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QuickTakes

Practice not being perfect

Every organization has high achievers and "workaholics." You know who you are — the people who are still on email at 11 p.m., the ones who never seem to take a break or go on vacation.

While it may seem like something to aspire to, there's a dark side to being a workaholic. Too often, this term disguises what's actually a problematic expectation for many employees. Behind the "always on" mentality is a bad case of perfectionism. And if left unchecked, this can be harmful to your mental health and the greater organization — leading to competition, lack of collaboration, and ultimately burnout.

Read on in this newsletter to uncover ways to identify and eliminate unreasonable workplace expectations, and to help cultivate healthier attitudes for you and your coworkers.



What Is Perfectionism, and Is It Affecting Your Work Life?

If you feel that perfectionism is associated with high performance and higher success rates, you might be surprised to learn that it has a dark side as well. It might seem that trying to work diligently with extremely high standards is good for productivity and success, but that's not always the case.

What is perfectionism?

Perfectionists hold themselves to incredibly high, often unattainable standards and engage in harsh self-criticism when they fall short. Research from psychologists Paul Hewitt and Gordon Flett found younger generations — specifically Gen Z and millennials — are showing higher tendencies of perfectionism than previous generations. Not only that, those tendencies are increasing, or becoming more prevalent, as time goes on.

The dark side? Constantly striving for the unattainable can have devastating effects on the psyche. "Perfectionism is a virtue to be extolled definitely," said Prem Fry, a psychology professor at Trinity Western University in Canada. "But beyond a certain threshold, it backfires and becomes an impediment," she said.

The Link Between Perfectionism and Mental Health

Perfectionism in the workplace is problematic for many reasons. Those who lean toward perfectionism exhibit harsh self-criticism when they don't receive the highest scores or forms of approval. This can create high levels of stress and psychological turmoil that negatively affects their health and wellbeing.

The World Economic Forum reports there is "substantial evidence indicating that perfectionism is associated with (among other things) depression, anorexia nervosa, suicide ideation, and early death." Considering how stressed out today's workers are already, it's easy to understand how any increase in pressure or stress could lead to poor mental health down the road.

Tips to Ease Stress and Combat the Negative Effects of Perfectionism

Learning to recognize the sources of pressure to be perfect, both real and perceived, is an excellent first step. Here are a few initiatives you can work to implement in your office to help everyone, not just the perfectionists, have a happier, healthier worklife.

Healthy culture. Helping build a workplace wellbeing program is an excellent place to start, as it supports all aspects of employee health. It can help cultivate a healthy workplace culture, one where you and your coworkers feel happy, valued, included, accepted, appreciated, respected and supported.

Health coaching. Asking your employer to bring on a workplace health coach can be an incredible resource for you and your coworkers. Through a person-first, holistic approach, coaches address the full spectrum of your health, including mental wellbeing. Connecting with a person, even if it's just a short call, can kickstart your path to better health and wellbeing.

Peer relationships. Fostering positive social interactions and re-affirming team building exercises between you and your co-workers leads to a more productive, happier work environment for everyone.

Sources:

The Cut. Study on perfectionism and millennials. <https://www.thecut.com/2018/01/new-study-on-perfectionism-and-millennials.html> (Accessed 10/10/19)

American Psychological Association. Perfectionism increasing over time. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/bul-bul0000138.pdf> (Accessed 10/10/19)

Virgin Pulse blog. Is perfectionism negatively impacting your organization? <https://www.virginpulse.com/blog/> (Accessed 10/10/19)

Maple-glazed brussels sprouts with crispy shallots Serves 8 - 10

Move over, classic green bean casserole! This tasty side dish is destined to become a fixture on your table.

INGREDIENTS

2½ pounds brussels sprouts
2½ tablespoons olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
8 large shallots, peeled and sliced (not too thin)
1 teaspoon fresh or ¼ teaspoon dried thyme leaves
1 tablespoon pure maple syrup
1 teaspoon cider vinegar

DIRECTIONS

1. Line a large rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Trim stems on brussels sprouts. Pull off any yellowed leaves. Slice the sprouts in half lengthwise and place on the baking sheet. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and toss to blend. Spread the sprouts out into a single layer.
2. Line an 8-inch baking dish with parchment paper. Place sliced shallots in the dish. Add the remaining 1½ tablespoons olive oil and the thyme. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Stir to blend.
3. Preheat oven to 400°F. Roast the brussels sprouts until they are browned in spots and tender, about 18 minutes, stirring halfway through. At the same time, oven-fry the shallots, stirring once or twice, until browned and crisp, about 15 minutes. Keep an eye on them to make sure they don't burn.
4. Combine maple syrup and vinegar. Drizzle over the brussels sprouts. Return the pan to the hot oven for 2 or 3 minutes to glaze.
5. Transfer the glazed brussels sprouts to a serving dish. Spoon the crispy shallots on top. Serve.



NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

115 Calories
5 g Protein
4 g Fat
0.6 g Saturated fat
9 g Carbohydrates
5 g Fiber
30 mg Sodium