



## 3 Ways to Excel at Work

Posted: 06/05/2013 12:29 pm



**Laurie Erdman**

Chief Energy Officer, LaurieErdman.com; Creator, Burnt Out To Balanced System

Imagine this. You're having a great day. You're checking things off the to do list.

Then boom! You hit a wall worse than a marathoner bonking at mile 20.

You want to crawl under your desk for the next hour. When you finally recover, you've lost an hour that you somehow have to make up for. Most people either stay late or work from home at night.

This is just one of many examples of how we survive at work instead of excel. Unfortunately, just surviving seems widespread since some 74 percent of people wouldn't mind a new job according to Forbes.

So how do you excel at work?

Most of us think we have to go the extra mile. Work harder. Take more on.

Wrong.

The real secret to excelling at work is learning to better fuel your body and soul. In this case, we're talking about learning how to thrive. The following three easy steps will help you excel at work with more productivity and engagement.

### **Feed Your Brain**

With the decrease in manufacturing jobs, we have become an intellectual economy. Whether services or products, most employees are hired for their brain not their brawn. Even retail, customer care and sales people must use their brains if they want to excel, thrive and earn bigger commissions.

Most people, however, are feeding their brains on survival mode. A 2004 study showed that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all restaurant meals were from fast food. Despite the success of the Food Network and cooking shows, we are eating most meals from the Standard American Diet playbook - sodas, energy drinks, sugar, fried foods and refined and processed foods. The truth is, we can do all the Sudoku we want to improve our brain function, but it's of little benefit if we aren't providing our brain the nutrients it needs to create more neurons for better thinking.



To excel, you must start eating brain foods. Specifically eat a diet rich in polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats like nuts, avocados, cold-water fish, deep green vegetables like spinach and kale and pumpkins seeds. Antioxidants are another great brain food and can be found in berries, high quality chocolate and cruciferous vegetables (e.g. kale, broccoli and cauliflower).

*Excel Tip:* For managers looking to get more brain power out of their employees, work with your facilities and human resources managers to ditch the soda and snacks machines and stock the kitchen with brain healthy foods. Some examples are: walnuts, pumpkin seeds, fruit especially berries, fruit smoothies, guacamole, snack bars with nuts, dates and flaxseeds.

## **Sleep Is Not For Slackers**

At a National Association of Women Business Owner panel I attended several months ago, I listened in horror as each CEO of a multi-million dollar company was proudly sharing how she was sleep deprived. They wore their sleep deprivation like a badge of honor.

Sadly, these successful women were teaching that to create a growing, thriving business you must give up sleep. But sleep deprivation puts us in survival mode once we get to work, where we are constantly seeking out sugar and caffeine to make it through the day.

I asked myself, what if they hadn't given up on sleep? What if they had drawn a line and insisted on eight hours sleep? Might their company be even more successful?

The research certainly supports that notion. We see the amount of sleep college students get affecting grades by as much as a whole letter grade for each hour of additional sleep.

Lack of sleep reduces productivity. The April edition of the Harvard Business Review reported on a study at Singapore Management University about sleep deprivation and productivity. The study showed that for every hour of sleep that was interrupted, the participants spent 20 percent more time "cyberloafing" (i.e., personal email and checking social networking sites instead of working. Not exactly excelling.

*Excel Tip:* Make 8-hours sleep a daily non-negotiable. If you think that will be the kiss of death at work (like I did), take this data to your boss and suggest changing your work hours, or working from home so you can skip your commute.

## **Practice Giving**

A giving work place culture translates into a high energy, thriving work culture. Specifically, giving yields higher-profitability, productivity, efficiency and customer satisfaction, according to research by Nathan Podsakoff of the University of Arizona. Giving also translates to lower costs and turnover rates.



Publication: Huffington Post  
Date: 5 June 2013  
Headline: 3 Ways to Excel at Work

As an employee looking to excel, giving can be your secret weapon.

When you are in survival mode, you feel pressed for time, huddled at your computer, typing away, just trying to get it all done, not making waves and hoping the next round of budget cuts doesn't land you in the unemployment line. Giving is not something you're thinking of when you're just surviving and that can be holding you back.

Giving makes us feel good and that is the key to excelling at work or any endeavor. Giving also releases endorphins that make us happy. I suspect this happiness leads to more creativity and engagement and thus the business results found by Podsakoff.

*Excel Tip:* A couple of times a day, get up and visit a co-worker for a few minutes. Find out what they are working on and how you might be able to help. Even if you can only offer them a different perspective on the problem they are working on you will have served, you increase your value to the company and you feel good.

Sometimes it's the small changes we make in our behavior that have the most profound results. Excelling at work doesn't have to be complicated. Sure continual learning and skills acquisition is important, but these simple steps can yield big results.