

Top Performance[®]

Helping You Be Your Best

December 2010



Practice SELF-APPRECIATION

Make December “appreciation month” for yourself. Use these ideas to reconnect with just how valuable you are:

- 1. See your good side.** Take a few moments with paper and pen to list things you like about yourself. In our action-oriented society, it’s easy to concentrate only on skills, such as being good at sports or cooking. Remember to also include the positive qualities that set you apart, such as generosity, kindness or organization. Focus on who you *are*, not only on what you *do*.
- 2. Accept compliments gracefully.** It’s tempting to shrug off or dismiss praise when it comes your way. Instead, accept it. Thank the person complimenting you, and allow yourself to feel good about your strengths.
- 3. Seek out new challenges.** Take a dance class, learn a foreign language or attend a work-related seminar. Learning a new skill can boost your self-image.
- 4. Look within for approval.** Resist the urge to depend on outside feedback or praise. True strength comes from a powerful inner feeling of self-worth. Find ways to reward yourself for a job well done.

The bottom line: This holiday season, give yourself the gift of feeling vital, useful and creative.



Time to give back.

Do something positive during this stressful time of year by helping those in need. Volunteer some time at a school, church, shelter, hospital, library or charitable organization.

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like hard work.” — Thomas Edison

RESOLVE WORKPLACE CONFLICTS



Part of workplace productivity is working well with others. However, in every workplace, different styles and personalities come into play, and conflicts may arise. Learn to manage workplace conflicts positively, before they become a real problem. *Here’s how:*

- FIND the cause.** Conflict may have various roots, including poor communication, different values, clashing personalities or problems with the job at hand. Clearly define the problem so you can work to resolve it.
- MEET face-to-face.** Sit down with the other person and possibly a manager or mediator if necessary. Choose a neutral location and a time when you’re both calm.
- STICK to the problem.** Limit your conversation to resolving the conflict at hand. Don’t bring up the past. Avoid personal insults or placing blame. Focus on how the problem affects work for each of you.
- MAKE your wishes known.** Let the other person know exactly what displeases you and how you *both* need to change to make things better. Include your reasons for wanting to resolve the conflict.
- COOL off.** If the discussion becomes heated, take a break. Recognize that you may need more than one conversation to solve the problem.

Be realistic. Professional relationships differ from personal ones. Resolving conflict to the point that you and the other party can work productively might be the best you can hope for. When basic values and personalities differ, agreeing to disagree might be the best peacemaker.

What is a leading cause of stress in the U.S.? Turn the page for the answer.



The Power of Sleep

The greatest elixir for improving productivity could be a mere eight hours away. Eight hours *asleep*, that is. Learn what sleep does for your brain and body — and how lack of sleep can harm your success.

Zzz Performance. Getting seven hours or less of sleep per night for a week or more has been shown to dramatically decrease alertness and productivity. Lack of sleep can decrease your alertness to the point that safety and job performance are affected. Sleep-deprived people have been shown to have similar impaired recall, reaction times and motor skills as someone who is drunk.

Zzz Memory. Researchers asked test subjects to memorize a list of words and then asked them to recall the list after a night's sleep, at the end of the day before going to sleep or after another task interfered. The people who had a full night's sleep with no interfering tasks were able to remember the most words. Your brain processes information while you sleep.

Zzz Mood. One study found that people were more likely to say they "hated" their jobs after a poor night's sleep. There's no doubt that lack of sleep affects your mood and can make you irritable. That can translate to an overall feeling of dissatisfaction with both your job and your personal life — sleep problems have even been linked to clinical depression. A full night's sleep can boost your mood and outlook.

Chasing those ZZZs: Change your habits so that you spend relaxing, quiet time before bed and allow at least eight hours for sleep. Cut down on caffeine and alcohol, and get regular exercise. If sleep problems persist, talk with a health care professional.

Question: What is a leading cause of stress in the U.S.?

Answer: Finances.

Money may not live up to its reputation as the root of all evil, but it can sometimes feel that way. Those who experience financial stress risk paying the price with their health. Worry over personal finances can lead to problems such as sleep disturbance and depression, which themselves affect almost every aspect of daily life, including your job. You may find yourself eating more, sleeping less and wondering how you can cope.



So what can you do about it?

For one thing, you can learn to manage your finances effectively with the help of a professional financial planner. You may benefit from an objective third-party perspective on major changes in your life, especially those that tend to be emotional, difficult decisions.

Ask your accountant, banker, attorney or insurance agent for a referral — they can be good references since financial planners often work with these specialists. Certified Financial Planner professionals are certified and regulated by the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, Inc.

Altering your spending habits is a big step. Make small, gradual changes. Your reward will be greater financial security and peace of mind.

ASSESSMENT:

A PRODUCTIVE YEAR

Was 2010 a year of milestones? Successes? Disappointments? How do you hope next year will be different? Use these self-assessment questions to put the year in perspective and to set future plans in motion.

SUCCESS: In what areas of your job have you been most successful?

SETBACKS: What mistakes did you make? How did you solve them? What would you do differently next time?

DEVELOPMENT: What classes, seminars or training sessions did you participate in? Did you get promoted or take on new projects? What assignments did you complete that you're especially proud of?

TEAMWORK: How have your relationships with your supervisors and co-workers progressed over the past year? How do you hope to improve them in the future?

SUPPORT: How have management and your co-workers helped you in the past year, and how have you assisted them? How can you strengthen your support network?

GROWTH: What do you wish to take on next year? In what job areas do you hope to grow?

Think big: Whether this year was good or bad, setting concrete, achievable goals for the future can help you cultivate a positive attitude and a sense of hope. Here's to a productive 2011!

Be direct. Qualifiers such as "This probably isn't a good idea, but..." detract from your message. Speak confidently and use words such as "I will" or "I think."