

## Personal Efficiency is the Key to Work/Life Balance

Work/Life Balance is a key issue in many organisations today. A quick scan of the People Plans for many organisations will show that they include terms like “becoming ‘family friendly’”, “providing a happy, healthy lifestyle” and “ensuring work demands are realistic”. But many of the managers that we talk to say that these objectives are much easier said than done. Managers are concerned about the growth of email traffic. They report to us that they can spend over four hours a day on emails. Another concern for managers is the amount of time they spent in meetings. But perhaps the worst concern is the sheer volume of work which – apparently – just has to be done.

Studies in the USA show that efficiency in blue collar industry has improved 80% over the last decade. In the same period, however, white collar productivity has improved by only 4%. This is despite enormous advances in technology.

The key to productivity improvements in blue collar work has been a strong focus on improving processes; for example, the implementation of Kaizen. But most white collar workers are only vaguely aware of their personal work processes.

Most managers, when asked, say they were never actually taught to work. Sure, we’re taught our computer systems, we attend university to learn the theory and practice of our areas of specialisation, but few of us are ever shown how to deal with the day to day ‘administrivia’ that crosses our desks and keeps us at work until all hours.

Most managers we speak to say that no-one helped them when they first started their career and explained how to handle emails, how to set up filing systems, how to plan their week, how to decide what is important – even how to find things. As a result they developed their own systems (some good, some not so good), which they model to their own set of new starters, with perhaps the same indifferent results. Talk about vicious circles!

In our work we deal with “white collar” people at all levels every day. We have noticed a few consistent things:

- Most people generally have a strong work ethic—they don’t like to leave until all their work is done.
- Most people are concerned that they have too much work, work too many hours, are overloaded with email, attend too many meetings, have considerable stress and too few people to handle the workload.

Some of our clients relate consequent high rates of sick leave, rises in compensation premiums and high staff turnover in some areas. While many factors contribute to these, it is generally accepted that a better Work/Life Balance is the key to improving organisational performance in these areas.

Managers are consistent in their wish lists for their people to:

- Be more strategic in their decision making;
- better delegate responsibility down into workgroups;
- Spend less time on process work, more on important work;
- Plan and manage projects better;
- Understand the bigger picture better and where their work fits in to that picture; and
- Make better use of time between cyclic events and responsive/reactive tasks.

But how can this be achieved?

Organisationally, managers must give their people permission to choose not to do unimportant work. They must help them to understand what is important, and to distinguish this from the merely urgent, and then empower them to work on the important.

And this must start at the top. With people from the CEO down choosing not to do things, then the "less important" gets pushed gradually down through the department until it forms a sort of administrative sludge somewhere deep in the bowels of the organisation. But it doesn't really matter that it's there (apart from the obviously toxic environmental reasons) because at each stage, as it has been *not done*, it has been filtered through the sieve of importance, not urgency, or history, or whim or tradition.

Personally, people have an absolute responsibility to pay attention to their own work habits and styles, and seek ways of continuously improving them. Almost everyone can work more efficiently and more effectively, but the realisation that they need to improve comes slowly to most.

But once introduced to the joys that can accompany a deadline met, an in-box cleared, a project properly planned, a key result exceeded, seeing a child growing up, eating meals at regular times and getting to the gym fresh, most managers we talk to say "Why didn't someone teach me this ten years ago when I started, instead of now, *after* I need it?"

Good question. Really good question!

If you want to know more about what we can do to help you change forever the way that you work then please contact us via our website

<http://www.pepworldwide.com.au/index.cfm>.

