

Changing Corporate Lifestyles Managing the Self

Vineet Tandon

The changing corporate lifestyles is playing havoc with the health of today's executives. While changing the corporate lifestyles may not be possible, it is always possible to plan the day well in advance, workout, socialize and be creative.

Many resolutions like exercising every morning, may continue to remain a dream, even though you struggle to fulfill them with each passing day. While a fresh day is already there, yesterday's workload and meetings have not brought freshness into your life. It's already 7:00 a.m., and you are almost late to perform your daily ablutions. And as the day progresses you start doing routine activities, finishing them one by one, participating in one meeting after another and finally ending the day. It's another day filled with stress and fatigue. While on your way back, the thought that you should start your daily workout from tomorrow again emerges as a pop-up window, only to disappear again without any fruitful action.

Is your life taking too much toll on you? Do you find yourself tired and lethargic and not able to feel energetic even after proper sleep? If yes, possibly, it's

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time that you pull up your socks and take stock of your life, and if you have not yet fallen into such a situation then possibly you can be a little proactive and avoid from falling into one.

Why Health?

While I was an MBA student I always fancied the corporate lifestyle. I used to feel that to be in meetings, presentations, strategy discussions, etc., was a great thing. However, only recently did I realize the fact that corporate lifestyle is nothing that great to really draw inspiration from. Today, I can understand that while the corporate life is full of meetings, deadlines, presentations, and pressures, the consequent fallout is hazardous to health, which not many of us are aware of. We are extremely busy climbing the corporate ladder to realize that by the time we reach the top we are hardly in physical condition to do justice to the job and execute our responsibilities properly.

It is also saddening that while most of us are taught strategies, leadership, marketing, and other management issues in our colleges, not many colleges are teaching the importance of a balanced lifestyle. So, while we have mastered the art of climbing to the top, we have lost the ability to control our lives. We are



doing programming that will fetch the company billions of rupees, but we are not loyal to our lives that can never be replaced. The consequences are obvious health-related issues that are, in turn, reducing productivity, increasing absenteeism and resulting in the loss of man-hours which can never be replaced.

So what is the way out? Certainly, the way out is to have a re-look at our lifestyles, identify the areas of possible concern, and develop a strategy to make the most of our lives. Will you not agree that if you were a little more energetic, had a little more control over your life, you would be better placed than where you are? Life is not just about climbing the corporate ladder or about financial rewards or promotions or purchasing that dream car. It's also about being happy and energetic, and about the adage that we have all heard about since our child-hood—"health is wealth". Yet, we do not bother about our health, until it becomes a matter of serious concern.

Yes, we will think of it when things start to go out of hand. We will think of it when the doctor suddenly recommends that you need to lose those extra 20 kg, else a serious heart problem is around the corner. While it's good to work hard and seek material affluence, will it make sense if it is being done at the cost of your life? What use will your dream car be to your life if you cannot have the pleasure of using it for a long ride? What use will a dream home be, if the only time you spend there is lying in bed with a sickness? While most of us are proud to have achieved a lot in less time, the hidden costs of it are there in the form of some ailment or the other. I recall a saying that in the beginning, we spoil our health running after money, and later spend that money trying to regain our health!

It's time to think! Think, when was the last time you went for a jog? When was the last time you played cricket or any other sport you once loved when you were a child? When was the last time you spent doing something you really cherished? Remember, you don't get a second chance to live your life.

Corporate Lifestyles

Take the case of Udit, who works with a BPO. She has taken up a job in call center after having completed her class XII last year. She is earning a handsome salary and is expecting to become a team leader soon after a year. However, she

admits that hectic workload and changing shifts had marked a significant change in her lifestyle. Increasing number of hours sitting in front of the PC had started to affect her back, and long distance travel between office and home had almost made her social life non-existent. Sometimes she feels that school was the best time of her life.

Let's take the case of Amit who works as the GM (Marketing) in a media house. He says that while he has climbed the corporate ladder quickly, his hectic lifestyle has left him no time for other activities. His normal day starts at 7:00 a.m., and ends around midnight. At times, he gets loaded with so much work, that he skips lunch.

These are not isolated cases, and in fact represent the lifestyle of this 24x7 generation, which believes in doing all things fast, and wants to achieve quick results.

Reasons for Changing Corporate Lifestyles

Globalization

While there is every need and reason to discuss and highlight the importance of globalization, the reason for changing corporate lifestyles is also because of it. Today, we are talking about a global village and everything is done at a rapid pace. You just send across an e-mail and it is delivered to people across the world almost immediately. So, while the pace of activities has become lightning-fast, most of us have not equipped ourselves to quicken our response time. Our approach and style remain as they were earlier. Globalization is responsible for many companies spreading their tentacles across the world. For instance, while a company's Head Office is in the US, the branch office is in India. Therefore, work needs to be coordinated by adjusting the time difference and, thus, creating a demand for working in night shifts as well. Thus, globally the workforce needs to adjust to the changing patterns and demands of work.

24x7 Work Environment

The obvious fallout of Globalization is the 24x7 work environment. Working round-the-clock has become more a norm than an exception. Be it banks, hospitals, restaurants, news channels, etc., they all work 24x7. So, if you are not 24x7 you

are probably living in the prehistoric era. While the convenience and flexibility this 24x7 environment has offered is indeed remarkable, the fact that it has also brought significant changes in lifestyles is also true. Though we all operate in a 24x7 environment, our needs, lifestyles, and socializing processes vary and which, in turn, create stress. This, in turn, necessitates the requirement to start realigning our life, work, and family, so that there is an effective work-life balance.

On-Demand Culture

Gone are the days when people used to wait for a week to watch their favorite Hindi movie songs program, *Chitrahari*, on Doordarshan. Today is the era for on-demand culture. There are 24-hour music channels which show all the best songs you would like to hear. Besides, with mobile entertainment platforms coming up, most of these songs or videos are just a click away. You just have to send an SMS, or make a call to listen to your favorite songs on TV. Nowadays, the consumer has become empowered and wants to exercise control over almost everything. While on-demand culture has made the consumer empowered, it has also made lifestyles more demanding. People today want anything, anytime. Being demanding in nature is fine, but being accommodative is equally needed. We need to understand that we are humans and not robots. Therefore, always having an on-demand approach might not be of any significant help in the long run.

Success Masters

At present, there are many self-help books on how to be successful than real-life success stories. Most of them have inspiring titles that claim to provide various steps on how to achieve success. Some call it the “seven laws of success” while others call it as the “ten immutable laws of success”. Whatever title these books carry, the writers of these success books have made their lives pretty successful. Well, I am at no point discounting the value and credentials of such self-help books, but what I am trying to say is that if success is so easy, everyone would have followed those rules. But, actually that is not the case. Also, the narrow interpretation of success has made the whole exercise of success meaningless. Most of us in pursuit of achieving excellence have forgotten the basic values of life. And any success achieved without values will be meaningless. Therefore, readers of these success and self-help books need to understand that there are no

quick fixes and shortcuts to success. Whatever the titles of these books claim, most highlight certain common principles. It's only the perspective and way of presentation that differentiates the authors. Many of the readers of such books set for themselves such unrealistic goals that even they, in the deepest recesses of their heart, know, can never be fulfilled. While there is nothing wrong in being ambitious, the fact that you are human and not super human should not be forgotten.

These days, everyone is measuring success in terms of professional excellence and financial rewards. However, does this alone means success? I beg to differ. One needs to understand that while professional excellence and material prosperity are welcome, the absence of the value system (which is more often there than not) will make success and any such endeavors empty and meaningless. So, there is a clear need to define one's values before one embarks on the journey of success and prosperity. It is the presence of values, which will make success meaningful.

Cost-Cutting Measures

One of the greatest management thoughts that hit the market around the 1970s was the term called "Reengineering." The essence of reengineering was that the organizational processes should be reworked to create more smart, independent, and functional organizations. No doubt reengineering has helped organizations to cut costs considerably, but at the same time cutting costs have resulted in lower levels of morale among workers. Widespread downsizing and layoffs have come into the picture. Job security has also become a major concern. The consequence of cost-cutting and layoffs has been increasing the workload. Increasing workloads have led to increasing work pressure and changing lifestyles. So, now you not only need to work hard, you also need to work smart. Call it whatever you like, but cost-cutting measures have made people work more than ever before and, therefore, people are robbed of the time, they could have spent otherwise with their families.

Less Socializing

Whatever be the reasons for it, the fact that people hardly get time out of their jobs makes socializing extremely difficult. Especially in metros, where people have to work for 8-12 hours excluding the couple of hours that are spent everyday in traveling, there is hardly anytime left for people to socialize. Admit it or not,

most of us have just become corporate animals – from home to office and back. Socializing is an important way to unwind, and lack of it combined with other factors have led to the modern world disease called “burnout”. By socializing, I am not in any case referring to Page3 parties, which are more a showing off of status in those get-togethers. I am referring to associations where one can unwind, open their heart out to a confidante, and, on the whole, simply relax. Such socializing has a deep impact on revitalizing our spirits.

Fine, while it’s true that all this is happening in our lives, what’s the way out? What should you do to regain your lost spirit? Here are a few tips.

1. Plan Your Day Well in Advance

Before you retire to bed just spend a few minutes planning your next day so that you can be comfortable and take things as they come. Also, do not miss out on anything that needs an immediate plan of action. Plan to avoid last minute hassles, and make sure things that are important are addressed well in time.

2. Workout

Yes, no matter how lazy you had been in the past, however much you have procrastinated earlier, take time to workout. I am not suggesting that you should go to a gym for heavy weight training, but a small, regular workout is going to be quite beneficial. Jot it down as part of your plan and stick to it. Your habit of rushing to the office, getting out of bed at the last minute will pull you down. Although there will be some inertia in overcoming those bad habits, it’s worth the effort. Even a regular morning walk and simple aerobics will make you charged and enthused for your work during the day. So just make sure that you workout, else you will find yourself burned out.

3. Socialize

Try to plan and socialize at least twice a month, if not more. See how it makes a difference in your lives. Just unwind and speak your heart out on these occasions. They also represent an opportunity to build a support system and it’s just like investing in an “emotional bank account” (for those who have read Stephen Covey!).

4. Be Creative

All of us are experiencing creativity in the world around us. Organizations, products, and services are all trying to be creative to grab more of the mind share and wallet share of the consumers. But why are we just being monotonous in the way we live our lives. Try to be different and see how it feels. Just get out of your comfort zone and experience the life outside. It's a great feeling to be different in our lives. It could be in anything you do daily. You could try making square chapatis instead of round ones. You could even try brushing your teeth holding the toothbrush with your left hand. The idea is to keep doing something different and not just get bored with the usual drudgery in life.

The list of tips could be endless, but if you succeed in following these tips, you possibly will not need any further tips as your life will start to fall into place. If you want to do anything more, just go ahead and do it. But take a few resolutions at a time. Happy Living!

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