

How-To Say No at Work



Do you find yourself not accomplishing everything you set out to do each day in the work place? Does the adage “not enough hours in the day” ring true on a regular basis? Do you constantly put the needs of others before your own? If your answer is yes to any of these questions you are likely what is commonly referred to as a “people pleaser.” Helping others is a core value and certainly an admirable one but if you’re not careful, it’s one that can be dangerous for your productivity, state of mind and physical health. If you frequently find yourself stressed and burned out at the end of the day, learning to tactfully say NO is a skill worth developing.

Make Yourself a Priority

You probably make it a habit to help others and go the extra mile. But when was the last time you made it a priority to take care of your own needs before someone else’s? In order to be at your best, you have to be in the right spot to do so. Prioritizing things like exercise, getting enough sleep and taking a day off all go a long way in helping you recharge and stay fresh.

Set Healthy Boundaries

By nature, the word “no” carries a negative connotation that most people are afraid to express. However, it has many positive benefits that not only will find you in a healthy frame of mind but being more productive as well. The first step to saying no is setting healthy boundaries and sticking to them. This simply means clearly stating your priorities and limits and communicating them to those around you. If you make this behavior a regular practice, it lets people know that you can’t be taken advantage of and they will respect you for it.

Check Your Schedule

You're probably inundated with requests to take on more work or help with items outside the scope of what you normally do. While it's easy to immediately say yes to helping out with something, it's perfectly acceptable to let someone know you need to look at your schedule and will respond accordingly. If you have the time to fit something extra in great, but if you're already committed then letting people know is reasonable as well.

What's in it For You?

While asking the question of what potential gain you might receive in return for helping someone out might seem selfish, it's important to consider. There are plenty of people out there that are all too ready to accept help but unwilling to return the favor in the future. Before you commit to taking on work for someone else, ask yourself the question of the likelihood of that favor being reciprocated.

Ask Someone You Trust if You're Unsure

We are all asked to help out from time to time. If you find yourself on the fence of saying yes or no however, take the time to seek the opinion of someone you can confide in. By verbalizing your concerns, you not only gain a valuable outside opinion, but allow yourself to consider all the options more clearly. Even if you don't take the advice, you'll at least have more information to help you make the decision that is best for you.

Delegate

The demands of the modern workplace can be overwhelming. Trying to accomplish every task on your own can lead to burnout in the office and negatively effect your health and relationships outside of work as well. If you work on a team or within a specific department, realize that your colleagues are there to help. By delegating tasks or projects to the people around you, you not only save yourself time, but demonstrate to others that they are valuable and can be trusted. This spells good news for everyone involved.

Provide Context

One of the most critical components of saying no is providing context. If you simply tell someone no you risk coming off as aloof or not caring. But if you make it a point to honestly explain to the person requesting your help that your plate is already full and that you are willing to say yes in the future, you come across as respectful and honest.

Say Yes to the Person and No to the Task

Empathy is a sign of high emotional intelligence. If someone asks for your help and you simply don't have the time or resources to do so, tell them that you understand the situation they are in but that you simply can't this time around. Saying no in this manner makes it clear that you value the person in question and are willing to help in the future.

Saying no is counterintuitive for most people. However, learning to do so in a tactful manner when it makes sense goes a long way toward increasing your own productivity and well-being. If you take the steps necessary to make yourself a priority, set professional boundaries and evaluate all your options before you say yes or no, you'll be in a position to make the best decision for yourself and those around you.

Should You Take that Promotion?



From the moment you finish your formal education, it's ingrained in your mind that you should always be looking to move up in whatever company you go to work for. The idea that if you show up early, stay late and consistently go the extra mile to set yourself apart is the key to getting promoted is what we are taught to believe. While getting promoted is usually equated with higher pay, more responsibility and a clear sign that your hard work has finally been noticed, there are a host of factors to consider before you sign on the dotted line.

Are you 100% ready to take the promotion? The obvious answer for most people is "absolutely". Even though getting the news that you're being promoted is sure to bring about feelings of elation in the immediacy, it's important to look at the opportunity from every angle as accepting could be life-changing. Below are some questions to consider with a clear head before you take the plunge.

Do You Have the Necessary Experience?

Maybe you've been in your current role for a while and have proven time and again that you have what it takes to do your job. With your pending promotion however, do you have the skills and experience that will be required to meet the demands of the new post? For example, maybe you've been working in a role that doesn't require management skills and now you'll be charged with overseeing an entire team or department. If you plan on "figuring it out as you go," you may want to seriously consider the impact taking the promotion might have on you, the organization and your team.

Will You Receive the Necessary Training and Support?

The truth is that not everyone who gives a promotion does so with consideration for what life will be like for the person in the new role. More often than you might think, managers don't have the clearest idea about what it takes to do the job effectively on a daily basis. This can result in a lack of necessary training and support which can not only make your life more stressful, but have devastating effects for the morale and productivity of the organization. So, before you dive in head first, make certain that you'll have access to the training, resources and support you need.

Is the Promotion Aligned with Your Goals?

You have probably given some serious thought to the things you want to accomplish both professionally and personally. Maybe you want to become an influential leader but need more time to sharpen your skills or want to spend more time with your young family but the demands of the new job will have you spending your weekends at the office. While prestige and more money are alluring, your best bet is to carefully consider the implications the promotion will have on life as you know it before you make a decision.

Does the Promotion Fit with Your Strengths and Passions?

Taking inventory of what you are good at and truly enjoy is a crucial step in deciding whether or not to take a promotion. Maybe you love working one-on-one with customers and colleagues and enjoy seeing the tangible difference you make, but your new job all but eliminates the opportunity for you to utilize your skills in a way you enjoy. What if you'll be chained to a desk away from the day-to-day or have to travel more than you'd like? Once again, it's easy to get excited about the benefits the job could bring in the short-term, but failing to realize the effects it might have on your core values in the long-term is a mistake you don't want to make.

Have You Asked the Right Questions?

Just because you're up for promotion doesn't mean it's always your best option. Before you take on added responsibility, make sure you do some thorough research and ask the right questions. Was the previous person in the role fired? Is your promotion part of a reorganization? Does the new position see excessive turnover? What do your trusted colleagues, family and friends think about the opportunity? If you take the time to examine all the different dynamics of why you're being promoted, you might find some red flags that cause you to think twice.

Getting promoted is exciting, there's no doubt about it. It's a sign that your hard work has paid off and managers feel like you have the skills to take on more

responsibility. Not to mention you're going to be compensated accordingly. While it all seems wonderful in the short-term, it's essential that you consider every implication taking a new job will have before you make a commitment. If you take the time to look at the entire picture as objectively as possible, you'll be in a better place to make a decision that is best for you and everyone involved.

If you do decide the promotion is not right for you, let your manager know you really appreciate being offered the new position and explain what you like about the opportunity, and what your concerns are. This discussion will let your manager know you've seriously considered the opportunity and may help determine a training plan moving forward.

How to Be Taken More Seriously at Work



Maybe you're known as the life of the party, the fun guy or just someone that anyone can come to for some needed levity in the office. You're loved by your colleagues for this reason, but something seems to be lacking. You show up early, do more than is expected and stay late. While you're happy to be the lively one at work, you wish your professional efforts received the recognition they deserve. The good news is that you can still let your shining personality make the office fun for everyone AND be recognized for your merits as a valuable employee.

Be Assertive

Maybe you're the one that your colleagues come to for advice or help in difficult situations. You always find yourself giving and expect nothing in return. This is a wonderful quality to have but if you're sick of being a pushover, don't be afraid to show your confidence. Doing so doesn't mean being the cocky person that toots their own horn, but giving yourself and your team credit and confidently displaying your expertise is contagious. When you adopt this attitude you'll garner the respect of everyone around you and you'll start to feel valued and appreciated.

Confide in a Mentor

If you find yourself struggling to ask others for help, you're not alone. If you want to grow, you're going to need help along the way. Coming to this realization and seeking out a mentor that genuinely has your best interests in mind is invaluable. If you make the effort to let someone experienced know that you're passionate about learning more and becoming more skilled in your job, it can help catapult your career and you'll quickly set yourself apart from other colleagues in your same position.

Be Prepared

There's nothing that lets others know that you care about your work like being prepared ahead of time. Whether it's getting a presentation done in advance or staying an extra hour late to finish up an important project, the smallest of extra efforts and preparedness don't go unnoticed. If you consistently show that you're not just on top of things, but ahead of the game, everyone around you will take notice and your level of respect will go up immediately.

Set Professional Boundaries

While you take pride in the fact that you can be there for anyone at any time, setting boundaries is crucial to your health and that of those around you. It's all too easy for professional and personal lines to become blurred when you're too accessible. Having an open-door policy is great for everyone in your organization

but should you find yourself participating in someone's personal affairs, do the professional thing and recommend help outside of the workplace.

Look the Part

As much as we all would like to admit that appearances don't matter at work, they do. There is something to be said for the way you dress as dictated by the environment in which you work. Whether it's a suit and tie or jeans and button-down shirt, people notice the way you dress. Your attire alone isn't going to win you that coveted promotion but making sure your clothes are clean and appropriate for your work environment goes a long way toward earning the respect of those around you.

Look for Opportunities to Help

There is nothing better in a manager's eyes than someone that offers to help. Whenever you have the chance, offer to lend a hand with a difficult project or assignment. Doing so shows not only your willingness to go the extra mile, but sets you apart as a collaborative leader that is willing to take on challenges to learn more, and are capable of doing more. By performing tasks that don't necessarily benefit you directly, you make it known to everyone around you that you're reliable and care about the greater good of the team or organization.

Follow Up

It's one thing to complete a task on time and to the best of your ability. Following up is an entirely different story. If you complete a project you have only satisfied the initial needs. Making it habit to check in every so often to ensure that all needs are met doesn't go unnoticed and can win you long-term relationships that prove invaluable down the road. If you find yourself scattered, give yourself email reminders or alerts so that you can precisely time all follow up communication.

Remember Names

Think about the times you walk into places where you are a repeat customer. Having someone remember you by name sets your experience off on the right

foot. Though it's a difficult task, especially if you have a large number of people or vendors you work with, recognizing people's names is paramount. Even though much communication takes place electronically, there is no substitute for the personal touch of addressing someone by name.

Being taken seriously at work is something we all crave. You want your contributions to be noticed and valued. If you find yourself in a position where you feel that your diligence isn't being praised, take a step back and look at the bigger picture. Chances are that if you implement a few new practices and adjust your attitude accordingly, you'll find yourself on the fast track to more success before you know it.

The Do's and Don'ts of E-mail Etiquette



If you're like most people, email plays a major in your life. Maybe it's the first thing you look at when you wake up in the morning and the last thing you check before you go to bed. While personal emails between you and your buddies might not require much decorum, such is not the case when communicating electronically with colleagues, clients or anyone work-related. Even though you may not like it, how and when you communicate via email for professional purposes can have a tremendous and lasting effect on your reputation. To ensure you send emails that are not only professional, but set you apart from your colleagues, we've compiled our best list of Do's and Don'ts below.

Introduction

If you're emailing someone for the first time, it's imperative to get your introduction right as it can make or break the entire conversation. Using a proper salutation such as "Good Morning" or even "Hello" is better than "Hey" or "Hi". From here, get right to the point of who you are and why you're reaching out. The tone of introductory emails should always be upbeat and courteous while remaining highly professional.

Subject Line

You probably receive dozens of emails every day. Chances are you probably skip over the ones that aren't flagged as important or whose subject lines don't catch your eye. The same goes for emails you send as well. Using subject lines like "FYI," "Circling Back," and "Hi" ensures that your emails won't be read either. Your subject line should be concise and effectively communicate what your email is about. Subject lines like "Board Meeting Minutes" and "Time Off Request" directly communicate to the recipient what your message is about and are more likely to be read.

Speaking of Concise

Professional emails aren't for sharing your thoughts and feelings in most cases. Instead, they are intended to communicate necessary information in an orderly, easy-to-read fashion. If you have several items to discuss in your note, use headings, short sentences and bullet points. Avoid using too many adjectives and excessive flowery language. Remember, your message is one of many that is going to be read so get to the point.

Don't Hit Reply-All

Sometimes you'll get emails from C-Suite Executives or Administrative Assistants addressed to 10 or people asking for your availability to volunteer for a community event or something similar. When responding, make sure you reply ONLY to the original sender. The entire thread doesn't need to know that you're committed to your kids' soccer game and can't make it.

Why Are You Forwarding This to Me?

The forward option in email is a great way to share ideas and gather input quickly. Whether it's something you're passing along to another department, HR or a colleague, take the time to write a sentence or two explaining the reason you're forwarding the message. Failing to take this simple step will leave your recipient either clueless or guessing at the intent of your forward.

The Power of One

As we've discussed, email is a form of communication that is meant to exchange information quickly and efficiently. While being concise is paramount, limiting the subjects you cover to one per message avoids confusion and makes organization easier for everyone involved. If you find yourself sending a message with multiple topics, make them brief and list them out in bullet point fashion.

Emojis

When you're sending a professional e-mail, you're not telling your boo how much you miss them. At all costs, avoid using emojis. Though you might think you're being funny or playful, all you're really doing is causing people to question your competency.

Why are You Sending Me This?

Make sure that the intended recipients are in the right fields before you hit send. There are plenty of stories of people that sent an email to the wrong person and the consequences can be devastating. Even if you're sure your message is bullet-proof, take the necessary time to give it a second look.

Grammar Police

While you might not care if someone uses "u" instead "you," others might. And even if they don't, you're always better off being safe than sorry on this one. Taking the time to use the right "there" or "their," commas and semicolons goes a long way in avoiding confusion and conveys intelligence to your reader. Though

the occasional grammar mistake is forgivable, repeated or blatant offenses can damage your credibility.

All Caps

Writing in ALL CAPS is something you should never do in an email. To your reader, it seems like you're shouting. Can you imagine reading a line in an email that says "NEVER BE LATE AGAIN"? Using all caps communicates unrest and is seen as confrontational. If you need to make a point, do it professionally and avoid language that incites anger or fear.

Read Receipts

When you send important emails, you want to make sure they are read. Utilizing the read receipt option lets you know that your message has not only been seen, but read as well. This eliminates any potential breakdown in communication.

Before You Hit Send...

Once you hit send whatever you've typed is gone forever. There are no do-overs. Before you hit send, take the time to thoroughly read what you've written to make sure that you are communicating the right message. Did you answer all the questions the original sender asked you? Were your directions clear?

Whether you hate e-mail or love it, it's not going away anytime soon. Being unprofessional or lazy in your electronic communication can prove costly. On the other hand, taking time to make sure your messages are professionally written, intended for the right recipient and communicate necessary information in a concise manner will set you apart from those that fail to make the effort.

Fitting Self Care Into Your Work Schedule



You've heard the saying about living to work instead of working to live. Sadly, many of us can identify with the former and after a while we become so enslaved to our jobs that we neglect are our own well-being. When was the last time you went on vacation, left early on a Friday or refused to look at email for an entire weekend? What do you eat for lunch everyday? Is it something you grab at a convenience store and throw in a microwave? How many steps do you get a day? And maybe most importantly, when did you last devote some time to simply writing down your thoughts?

With the demands of the modern-day workplace, it's all too easy to become lost in the rat race. Before you know it, years have flown by and you haven't even blinked. If you're determined to live a long and fruitful life, it's vitally important to take some steps to care for yourself along the way.

Exercise

Maybe you just don't have time to go for that five-mile run or to an hour-long yoga class. That's ok, even short periods of exercise can benefit your physical and even mental health. Studies show that taking just a five-minute break every hour to get up from your desk and stretch your legs is beneficial for your mind and body.

How do you spend your lunch break? The answer for many people is working. Even if it's only for half an hour, leaving your phone at your desk and going for a walk outside while you eat is proven to enhance blood circulation, build strength,

improve your mood and make you more productive. If your employer has an onsite gym or fitness program, it's in your best interest to take full advantage.

Being Sick

We all get sick at some point. When it happens, it's important to make recovery your one and only priority. If you let an illness linger and continue to work at full capacity, your productivity decreases both in the short term and long term. Even though it's difficult, taking the time to fully heal from an illness is key to not only to success at work but vitality outside the office as well.

Eating Healthy

Eating properly is something the majority of us overlook. It's easy to grab something that's quick and satisfies your hunger regardless if it's good for you or not. Even though you probably skipped breakfast and that burrito or slice of pizza sounds great for lunch, they could likely do you more harm than good. Eating fatty or greasy food lowers your immune system and can put you in a food coma rendering you useless the rest of the afternoon.

If you're short on time, it might be worth considering a meal delivery service like Door Dash or Uber Eats. The delivery fee is most often minimal and you have plenty of options to choose from. Most delivery menus have vegan and gluten free choices that come in reasonable portions so that you won't eat yourself silly but won't starve either.

Snacking throughout the day is crucial. If you're busy running from one meeting to another, you likely don't realize you're hungry until your blood sugar has reached low levels. If you take the time to cut up fruit and veggies that you can store at work, you'll have healthy snack options at the ready and be able to maintain your energy level throughout the day.

Caring for Your Mind

Being in a positive state of mind is just as important as taking care of your physical well-being. If you aren't in the right mindset, not only is your work in trouble but everything around you might be as well.

One of the ways to get your day off to a positive start is to meditate when you wake up in the morning. Even if it's just for a couple of minutes, practicing a simple meditation on a regular basis allows you stay centered and in the moment even when everything else around you is chaotic.

Starting a gratitude journal is another option to help put your mind at ease and relieve stress. This can be done in the morning or before you go to bed by simply putting a pen to paper and making a short list of everything you're thankful for brings you back to the present and allows you to see the bigger picture. Practicing gratitude in any form helps you put things in perspective and realize that there are other things in life besides work.

No one doubts you want to be successful and make an impact in your job. If you don't take some small steps to take care of yourself along the way however, you not only risk your job performance, but living a long and fulfilled life as well. If you find yourself physically ill, stressed or depressed because of work, implement some of the small routines above into your life and you'll be back on top of your game in no time.

How-To Delegate Effectively at Work



Many business leaders hesitate when delegating tasks. After all, they can get the job done right, the first time (or so they think). However, delegating can bring in new valuable perspectives and an increased productivity for the company.

Delegation in the workplace today is largely lacking and the result is insufficient communication and a general absence of positive morale. If you find yourself in a position of leadership or management, delegating work to others not only reduces your workload, but does wonders for your colleagues and the company as well.

The Foundation

If you're going to effectively delegate work and responsibilities to others, there are some key dynamics that must be present in an organization to begin with. If any of the following are absent, effective delegation doesn't stand a chance.

Communication

Every employee on a team or in an organization must clearly understand what is expected and what the objectives are. It rests on your shoulders to make sure that core values, policies and expectations are clearly understood by everyone involved.

Trust

If you don't fully trust your co-workers or they don't trust you, you're in for an uphill battle. While trust takes time to build, it's hard to win back once it's broken. In order to achieve maximum productivity while maintaining high morale, trust is a must.

Honesty and Respect

The relationships between everyone involved must be built on honesty and respect. We all are prone to mistakes occasionally, but if those mistakes are dealt with in an honest and respectful manner, everybody wins. You're in trouble though if there is deceit or lack of respect.

If you feel your work environment is healthy for everyone involved, you're in a fortunate spot where delegating can really do wonders. Now it's up to you to get to work. Below are some tangible benefits that proper delegation brings to all parties.

The Opportunity to Train and Grow

As a leader, it's your job to identify opportunities for everyone on your team to learn and become better. If you're actively seeking out these opportunities there will be tasks and responsibilities that you can delegate to others. With the right encouragement and training along the way, most employees will jump at the opportunity to make a greater contribution. This can also help to retain your employees since they are feeling challenged.

Weaknesses Become Strengths and Strengths Become Stronger

You're probably already doing a great job of identifying the strengths of your employees. And maybe you've already given them added responsibilities that align with those strengths. Some of the greatest opportunities for growth though, come from identifying weaknesses and giving an individual added responsibility where they need growth. This might seem terrifying to both you and the employee at first, but with the proper guidance and feedback along the way, the employee and your organization can experience tremendous growth and empowerment.

Delegate Toward a Goal

Delegating the occasional task here and there is great. For a short time, you feel relieved and the person you delegated to feels appreciated. But if you take this a step further and align delegated tasks with a greater goal or objective, everyone can be committed to the process. When everyone works together on a project from its infancy to the final product, the sense of accomplishment is infectious. If this process of delegation becomes a regular occurrence, your employees are sure to remain hungry and keep coming back for more.

Never Lose Your Identity

Successful companies all have core values that govern everything they do. Delegating is the perfect time to not only reinforce core values, but to demonstrate how each and every task at hand reflects and promotes what you're about. When everyone can see your "WHY" in the work they do, it reinforces that

they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Cross-Delegation

Different departments within organizations see things differently. The classic case is the rift between sales and production where there is often disconnect and misunderstanding. A great way to bridge the gap between any subsets in a team or company is to delegate tasks that require collaboration. While there is sure to be some angst, it's up to everyone to find a way to get the job done. Collaboration provides broad insights that garner respect and understanding between departments that don't necessarily work alongside each other on a daily basis.

Always Celebrate Success

When an important project is finished and meets or exceeds goals, is profitable, aligns people around shared values and creates momentum, it deserves to be recognized and celebrated. Whether it's a simple catered lunch on the company dime or a trip to a sunny destination, recognizing the hard work and success of the people that made it all happen is essential and sets you up for continued success in the future.

If you are a business leader and find yourself overwhelmed, it might be worth taking a step back and evaluating the foundation of communication, trust, honesty and respect. It very well could be that there are some fundamental issues that can be resolved with collective input and discussion. If all the dynamics are in sync, you're in a great spot to spread responsibility, help each individual grow and realize success that you never thought was attainable. It's at this point that the hard work becomes fun for everyone.

Signs That You're Not Going to

Get Promoted



Promotions are the goal for most employees. After all, who wants to stay in a dead-end job? Unfortunately, some employees are stuck in jobs with no opportunity for growth or a raise. If this is you, it might not be obvious at first. You could even receive extra responsibility, but without any extra recognition, there might be a problem.

As a recruiter, I see many people stuck in dead-end jobs. I have compiled a list of signs that you are not getting promoted. If you recognize some of these signs in your current position and are a Regulatory or Quality professional in the San Francisco Bay Area, I can help you find a job with opportunity for growth.

You Get the Work No One Else Wants

Everyone gets their hands dirty from time to time- even your boss. No one really likes doing menial tasks, but they are necessary. However, when you're the one that ends up with this type of work day in and day out, it's a sure bet you're not as valued as you should be.

Whether it be your own fault for your willingness to do whatever it takes, or you're continually being looked over by your superiors and colleagues, it's now clear that you are replaceable. This is a safe place in the eyes of your boss and there's no need to fix a problem (promoting you) if it's not broken. Bottom line, you're not about to move up.

You're Out of the Loop

People engage with you on a daily basis but it's only the cursory "good morning" or "how's it going?" Physically you're there just like everyone else but you're left out of closed-door meetings and conversations of importance. No one asks you your thoughts on that collaborative project that the rest of the team is excited about. These are all signs that when it comes time for quarterly bonuses or promotions, you're not high on the list.

Your Boss Isn't Interested In Your Ambitions

Managers that care regularly check in with their employees about their aspirations. Even if it's not with the same company, they genuinely want the best for you and will do whatever they can to help you get there. Maybe you even go to them for advice but none is given. Unfortunately, this is an indicator that you're valued only in your current role and the chances of being promoted are slim to none.

The Math Doesn't Add Up

Even though things seem to be going well you start to notice irregularities. You're asked to take a pay cut or give up company health insurance, bonuses and recognition no longer exist, meetings between HR and company executives become more frequent. These are signs that there might be a problem beyond the control of you or your boss. If your company is on thin ice from a leadership or financial standpoint, it's a clear sign that any thought of a promotion is out of sight.

There are countless reasons that you might not be getting promoted. Whether it's poor leadership above you, financial trouble, or plain indifference on your behalf or someone else's, it's important to recognize the signs and take the necessary steps to improve your situation.

If you find yourself in this situation it's natural to feel discouraged. Not all is lost though! If you take the steps to update your resume in a way that highlights your

contributions (I can help with that as well) and actively start looking for better opportunities, they are out there. There are plenty of clichés about making the best out of a seemingly hopeless situation but there's a reason why. Indeed, some of the greatest opportunities for growth and advancement stem from situations when you hit the proverbial glass ceiling. Look for signs that you can turn things around if you generally enjoy your job. But also look for signs that things will not improve and develop a plan to improve your situation.

I'm here to help. If you are looking for a new opportunity in the pharmaceutical, medical device, or biotech industries in the San Francisco Bay Area, contact me, Jeff King at jking@rqfocus.com or (541) 639-3501.

How Finding Your “Why” Leads to Success



Your most basic needs for survival are food, water and shelter. While survival is the bare minimum, humans crave and are capable of much more. You seek to provide for yourself and your loved ones. Making money, learning new things, helping others, pursuing happiness, staying healthy, creating relationships, the list goes on. Without a clear sense of why you seek these things however, you're susceptible to disengagement, despair and shame. To cope, it's easy to turn to drugs, alcohol and other unhealthy habits. It's not surprising that dependence on antidepressant medication, suicide and depression is on the rise.

Disengagement in the workplace is at an all-time high as well. While we're the

wealthiest we've ever been, there is a distinct disconnect between being well-off and well-being. Without a clear sense of purpose - or a why - this cycle is sure to continue. The first step to achieving your career aspirations and breaking out of the rut of complacency and indifference is defining your why. Having a why gives you motivation, energy, courage to take risks, and drive to keep going when times get tough.

Five Why Questions

A good place to start when finding your why is having someone you know and trust, and that knows you, ask you the five why questions. Each question in this exercise is based off the answer to the previous and is designed to dig a little deeper. An example of what this conversation might look like is below.

Q: "Why do you come to work every day?"

A: "So I can make money to support my family."

Q: "Why do you want you support your family?"

A: "Because I love and care for them deeply."

Q: "Why do you love and care for them deeply?"

A: "Because they enrich my life and bring me joy."

Q: "Why do they enrich your life and bring you joy?"

A: "Because seeing them happy and successful make me happy?"

Q: "Why does seeing them happy and successful make you happy?"

A: "Because I care about others and when I see them doing well it motivates me to pursue my goals and dreams too."

As you can see, this simple exercise can quickly get you thinking about what your true motivations are. And the best part is, it is not limited just to just five questions. Keep asking "why" until you have some answers you're satisfied with. Doing this exercise with someone that knows you pretty well can also give you a different perspective on some of your answers that you might not have even considered.

Now that you've entered a mindset that has you thinking about your life beyond the daily grind, Forbes contributor and award-winning author Margie Warrell suggests contemplating four questions that will help you identify the crossroads between your work, talents, expertise, passions and values. It is here that you can

truly define your why.

What Makes You Come Alive?

The immediate answers for you might be sailing in Greece, seeing your favorite band in concert or vacationing in New England during the fall. If you think a little deeper however, you'll probably come up with some different answers. Instead of being about you, these answers will be about something bigger than you. They will let you connect with what you're passionate about. Writes Warrel, "when you focus your attention on endeavors that put a fire in your belly, you grow your impact and influence in ways that nothing else can."

What are Your Natural Strengths?

When you're in an environment that lets your strengths shine through, you're bound to find increased personal and professional success. Are you the calming voice amidst chaos? Do you easily inspire or persuade people? Do your problem-solving skills set you apart? Do you find you're most successful going against the grain? By taking the necessary time to identify your strengths, you'll be better positioned to make an actionable plan to achieve your greatest ambitions.

Where do you Add the Most Value?

Maybe you excel at your job. Others come to for help, you get promoted more quickly than your colleagues and your superiors recognize the contributions you make. This is all good and well but if you're heart isn't fully committed to what you do, chances are you aren't living out your why.

By knowing in what types of environments you add the most value and are most fulfilled, you're able to identify opportunities and career paths that allow you to make meaningful contributions and afford the greatest sense of accomplishment. Thinking about where you can best solve problems that you enjoy is a great way to focus solely on your strengths instead of eliminating weaknesses.

How Will You Measure your Life?

Here again, your surface-level answers might be divergent from those derived if you think a little deeper. Perhaps making money is your immediate primary goal that you see as a means to an end allowing you to live the life you want. Perhaps a more thoughtful answer might be having an impeccable reputation for honesty or helping as many people as you can become homeowners. As Warrel writes, "the things that matter most are rarely things... deciding how you want to measure your life means making a stand for something and then living your life in alignment with it."

While the reality for most people is that they can't trade in making money for living a life based just on passion. If you look at this reality in the right way however, making money and following your heart don't have to be mutually exclusive. By focusing on how you go about your job instead of what your job is, you're likely to find more meaningful purpose.

Finding your why personally or professionally isn't something that happens overnight. It takes a lot of work and involves having some tough conversations with yourself. If you're willing to put in the effort though, the rewards can be unimaginable. If you feel like you're stuck in a rut or not progressing toward your goals as quickly as you'd like, asking yourself some of the questions discussed here is a good place to start.

The Importance of Mental Health in the Work Place



The demands of the job in the American workforce are unlike any other in the world. For salaried employees this is especially true. Long hours, weekends and constantly being available are the norm. The truth is that most of us are “at work” even when we’re not at work. In order to function at full capacity, it’s vitally important that you are healthy not just physically but mentally as well. While employers have increasingly made physical well-being a top priority through initiatives like step programs and on-site gyms, not enough is being done to ensure mental and emotional well-being for employees. In order to reach your maximum potential, it’s paramount that mental and emotional well-being are a top priority. Identifying needs and having the appropriate resources available is crucial to the success of you, your team and the entire organization.

Recognizing and Identifying a Problem

Some [44 million Americans](#) suffer from a mental health condition. Though sometimes tricky, identifying mental health concerns upfront is integral for not only your ability to do your job, but your overall well-being. Symptoms of poor mental health can be subtle, but knowing what to look for upfront goes a long way. If you notice yourself being withdrawn, complacent, having an inability to focus or seem unmotivated, there is a good chance that something extraneous is affecting your performance.

Addressing Mental and Emotional Health

If you’ve identified symptoms and suspect that you might not be in a healthy mental or emotional state, it’s something that certainly needs to be addressed. Finding a safe and confidential space to have a one-on-one conversation with someone you trust is the first step. When the time is right, schedule a meeting

with your manager or supervisor to have a conversation. Communicating your concerns will not only lift a weight off your shoulders, but allow you to collaborate and plan a healthy course of action.

Caring for Mental and Emotional Health

In order to lead a productive and fruitful existence both at and away from the workplace, it's imperative that you take care of yourself.

1. Journaling

We all have days that are better than others. Sometimes the roller coaster of work and life can seem overwhelming. Setting aside a few minutes each day to simply write your thoughts down can go a long way in putting your mind at ease. Even if it is for five or 10 minutes before bed, putting your thoughts on paper not only provides an immediate outlet, but creates room for reflection down the road when times are difficult. It can provide a window into how far you've come in recent months, or highlight an area that maybe you haven't fully addressed and remind you there may still be some work to do.

2. Practice Gratitude

It's all too easy for us to focus on everything we don't have. Maybe your colleague got the promotion, was awarded that dream trip for sales performance or bought a new car. We find ourselves feeling jealous, inadequate and wondering why it wasn't us that was rewarded for our hard work. Comparing ourselves to others does little good. Instead, make it a point to recognize all that you have to be thankful for and write it down. Much like journaling, making a short list of people and things you are thankful for helps you focus and stay centered.

3. Exercise

Too many of us find ourselves stuck at our desk staring at a computer screen for countless hours every day. This is not only detrimental to our physical well-being, but our mental and emotional well-being as well. When we are physically active, our brain **releases endorphins** which improve our mood and increase our productivity. Even if it's simply going for a short walk at lunch, making exercise a part of your routine is essential for maintaining a positive frame of mind.

4. Get Enough Sleep

Getting enough sleep is important for your overall health. Continual sleep deprivation is proven to cause anxiety, depression and a host of other problems. Making sure that you get to bed on time and sleep soundly for seven to nine hours is directly linked to happiness and productivity. If you have problems sleeping, consult with your doctor to see what options you might have, and check with your employer to see what health resources are available to address the problem.

5. Be in Nature

We all long to be outside as much as possible. Wouldn't it be great to take that two week-long camping trip at a moment's notice? Unfortunately, for most of us that is simply not realistic. However, finding ways to spend even a little time outside on a regular basis is proven to increase self-esteem, stave off depression and increase creativity. Even if it's going for a short walk or making time to work in your yard or garden, being in nature can go a long way in caring for your mental health.

Meditation

Even though it sounds a bit goofy, the benefits of meditation are countless. From promoting sleep to improving memory, meditation plays a key part in helping you be at our best. Though it can be done at any time, setting aside just ten minutes to meditate in the morning or evening is enough to improve your state of mind. With so many types of meditation available, there is sure to be one that works for you.

The fact remains that most of us are going to spend a large part of our lives working. In order to be at your best, self-care is essential to the process. While physical health is highly important for us to do our jobs, mental and emotional well-being must be looked after as well. By taking even a few small measures to look after yourself in this regard, you're sure to perform at your potential and further enjoy the process.

How-To Manage Your Employee's Time Off



If you're like most hard-working Americans, chances are you laugh at the idea of working 40 hours a week. The reality is that you probably are the first one to the office in the morning and the last to leave in the evening. You probably even show up on the occasional Saturday morning or Sunday evening because you have no other choice. "Time off" is probably laughable to you but it's vitally important. Not just for you, but your employees as well.

Your company is only as good as the people on the ground and in the trenches. Your expectations are high and your employees take pride in the job they do for their own sake and that of the company. You probably have great relationships with most of them and your culture is one of teamwork and inclusion focused on a greater goal. Even if all this holds true, the number one complaint from employees across the board is not having appropriate time off to recharge so they are able to maximize productivity and efficiency while at work. Such begs the question, how do you balance maximizing productivity while making sure your employees can be at their best each and every day they come to work?

Be Upfront About Paid Time Off Policies

In the modern workplace, employees see paid time off and benefits just as important as a competitive salary. If your competitors offer more attractive PTO perks, you'll struggle to hire and retain qualified people. It's paramount to make sure all employees know and understand PTO policies immediately during the

hiring process. These policies should be clearly stated in the employee handbook and readily available for access upon request.

Forecast and Plan Ahead

If you've been in business for any length of time, you likely have a good idea of when your busy and slow times are. This should directly affect how you manage PTO requests. If your busy time is the winter holiday season and all hands on deck are needed, your PTO policies and labor budgets should reflect that trend. Effectively writing, communicating and implementing these policies up front lets employees plan their time off in a manner that is best for them and also aligns with company needs and objectives.

Set Deadlines for PTO Requests and Approval

While time off is essential for every employee's well-being, it's important that they communicate their requests well in advance so managers can aptly plan for their absence. Communicating these deadlines to all employees at once creates transparency and ensures fairness.

If many PTO requests are made at one time, it's imperative to have a policy in place for the priority in which those requests are processed. Whether your policy is first-come-first serve, based on seniority or some other metric, it needs to be made clear to all employees so that everything is black and white.

Incentivize Employees During Peak Times

It's widely known that employees are tremendously more motivated by incentives than they are reprimand. Budgeting and forecasting for incentives like holiday pay and bonuses is a great way to offer a win-win for your employees without sacrificing productivity. For those that want to take time off, the deadlines and policies have been clearly laid out. For those that are motivated to make extra pay, times like these are a great opportunity to cash in. The key once again is effective planning, policy setting and communication.

Make Your Schedule Rotational

I'll say it again, transparency and communication are your best friends. Not everyone works Monday through Friday 9:00-5:00 on your team or in your organization. No one wants to be "on call" on a Friday night when they could be at happy hour or at their child's soccer game. This time is fleeting and spreading that responsibility equally and fairly amongst your employees ensures that everyone is on a level playing field.

Be Flexible

Any reasonable employer makes time for deaths in the family or illness. That only goes so far however. Circumstances come up in your life. It's unrealistic to expect every single one of your employees to stick to a regimented rotational schedule without any room for variance. Allowing employees to reasonably switch days or shifts goes a long way in building morale within your team knowing that you've got their back and the favor will be returned someday.

It's important that these schedule requests be approved by a superior however. Having an open and balanced conversation with your employees about last minute schedule requests is essential for the health and productivity of the entire organization.

Everyone in the modern-day workforce wants to feel valued for the job they do and compensated accordingly. While higher wages are great, managing time off in a favorable, but efficient manner shows those that work for you that you care on a human level. With proper planning, policy setting and communication, accommodating PTO requests can make everyone of your employees feel valued and empowered. Good news for everyone involved.