

ST APPOINTMENTS

MAKING OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR

Work for work's sake is not a life

By Graham Reilly

WHENEVER I go to the fridge and open the door I've usually forgotten why I went there in the first place. I know I want to extract something from it but have no idea what. I'm 52. And Kevin Rudd wants me and a few million other Australians of my generation to work until we are 67. Good help us.

I'm relatively fit, I don't dribble and I scrub up all right in a suit, but my days are punctuated by involuntary groans whenever I rise from my chair or sink into the seat. Where did they come from? I don't know, I hadn't expected this to happen.

And I didn't expect my body to start wearing out. The accumulation of years of sporting injuries, tumbling off ladders while doing up the house, falling up the stairs after Friday night drinks with workmates, and the dull coccyx ache from decades of being wedged to an office swivel chair have taken their toll.

What state will I be in in 15 years? What's the PM going to do? Dispatch the district nurse to the home of every vague-minded, bone-soe-sevaxenarian to administer a few non-retabtable lines of coke to inject some much needed giddy-up before we all hobble off to work of a morning?

And I've been lucky. I've mostly worked in office jobs where the physical toll is not too great, the mental burden manageable and the work enjoyable, even fulfilling. But I come from a family of coal miners, dockworkers, labourers and factory fodder, people who aged before their time, who got injured or killed in workplace accidents, or crawled home at night after another bout of overtime never wanting to make another plastic widget in their lives.

This is not to say that working in a flour mill as my grandfather did is not satisfying at some point, but in the end it did his head and his lungs in, and it became work for work's sake, work to make ends meet.

Times may have moved on - better working conditions, for example - but there are still many people who want the daily grind to end sooner than later and not just those whose have rotten jobs - and let's face it, there are some really rotten jobs out there.

(I worked in an abattoir for a while and, curiously enough, I quite enjoyed it. But I knew it was only temporary, especially after I watched a slaughterman being stretched out on the works after being fatally gored by a disgruntled bovine. The cow's time there

proved to be temporary as well, especially his early retirement was expected.)

The Federal Government's proposals to lift the formal retirement age and make people work longer before they can get access to a government pension has a whiffy arrogance about it that assumes everyone can, or wants to, work until they don't know what a refrigerator is, never mind what's in it; that everyone wants keep slogging away because they've got an HR department that hasn't downsized them yet, that they are happy to continue hacking at the coffeeice because they haven't yet lost heart or been defeated by hard labour, office politics or thwarted ambition.

And what jobs will we do until we're 67, waiting for the Government to grant a pension? How many 60-odd-year-olds are doing responsible, satisfying work in your office or factory?

And where is the meaningful work for the silver-haired and dodgy-kneed? Is there any such work here?

And so many locations are outsourcing jobs that people may have to be offloaded to Manila or Mumbai. They could ring up people in the middle of their dinner and ask them irritating questions about their electricity provider. Even so, all the evidence suggests that domestic employers still prefer the (cheaper) exuberance of youth over the wisdom and experience of age.

People may be sustained by little pills for high blood pressure or cholesterol, kept upright by a foundry of metal pins in their shoulders, knees and hips, and rescued by heart bypasses and prostate cancer surgery done by a robot, but being kept alive does not necessarily equate with living longer.

The Government justifies its 'live longer therefore work longer' plans by pointing to the demographic evidence that we are spending more time on this earth, and assumes this will continue.

But recently the medical community has been discussing the likelihood that for the next three or four decades at least our children will not live as long as their parents, as they suffer the effects of lifestyle-related health problems such as obesity, hypertension and heart disease. What will the Government do then? Lower the pension age?

There may come a point when, for some, their reservoir of energy and commitment runs dry, when they want to live a bit before it's too late. Life remains short and delaying people's access to the pension will only make it shorter.

Creating an environment for innovation in the office

The environment of the office coupled with other crucial factors acts as a determining factor in the overall thinking process and eventual reactions of your workforce at any specified time. The overall environment plays a fundamental role in shaping the outcomes of events and can result in desirable circumstances or deviations from the goals if not paid appropriate attention.

A normal working individual spends at least eight to ten hours a day in the office, not including the travel time. They pass the rest of the time engaged in the other daily chores of life. If you add onto this the travel time,

accounting for the increasing traffic in cities, and the time spent in dressing for the next day, the time dedicated

toward the office could increase to twelve to fifteen hours a day. Now consider a situation wherein you are spending the chunk of your day at a place you don't enjoy. The environment is stifled and managing office politics is more crucial than any other part of the day's work. Such occurrences only have a negative impact and do not leave a place for a positive attitude towards the regular day to day work.

All organizations irrespective of size or nature of work performed face this problem in different forms. The environment tends to demoralize even the most creative workers. High performers subside without any impelling force to gear up and strive towards new avenues. The only option that remains is looking for a new job.



This challenge has been continually haunting Human Resource managers, who, considering the stiff competition, are always facing enormous problems in hiring the right candidate. Complemented to this are

the huge training costs. What is the right solution?

The solution is to create an environment inducing work and prompting rapid innovations. An environment that allows people to experiment and effectively utilizes the requisite space and resources is the perfect remedy.

Employees must be internally motivated to research and perform the required extra duties in addition to their daily work requirements. Some methods to achieve such an open environment are listed below.

Create an effective communication channel. Make sure that you as a boss are accessible. The channel should be two ways.

Create an effective reward system. The worthy must be

honoured.

Do not be afraid of experiments. They are the road to innovations.

Promote a horizontal structure to the greatest extent possible instead of various layers.

Impart individuality. Recognition is an effective motivation tool.

Organize cultural activities.

Eliminate unhealthy competition among the team members or employees in the same department.

Various organizations are taking extreme steps like promoting relationships in the work place and creating small team open office configuration. However, the exact requirements can be decided only upon understanding the work environment and existing culture.

Steps to Review Your Office Systems

Running an efficient business is all about continuously improving and 'tweaking' your office management systems so that they grow with your business and not hinder your business.

But why do you need efficient office systems in place? Here are some answers!

- To quickly and easily find important contact information.
 - To be able to respond to client's requests straightaway.
 - So that you can immediately submit a proposal.
 - To keep track of your business.
 - To be able to follow-up with clients and contacts.
 - So that you can stay on track with your projects.
 - To monitor your latest marketing campaign.
- Sometimes though problems don't become apparent with your office systems until you actually start using them - and then you may find out that they're not working in the way that you'd hoped.



So what can you do about it? Step #1 Look at where the problems are. Are you constantly searching around looking for an email address? Or cannot tell at a glance if your project is

on track? Or you don't know your cashflow situation?

Step #2 Analyse what percentage of your time is being spent on administrative tasks. What should we do?

Keep a diary for a week of

how you are spending your time. At the end of the week look it over and see what percentage of your time is being spent on these jobs. Could this time be better spent on income-generating activities? Or market research?

Step #3 Compile a list of all non-income generating tasks that you currently do. Could some of these be delegated? Would it help if you took on an assistant?

Once you have followed these 3 steps you should have a good idea of where your time is being spent, what your biggest time drains are, and where you can make improvements. You will be well on your way to deciding if you need to partner with a Virtual Assistant and will be able to see exactly where you need the support.

traceylawton.com

Motivation and solving office conflicts

THE CONSCIENTIOUS and well-meaning owner of a small business cannot seem to get his work force motivated, despite a good benefits package and pleasant working environment. "I am coming to the conclusion that it doesn't pay to be nice to people," he says. "Maybe if I fired a few of them I'd get better results."

The supervisor of a 100-employee division of a large company says his employees are demoralized; he wants to know ways to increase their motivation.

An office manager is stunned to find out that two of her best employees told another supervisor she did not like them. "They are both top performers, and I can never remember being dissatisfied with them in any way," she says. "What's happening?" These managers are discovering that managing means managing people. In the course of consulting and column writing I have found the two major problem areas for managers are how to motivate and how to reduce conflict.

Take the owner who is contemplating firing some of his employees. It is not that he is doing something wrong by giving them a handsome benefits package and good working conditions. He is just not doing enough. If you are in his situation you should ask yourself these questions: Do your employees participate in decision making? Do they have promotion opportunities? Do they think you have made promises you have not fulfilled? Do you reward them for initiative and superior performance?

People will work for money, but except in extreme circumstances, they resist working for money alone. They also want recognition, security and opportunity. There is, accordingly, a simple solution for the supervisor of those 100 demoralized employees:



Tell them "thank you."

It is human nature to like praise and to be motivated to work for it. I often tell my clients, "Do you want to make \$1,000 in five minutes? Go and give an employee a word of praise. His work rate will increase, his motivational level will rise, and he will pass along his good mood to others."

And you must be aware that all the good work and good feeling you build up can be destroyed in ways you little expect. Take the

supervisor who was amazed to find out that her two best employees thought she disliked them.

It can happen like this: The manager is worried about a procurement problem. Frank, the employee, passes the manager in the corridor and greets her with a smile. The manager, engrossed in her problem, looks up briefly and mumbles a reply. Frank's mood drops. He wonders why she is angry with him, what he did, whether he is

doing a good job.

The next day, the procurement problem takes a turn for the worse. Frank tries again. This time the manager does not even respond. Frank's worst fears are confirmed. And the manager does not even realize it.

Why does this happen? Employees are constantly gauging their job security and their employer's satisfaction with their performance by the expression they see on the manager's face.

OFFICE CONFLICT at its worst is caused by a deliberate troublemaker. Here is a typical case:

"I work with a manager who constantly criticizes me and the other managers. He likes to show my boss how knowledgeable he is and how he is the only guy who can 'get anything done around here.' The boss laps it up, and the two of them have lengthy conferences discussing all the employees. This guy is bent on climbing to the top over our bodies. What should we do?" These professional conflict makers create morale problems, credibility problems and eventual productivity problems. They can be cunning and vicious, but they flourish only where the boss is a willing participant.

Professional conflict makers devote so much of their energies to criticizing others' performances that their own tasks are neglected. You can find subtle ways of pointing that out to their superiors.

Worth noting is that professional conflict makers rarely confine their volleys to employees. Their highly critical appraisals usually include disparaging remarks about the boss and his management style. At the appropriate time, you might wish to share with your boss your concerns about the damage being done to the boss' own image in the eyes of the employees. By the way, bring along a witness or two. It will enhance your credibility. Keep your remarks dispassionate, and your boss will see the light.

A high level of employee motivation can make a company grow and flourish. Human conflict can reduce productivity and increase turnover. Business owners would be well advised to regularly monitor both. For a business they can spell life or death. findarticles.com