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PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Working at wellness: How to stay healthy while working

1 July, 2019

Karen Gately* says so many of us struggle to stay healthy because we don't make our wellbeing a priority in our working lives.

Let's face it, the formula for staying healthy isn't complex.

It's our ability to apply it consistently that's typically the problem.

Eat a well-balanced diet, get plenty of sleep, engage in regular moderate exercise and you've pretty much got it covered.

Photo: Daniel Reche

Avoid too much sugar, alcohol and caffeine and you're well on your way to being a vibrant version of yourself.

So why do so many of us struggle to stay healthy, especially when working in a demanding job?

The simple truth is because we don't make our wellbeing matter enough.

Among the most important steps any of us can take to make our health a priority and avoid the all too common physical and psychological consequences of overwork, include these.

Manage your energy

You wouldn't fail to fill up on petrol and then expect your high-performance car to win the race.

And yet all too often people push themselves to keep going when they are running on empty.

No matter the strength of your skills, your ability to perform is unquestionably influenced by the energy you have in reserve and can draw on.

Taking the time to eat breakfast or lunch, to get some fresh air, to connect with energising people, can have a big impact on your ability to focus, make clear decisions and get your job done efficiently.

It's undeniably a false economy to just keep moving forward when your mind and body are screaming out for you to stop.

Move every day

You don't need to get to the gym or go for a run to give your body at least some of the exercise it needs.

Don't ask your colleague, for example, to collect your photocopying — go and get it yourself.

Take the stairs over the elevator.

Walk the long way to the meeting room.

Skip the taxi and walk to those meetings that aren't too far to get to on foot.

Have a health plan and share it with your boss.

Have the courage to talk to your manager about how you manage your wellbeing and the support you need from them.

If getting out for a regular walk is important to you, ask that they support you to make that a priority every day.

You're not asking them for time off.

You're asking them to respect the boundary you are putting in place that will allow you to break away from work to get much needed exercise.

Choose your thoughts

The ways in which we choose to perceive our reality and respond to people and events have a profound influence on the levels of stress and anxiety we ultimately feel.

While of course far easier said than done, your ability to release tension and keep stress at bay is essential to not only your work performance but also long-term health.

Reflect on how your thinking influences the stress you feel and choices you make.

For example, is perfectionism driving you to give more than you need to?

Is your fear of failure or of letting others down causing you to go well beyond the standard of contribution other people expect from you?

Does your ego tell you have you have to win at all costs, regardless of what it means for the pressure you're putting on yourself?

Keep things in perspective

Unless you're "saving babies", try to remember that you're not saving babies.

Keep the importance of the work you do in perspective.

Of course, take ownership for delivering on the promises you have made to serve your employer faithfully and give your best.

But remember also how your job fits into the broader scheme of your life and what's important to you.

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.

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