

The CEO Advantage: Why Workaholics Turn Talent Advantages into Disadvantages

By Nancy MacKay, Ph.D

CEO challenge

After the best year of his career, an executive was appointed CEO. He had accomplished an important goal and, to all appearances, he was a success. Yet the rest of his life was out of control.

To get that promotion, he had spent more than 80 hours a week working and travelling extensively. Not surprisingly, it had taken its toll.

His wife had called him six months ago while he was on a business trip to let him know that she was leaving him and would be gone when he returned. He had been too busy travelling to have developed much of a relationship with his teenage children, and he had no close friends. He hadn't had a medical examination for more than three years because he was too busy to fit it in. And, even though he was a CA, he didn't have a financial planner – a fact of which he was now acutely aware given that his marriage was dissolving.

CEO mistake

Clearly, this CEO had made his work his priority in life and, at the young age of 53, he was burning out. Neglecting the other aspects of his life had now cost him. He felt lost, disconnected and unmotivated.

To feel fulfilled and happy in life, six human needs must be met. They are: love and connection, learning and growth, certainty, variety, contribution and significance. In this case, all of these needs were being met through work. Our CEO was a classic workaholic.

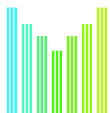
CEO solution

Now in a personal crisis, the CEO realized for the first time that there was more to life than work. He needed to take charge or continue to face serious personal, financial and/or physical consequences.

With assistance, he was shown how to start setting goals in all areas of his life: career, money, partner, friends and family, health, personal growth, physical environment and fun and hobbies. It was hard for him to think outside the context of work, but he persisted despite the discomfort. The CEO then developed a 90-day action plan to achieve greater satisfaction in three key areas.

First, he made a commitment to work with a financial planner to sort out his finances and formulate long-term money strategies.

Second, he committed to getting a medical exam, one which was specifically geared to executives and could address the implications of his work profile and habits.



Third, he committed to having dinner regularly with each one of his kids and to spending more time nurturing friendships, important first steps to building deeper personal, non-work relationships. By applying the same level of focus to his entire life, and not just work, the CEO felt more settled and in control. He vowed never to let work take over, and he encouraged his direct reports to achieve the same balance in their lives. Not only did he become a model for his employees, he also helped ensure they didn't experience the burnout that he had. •

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