



# *Work Smart Live Smart*

## **S-O-S**

### **Ways Of Preserving The Wellness Of Corporate Leaders**

**By**  
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Often our discussions around wellness focus on the strategies company leaders can use to assist their employees. Leaders are frequently forgotten in this equation of corporate wellness. But in the quest to achieve a strong, surviving and flourishing company, its' leadership team must also be assisted in remaining physically and mentally healthy.

Leaders face unique challenges, often work in isolation and are not usually trained on how to effectively manage their stress. By addressing these challenges, providing information on how to better maintain their health and by building support, corporations can more effectively develop the overall wellness that they are striving for.

#### **S - Leadership Challenges – Addressing The Situations**

Leaders face a variety of challenges throughout the day. Many of these are common to most employees at every level within the company - from getting up in the morning, commuting to work, caring for children and/or elderly parents, to time demands, utilizing technology, and balancing work and a personal life.

However, according to the Executive Challenges Survey, 2003 by Axmith and Adamson, leaders face the additional challenges associated with attracting and keeping talented staff, managing constant uncertainty, handling the bombardment of information from various levels, and maintaining a strong financial performance.

Bill Wilkerson, CEO of the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health, goes on to include the above and identify the following as the top ten sources of workplace stress. As we look at these challenges, we start to see what solutions might alleviate the stress that leaders may experience in relation to these situations.

**The treadmill syndrome** - leaders with too much to do, too many responsibilities and who feel that they should be even more productive. Learning to delegate appropriately, prioritizing and being more realistic about what they can and should be achieving can help to tackle this syndrome.

**Random interruptions** - telephones, walk-in visits, and 'emergencies' from others. Goal setting, time management and assertiveness strategies can increase their productivity and alleviate the stressfulness of incomplete projects.

**Pervasive uncertainty** - market conditions, company challenges, and unsatisfactorily explained and/or announced change. A leader has to have the emotional capacity to tolerate uncertainty and frustration. Their coping strategies through this uncertainty will allow them to be able to raise tough questions without getting too anxious. Others will observe the verbal and non-verbal clues to a leader's ability to cope and this will impact their own team's ability to effectively cope.

**Mistrust, unfairness, and vicious office politics** – department and individual competition, unresolved conflict and inconsistent and unclear policies. Addressing these situations head on through effective communication and conflict management skills, rather than avoiding them is the only way to guarantee that these issues will not continue to poison them and their workplace.

**No sense of direction in the company** – no long-range vision of the company that dictates how day-to-day decisions are to be made often due to a lack of distinguishing between management and leadership skills. According to Stephen Covey, management has a bottom-line focus – How can I best accomplish certain things while leadership has a top-line focus – What are the things that I want to accomplish. A company's vision is not just an exercise to go through, but it is a picture that allows daily decisions to be measured against. When there is a sense of little direction in the company, a leader must work to bring the vision into clear focus.

**Career and job ambiguity** - a lack of connection to the big picture. Effective leaders tie what they do on a day-to-day basis to the vision and mission of the company. When competing tasks collide the leader can then turn to the vision and mission to correctly prioritize what needs to be done.

**No feedback** - good or bad - prevents leaders from knowing how they are doing and whether they are meeting expectations. Feedback is a very important part of the communication cycle. It closes the loop and ensures that there can be learning and change. A 360-degree feedback process will help leaders identify any gaps between perception (what they think) and behaviour (what their team sees). This process will enable the leader to understand how others see their behaviour and allow the leader to change their behaviour if necessary.

**No appreciation** - leaders are expected to give appreciation and are often not the recipients. Dr. Clifton and The Gallup Organization discovered that 65% of employees received no recognition in their workplace in the last year. However, we know through various research studies that regular recognition and praise increase workplace engagement, productivity, safety, retention, and customer satisfaction.

**Lack of communications** – mixed or incomplete messages can lead to critical mistakes in problem solving. While problem solving, the leader needs to ask who needs to learn what in order to develop, understand, commit to and implement the strategy. The leader needs to listen to other's to raise questions that may indicate an impending challenge. By tapping into the individual's particular vantage point they may see where they might be missing something.

**Lack of control** - stress levels are reduced when the leader is involved in setting the course of the organization, developing policies and strategies, and creating workplace expectations. While having complete control over all of the challenges and activities one faces is not possible, a healthy leader directs their energy to those people and areas that they can appropriately influence.

## **O - Leadership Health – Focusing On Ourselves**

Stressful or draining periods were to be followed by relaxing and energy restoring phases. Leaders get caught up in the situations that are stressful and often forget about the simple techniques that can be used to restore their body's natural rhythm and decrease the negative effects that stress can have on them. Helping leaders learn these 5 quick tips below can ensure that a company preserves the wellness of their corporate leaders. The great thing about them is that they are fast and simple.

### **Breathing**

Air is the primary 'food' of our body. Rapid, shallow breathing is a common involuntary reaction to stress and is part of our innate stress response. This shallow breathing causes us to feel tired and foggy-headed. Deep breathing interrupts this stress response and can be a powerful means of recharging oneself and regaining a more natural rhythm. It can relieve headaches, relax shoulders, stop racing thoughts, increase energy and turn restlessness into calmness.

### **Deskercises**

Tense muscles cause blood to be squeezed out of the body tissue resulting in oxygen and nutrient depletion. This can cause pain and even a lack of concentration. Deskercises or self-massage can be helpful in releasing tension and restoring the flow of blood. Deskercises can relax neck and shoulder muscles, increase focus for problem solving, and can revitalize energy. Some quick examples: Neck rolls, shoulder shrugs, stomach squeezes, hip twisters, wrist curls, quarter squats, and hand massage. Focus on particularly tense muscles or create a whole body stretching routine.

### **Nutrition, water, light**

During high stress times we often compromise or completely forget about eating, drinking and getting outside. Taking lunch, drinking a glass of water, or going outside for a stretch break are simple and necessary techniques that provide essential energy and can restore rhythm.

### **Safe Space – beauty, sound, aroma**

The space in which we work can have a profound effect on our mood, energy and comfort. It is a benefit to create a space that feels, sounds and smells great and to take a few moments after a stressful situation to become involved in the quiet of one's surroundings.

### **Sense Of Fun**

A leader's mood and behaviours drive the moods and behaviours of everyone else - "Smile and the World Smiles With You". Moods are contagious – laughter is the most contagious of emotions and depression can have a definite negative impact on the work group. Often hear about emotional intelligence in relationship to leadership ability. A leader's emotional maturity affects his or her performance and creates a certain culture or work environment. It creates climates where information sharing, trust, healthy risk taking and learning flourish. Leaders can make sure that they are in an optimistic, authentic and high-energy mood, which will positively affect their own behaviour, and the mood and behaviour of those around them.

### **S - Building Leadership Support**

Often leaders feel isolated and disconnected in both their work life and those who report to them and in their family and personal life due to the difficulty maintaining these more intimate relationships. Support and connectedness can be a powerful tool in preventing illness. Unfortunately many leaders in the workplace do not make the effort to utilize this great coping strategy.

Team building strategies are a necessity not only for building a 'team' of employees who can work together, but also for decreasing the isolation and disconnection that a leader may face. These efforts help to boost communication and promote sharing of ideas and interests that help to include the leader in the team.

### **Conclusion**

Though leaders are frequently forgotten in the equation of achieving corporate wellness, there are a variety of ways to assist them in remaining physically and mentally healthy. By specifically addressing the unique challenges that leaders face, by providing information on how to better maintain their health through quick stress busters and by building support through team based activities corporations can more effectively preserve the wellness of their leaders and the overall wellness of the entire company.

Stress and wellness specialist, **Beverly Beuermann-King** translates current research and best practices information into a realistic, accessible and practical approach through her dynamic stress and wellness workshops, on-line articles, e-newsletters and media interviews and through a collaboration called *Awakening The Workplace*. Visit [www.WorkSmartLiveSmart.com](http://www.WorkSmartLiveSmart.com) for more on Beverly and her wellness work.

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