



An Antidote for Executive Stress

by Robert Whipple: MBA, CPLP

If you are in an executive position, chances are you live in a very high stress world. Conditions and events in the world over the past decade have led to a much higher level of complexity and risk in everything we do. The pressure for performance and the razor thin margin between success and failure have resulted in health problems for numerous executives. It seems there is no way of avoiding the incredible pressure executives face daily.

What if there was a way you could get out from under the immense pressure and have the ability to relax, even though the challenges at work often seem insurmountable? Would that be helpful? I truly believe there is a pathway to this kind of existence. It is under your nose. Unfortunately, most executives do not see the wisdom or power in the method I am about to explain, so they go on with the same struggle, day after day, rarely gaining on the very problems that are making them sick.

The antidote is to carve out time to work with your organization to create an improved culture. This suggestion sounds impossible to most CEOs I interview, because they are more than fully consumed trying to survive. How could they possibly create enough slack time in the schedule to actually work on the culture? This attitude means these executives are literally stuck in the rut they hate with no viable way out. I call this phenomenon the "Executive Whack-a-mole Syndrome." When top executives spend 100% of their time dealing with crises and problems, there is no time left to develop a culture where there are fewer problems.

Investing in the culture means spending time with people learning how to work better as a team. It means documenting your behaviors or how you intend to treat each other so it becomes possible to hold each other accountable. It means learning to listen more often and more effectively, so the communication problems are significantly reduced. Also, it means learning to trust each other, so more delegation is possible and the micromanagement is not necessary. The perceived need to micromanage creates a significant percentage of executive stress.

Improving the culture means having the executive be more willing to be transparent and admit mistakes. This practice makes him or her more of a human being: subject to being fallible, but willing to be vulnerable and human. This behavior enables stronger rather than weaker leadership. It also leads to an environment that is more relaxed and healthy. In this culture, the problems are diminished and replaced with sanity and the joy of achieving great goals together. If you know an executive who is playing the Executive Whack-a-mole Game, print this article out and leave it someplace where it will get read.

If you are an executive who has nearly reached the limit of endurance, you might want to try investing in the culture. You will find it to have a much higher ROI than any other activity you can envision. It could even save your life!

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