and one half of every day either at work, or travelling too and from work. For those people who are trying to juggle home and family life with the demands of full time work maintaining work/Life balance can be difficult. However according to Talent2 we should not be aiming for a better work/life balance per se, but "Work-Fusion". Mark Brayan of Talent2 says that in an ideal world we would all "love what we do so much that you do not see your work as "work" but rather something you enjoy as much as your "play". While the trend has not been to work at a job for the sake of a job and a wage, but to find a career that is fulfilling, adds to the life experience and provides a deep level of satisfaction – work-fusion is about finding a job that helps them to meet professional and life goals."

Hands up those of you who have managed to find "Work-Fusion" in your day-to-day lives? Hmm – not many. So what are the alternatives?

With approximately 7 million Australians overweight (ABS, 2001) or almost one third of our population, some organisations have taken the decision to provide corporate health programs, with everything from gym memberships on offer, through to health and wellness checks. For example CBH provide opportunities to work "flexi-time" provide a fully supervised and well-equipped gym at its premises in West Perth along with an in-house cafeteria. Whilst BP have hired a Health and Lifestyle Advisor to develop a range of activities designed to create awareness and improve health and fitness.

But who benefits?

Of course if an employee is healthy they are less likely to be off work through ill health "employees are 20% less likely to take sick leave if they are involved in some kind of physical activity". *Fitness fires up, P&L – Professional and Lifestyle Issue no 6 2005, p14*, which is great for the bottom line of the company. But is that the only reason that employers have taken on the role of ensuring that their employees are fit and healthy? Part of the answer lies in "Knowledge Management." With a duty of care to ensure the health and well being of an employee comes an added benefit as Natalie Males of BP stated "The philosophy for providing health and wellbeing programs arises from the concept that 90 percent of business knowledge is held in the minds of employees, so a business's intellectual capital is only as good as the health of the people in the business." *Fitness fires up, P&L – Professional and Lifestyle Issue no 6 2005, p16*

Of course if a person chooses to use the facilities provided, then they do get the benefit of improved health, fitness and well-being, with the added advantage that if the facilities are housed in the same building they don't have to travel somewhere else to "go to the gym", so long as showers are provided, then visits during lunch breaks or before work starts should not impact on their colleagues or tax the air conditioning too much.

One last question - If the facilities are free to use for employees or subsidised as part of an employees package, then those people who would normally have had to pay for a gym membership (which for those people who do pay for their own memberships can cost several hundred dollars per year) get far more "monetary" benefit than those people who choose not use the facilities (for whatever reason). Is that discriminating against those who don't use them, and should organisations take this into consideration when working out remuneration?

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New Year Hangovers Cloud 2005

In a recent survey by Talent 2, 62% of employees coming back to work after the New Year break felt that "normal" levels of productivity were not reached until at least the middle to end of January. Of the 1,200 Australian workers surveyed 13% also said they could not wait to find a new job! *Human Resources 22 February 2005 p26*

A Thought to Ponder:

"Act impeccably! Perform every act as if it were the only thing in the world that mattered"

Michael Korda

Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email me at training@iea.com.au

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