



Healthy lifestyles mean greater performance

Productivity, performance and profit can be greatly enhanced through a healthy workforce, argues *Andre Vermeulen*. He gives some practical tools for increasing performance in the workplace.

Our world is rapidly changing. Information is more than doubling every two years. One edition of the New York Times contains more information than people in the 17th century were exposed to in their lifetime. Today the average first world learner has to work through five times more volumes of information than 20 years ago.

Due to technological advances, great challenges are imposing themselves on society, giving rise to new levels of devitalising stress, which have taken their toll on people's health in general.

The magnitude of psycho social, economic and political transformation which have occurred over the last decade, in conjunction with the realisation that we can neither stem nor control this tide of momentous change, are factors which have left us feeling anxious and confused. This leads to people thinking they have to work harder, rather than smarter.

Now more than ever, people have to live a balanced life style if they want to perform well and maintain physical and mental wellness

What is burnout? Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism over a long period of time.

What is stress? Stress is anything that causes us to feel we are losing control. Change and a lack of understanding the environment may cause stress. It includes anxiety and fear. Anxiety deals with imagined or unreal dangers. Fear deals with actual or threatened dangers. Because stress includes both fear and anxiety, stress may be defined as the feeling that results from the desire to terminate, escape from or avoid a real or imagined, current or imminent, negative event. A stressor is defined as any stimulus that makes demands on us to adapt or adjust.

Unfortunately, not many people know how to deal with stress effectively.

Devitalising stress, which is characterised by habitual negativity, leads to an all-prevailing sense of despondency

and purposelessness which most certainly sets the stage for illnesses like cancer, heart disease, stroke and depression.

These illnesses will most certainly affect performance, productivity and wellness in the workplace.

Consider the costs of replacing a manager who died of a heart attack. Add up medical bills, the loss of expertise and experience and time and money for training someone else as a replacement. This certainly is not good business for companies.

"We should view health and well-being as a three legged stool," says Dr Herbert Benson from Harvard Medical School. The first leg is pharmaceuticals, the second leg is surgery and the third leg is self-care. Most of medicine as practised today involves the first two legs. Yet 70% to 90% of doctor visits are in the mind/body stress related realm that is poorly served by medication or surgery. People should realise that most of the responsibility for healing remains their responsibility

Tools for maintaining wellness

Fortunately, there is a powerful tool for activating the body's healing and wellness mechanisms. An entirely new area of medical research has developed in the past decade with the unwieldy name of PsychoNeuroImmunology, in short PNI.

PNI is the discipline that studies the link between emotions, the nervous system and immune function. It consists of studies that demonstrate that your thoughts, moods, emotions and belief systems have a fundamental impact on some of the body's basic health and healing mechanisms. PNI has shown that positive and negative mind-states do in fact result in chemical reactions in the body, which can alternatively compromise or enhance immune function.

The body's basic health and healing mechanisms respond favourably to positive attitudes, thoughts, moods and emotions (e.g. to love, hope, optimism, caring, joy, laughter and humour) and negatively to negative ones (e.g. hate, hopelessness, pessimism, indifference, anxiety, depression, loneli-