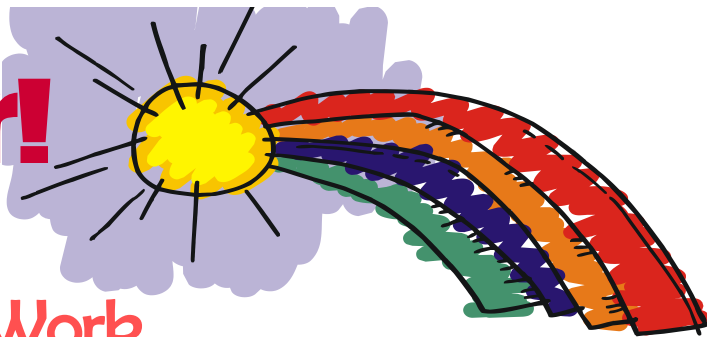


It's a New Year!

2012

Increasing Energy Levels at Work



If you're like most people, 2011 was a long, exhausting year at your workplace. You're probably laying the blame for your fatigue squarely at the feet of the increased responsibilities and long hours you've faced. However, working hard – when done with a good attitude in the right environment – can actually be quite invigorating. What's wearing you out at work might not be the work.

Living in a World of “Drainers”

Although your tasks and responsibilities may wear you down, the *real* culprit may be the negativity of the people you work around, constant complaining, and the pessimistic culture that's now the norm in many workplaces. In fact, many of us work in a world of “drainers.” What, exactly, is a “drainer”? A drainer can be anyone in your workplace – a boss, co-worker, employee, or client – who “sucks the life and energy right out of you.” Here are some top draining behaviors as well as tips for how to handle them:

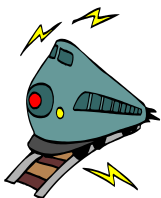
The Energy Vampire Attack



DON'T let negativity become your go-to response. There's no one more draining than someone who's constantly negative. These folks are “energy vampires.” They're never happy, rarely supportive, and constantly nay-say any and all ideas and suggestions that aren't their own. According to them, you might as well give up before you even start.

DO respond constructively when someone presents an idea. Even if you know more about a particular project, have more experience, or are sure that the suggestions are off the mark, let people know that when they come to you, you'll listen respectfully and with an open mind. While negativity squelches creativity and initiative, an encouraging attitude keeps creative juices flowing and enhances constructive dialogue. Remember – as pessimism rises, performance **DECREASES**.

The Out-of-Control Complain Train



DON'T give in to the temptation to whine. It's a well-known phenomenon that when one person's complaint resonates with someone else, it prompts yet another individual to throw in his or her negative two-cents worth – and so on. Before you know it, everyone's complaining and any work that does get done afterward is marred by a bad attitude.

DO push for solutions. The next time a water-cooler conversation threatens to turn into “Complaint Central,” step in and ask the complainers how *they* would make things better. Turn employees from *problem-sharers* to *problem-solvers* – it'll make an unbelievable difference in your office's atmosphere.

The Vicious Email (or Voicemail)



DON'T leave critical or harsh messages on voicemail or send them to an email inbox (or other electronic device). Often these electronic “critiques” seem harsher than intended. Plus, any communication you send via electronic methods can potentially last forever. In addition, your words could come back to haunt you and your co-worker or employee.

DO choose to conduct tough talks in person. If you need to have a stern talk with someone, or if you need to talk through a conflict or problem, do it in person if possible. You'll be able to ensure that your words and tone aren't misinterpreted, and you'll be able to immediately have a constructive dialogue with the other person. By talking about ways to improve, you can end the conversation on a positive and encouraging note.

The Loaded Monday Morning Inbox



DON'T overwhelm your team with a mountain of emails before the week is even underway. If you're finishing up your own to-do list on a Friday night, or if you're simply trying to get a jumpstart on the week ahead, it can be tempting to dish out the details and to-dos as you think of them. After all, if you wait until Monday morning, you might forget to tell those who need to know! However, coming in to an inbox of 57 new messages is draining and makes folks feel like they're fighting an uphill battle from the start.

DO bundle communications as considerably as possible. Inevitably, people are going to be working late and sending emails over the weekend – in today's business culture, it's unavoidable! However, there are a few things you can do to make “You've Got Mail!” less stressful and more efficient for the recipient. Be sure to flag any urgent emails so teammates know which tasks to tackle first – and include as many details

as possible so that, 1) you won't forget them, and, 2) the recipient can get started as quickly as possible. If you can, combine tasks and questions into one correspondence. One email as opposed to 10 separate ones is a lot less intimidating.

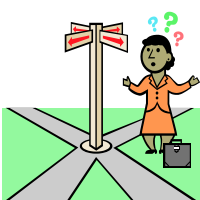
The Busy Bee Bamboozle



DON'T confuse activity with progress. You know the person – he or she is always sooo busy but doesn't ever seem to meet deadlines or get anything done. When teams are being formed, people secretly hope that this person isn't assigned to theirs. This employee is living proof of the fact that just because your day is full of things to do doesn't necessarily mean that you're getting anything done.

DO set goals and hold yourself and your employees accountable for results. These results should be ones that *matter* in the organization and are visible and valuable to the team. It can be helpful to transition to a day-to-day plan that will help everyone stay on the right track. Most importantly, don't put the team in situations where the lines are blurred. If the goals are crystal clear, they'll be easier to accomplish.

The Unclear Communiqué



DON'T assume others have all the information they need, or that something that you know isn't really *that important*. Hastily drawn conclusions that result from chronically poor communication can lead to serious mistakes and major missed opportunities. In addition, lack of clarity is incredibly frustrating to the individuals who work with you (and for you). When employees, co-workers, or supervisors have to spend their time tracking you down for clarification rather than getting the communication from you that they need, productivity falls and creativity is stifled.

DO make concerted and proactive efforts to make sure that the right people are “in the know.” Whether it's letting your boss know that a co-worker's daughter is getting married or telling a co-worker that a client prefers to be contacted only via email, be sure to tell the appropriate people. Also, make sure you copy the right people on emails, promptly return voicemails, and are clear about directions and expectations. If you say you are going to do something, mean it. A big part of a successful work culture is having a relationship between employees and managers that's built on trust and collaboration. And that can happen only if a clear line of communication is established so that inspiration, encouragement, empowerment, and coaching can take place.

The Disorganization Drag-Down



DON'T allow disorganization to impede productivity. If you're managing or leading an agency, or heading up a big project or program, it's likely you've lost an email, important paper, phone number, or pie chart or two (or three or four) in your day. You're busy, and that's understandable. But constant disorganization can drain your employees and co-workers if they always have to cover your tracks. It may not always be possible, and accidents certainly do happen – but it depletes others of the energy they could be putting towards other, more productive work.

DO make a concerted effort to keep up with your tasks and responsibilities. If you can't immediately put your hands on something you need, don't automatically ask others for help. Take a few minutes to try and find what you need on your own. Better yet, try to think of better systems and processes than the ones you're using (or not using) now. If you see that someone in your office has a particular knack for organization, ask him or her for some tips to help you out. For instance, some people are still trying to rely on their memory to keep track of scores of things, instead of utilizing pop-up reminders and other functions on PDAs and computers. Having grown up in a non-technological workplace, they may be afraid to ask for help using them. Big mistake! As the saying goes, the only dumb question is the one that *doesn't* get asked. Don't be afraid to admit to a mistake either. If you're humble and honest about it, they'll be more sympathetic about your plight and more likely to jump in and help.

Summary

If some of the behaviors described in this article sound all too familiar, don't despair. The cusp between the year that's drawing to a close and the one that's newly here is the perfect time to take stock of what's draining energy and fostering ill will in your organization – and resolve to make it better in 2012.

Based on Jon Gordon's book, *The Seed; Finding Purpose and Happiness in Life and Work*. For more information, visit www.jongordon.com