

Staying healthy while managing a demanding job

February 24, 2020



Being an EA is often a 24 hour, seven day a week job. But knowing when to stop and get some much-needed rest or exercise is vital to success says *Karen Gately*

Reflect for a moment on whether you have the depth of energy and vitality you need to be at your best at work. Do you stop when you need to, or do you keep pushing through irrespective of how tired you feel? How often do you recognise the signs of stress and take steps to decompress and recover well?

While it's great to be dedicated and in service to your boss, colleagues and organisation, the harsh reality is if you're slogging through with little regard for your own health and wellbeing, your chances of performing at your peak are dramatically undermined.

Many EAs struggle to stay healthy especially when working in a demanding job. Long hours, competing priorities, tight deadlines and resources and the somewhat unpredictable nature of the job are common reasons why EAs reach a point of burn out and face the physical and psychological consequences of overwork.

Most of us learned to eat a well-balanced diet, get plenty of sleep, engage in regular moderate exercise so you've pretty much got it covered. Add to the list spending time doing the things you love, avoiding too much sugar, alcohol and caffeine and chances are you'll have the energy needed to thrive.

While the wellbeing formula isn't complex, the real challenge for most of us is consistently applying these simple rules to managing our health every day. Overcoming this battle starts with making our well-being matter. Not just in theory but in practice. Among the most important steps you can take include these:

Learn to say no. Over investing typically driven by a desire to please, is a common reason why EAs end up with too much on their plate. The simple reality is there are so many hours in your day and only so many outputs you can generate. It's critical that you understand priorities and have the confidence to be upfront about what is possible and what isn't.

Manage your energy. It's illogical to expect our minds and bodies to keep functioning well when running low on fuel, and yet all too often people push themselves to keep going when they are running on empty. The strength of your spirit, that is the depth of energy you have in reserve, has a profound influence on your ability to think clearly, manage emotion and behave in ways that enable your performance. Make having energy a priority and you're more likely to recognise when it's time to stop.

Taking the time to eat breakfast or lunch, to get some fresh air, to connect with energising people, or exercise can have a big impact on your ability to focus, make clear decisions and get your job done efficiently. It's a false economy to just keep moving forward when your mind and body are screaming for time out.

Be open with your boss about how you intend to manage your health and ability to thrive. Be clear about the support you need from them to make that possible. For example, if getting out for a regular walk is important to you, ask that they support you to make that a priority every day.

While it may feel confronting to ask for what you need, keep in mind the healthier you are, the more likely your boss is to benefit from the work you do. Remember also that you aren't asking for a favour. You are simply requesting that they respect the very reasonable boundary you are putting in place that will allow you to break away from work to get much-needed exercise or rest.

Arguably the most important step you can take to manage your health is to choose your thoughts. How we choose to perceive our reality and respond to people and events directly influences the levels of stress and anxiety we ultimately feel. Reflect for a moment on how your thoughts impact the stress you feel and the choices you make.

For example, is perfectionism driving you to give more than you need to? Keep the importance of the work you do in perspective. Recognise that while in many jobs there are times you need to dig deep and give more, no reasonable employer will expect you to maintain that pace without periods of rest and recovery.

See Karen at an Executive PA Masterclass

Karen Gately is one of our facilitators for the 2020 Executive PA Media Masterclass program. If you'd like to learn how to become a 'high impact EA', book your spot to see Karen in Brisbane, Sydney or Melbourne at a Masterclass this year, [click here](#).



THE EXPERT

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