

Increasing Energy Levels at Work in the New Year

By Jon Gordon

If you're like most people, 2011 has been a long, exhausting year at your workplace. You're tired, depleted, and quite frankly just plain done with "business as usual." You're laying the blame for your fatigue squarely at the feet of the increased responsibilities and long hours you've faced.

However, have you considered that you might be wrong? Working hard – when done with a good attitude in the right environment – can actually be quite invigorating. In other words, what's wearing you out at work might not be the work.

Living in a World of 'Drainers'

Most people wrongly assume that their tasks and responsibilities are what's wearing them down. However, while "work" is a convenient scapegoat, the *real* culprit is often the negativity of the people you work with and for, their constant complaining, and the pessimistic culture that is now the norm in a lot of workplaces.

The fact is, many of us work in a world of "drainers." But what, exactly, *is* a "drainer"? This term can describe anyone in the workplace – a boss, co-worker, employee, or client – any person who "sucks the life and energy right out of you."

No one sets out to be a drainer, of course. It's just that some people regularly (and inadvertently) exhibit energy-draining behaviors. What's worse, many bosses allow them to continue – or they are guilty *themselves* of practicing these behaviors. Over time, the entire work culture becomes "poisoned."

Don't fret though: *If managers are able to identify the offending behaviors and FIX THEM – and that is the intent of this brown bag session for EA professionals – they will be able to spend more time nourishing their companies' cultures, which will, in turn, make employees happier and more productive, thus increasing the bottom line.*

The following are my top draining behaviors (presented in a what-NOT-to-do format), as well as tips for how you can make a change for the better in each of these situations in the New Year. Most of them are presented here – the remainder appears in the Handout section on page 4.

The Energy Vampire Attack

DON'T: Let negativity become your go-to response. There's nothing more draining than a boss or co-worker who is constantly negative. I call these folks "energy vampires." They are never happy, rarely supportive, and constantly nay-saying any and all ideas and suggestions that aren't their own. According to them, you might as well give up before you even start.

DO: Respond constructively when someone presents an idea. Even if you know more about a particular project, have more experience than the rest of your team, or are positive that the suggestions others are making are off the mark, hear them out. Let employees and co-workers know that when they come to you with their ideas, they'll be heard with an open mind and received with respect. Insist that everyone else practices positive behavior as well. While negativity squelches creativity and initiative, an encouraging attitude will keep creative juices flowing and enhance constructive dialogue. Remember – as pessimism rises, performance DECREASES.

The Out-of-Control Complain Train

DON'T: Give in to the temptation to whine. It's a well-known phenomenon that when one person's complaint resonates with someone else, it prompts yet another individual to throw in his or her negative two-cents worth – and so on. Before you know it, everyone is complaining, and any work that does get done afterward is marred by a bad attitude.

DO: Push for solutions. The next time a water-cooler conversation threatens to turn into “Complaint Central,” step in and ask the complainers how *they* would make things better. Turn employees from problem-sharers to problem-*solvers* – it’ll make an unbelievable difference in your office’s atmosphere.

The Vicious Voicemail (or Email)

DON’T: Leave critical or harsh messages on voicemail or send them to an email inbox (or other electronic device). Nine times out of ten, these “critiques” seem harsher than they actually are. Plus, any communication you send via electronic methods can potentially last forever. Not only could your words come back to haunt you, they’ll also be a constant reminder to your co-worker or employee of his or her supposed shortcomings.

DO: Suck it up and conduct tough talks in person. If you need to have a stern talk with someone, or if you need to talk through a conflict or problem, do it in person if at all possible. You’ll be able to ensure that your words and tone aren’t misinterpreted, and you’ll be able to immediately have a constructive dialogue with the other person. By talking about ways to improve, you can end the conversation on a positive and encouraging note.

The Loaded Monday Morning Inbox

DON’T: Overwhelm your team with a mountain of emails before the week is even underway. If you’re finishing up your own to-do list on a Friday night, or if you’re simply trying to get a jumpstart on the week ahead, it can be tempting to dish out the details and to-dos as you think of them. After all, if you wait until Monday morning, you might forget to tell those who need to know! However, coming in to an inbox of 57 new messages is draining and makes folks feel like they’re fighting an uphill battle from the start.

DO: Bundle communications as considerately as possible. Inevitably, people are going to be working late and sending emails over the weekend – in today’s business culture, it’s unavoidable! However, there are a few things you can do to make “You’ve Got Mail!” less stressful and more efficient for the recipient. Be sure to flag any urgent emails so teammates know which tasks to tackle first – and include as many details as possible so that 1) *you won’t forget them*, and 2) *the recipient can get started as quickly as possible*. If you can, combine tasks and questions into one correspondence. One email as opposed to 10 separate ones is a lot less intimidating.

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The Busy Bee Bamboozle

DON’T: Confuse activity with progress. You know the person – he or she is always sooo busy but doesn’t ever seem to meet deadlines or get anything done. When teams are being formed, people secretly hope that this person isn’t assigned to theirs. This employee is living proof of the fact that just because your day is full of things to do doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re getting anything done.

DO: Set goals and hold yourself and your employees accountable for results. These results should be ones that *matter* in the organization and are visible and valuable to the team. It can be helpful to transition to a day-to-day plan that will help everyone stay on the right track. Most importantly, don’t put the team in situations where the lines are blurred. If the goals are crystal clear, they’ll be easier to accomplish.

The Unclear Communiqué

DON'T: Assume others have all the information they need, or that something that you know isn't really that important. Hastily drawn conclusions that result from chronic poor communication can lead to serious mistakes and major missed opportunities in business. In addition, lack of clarity is incredibly frustrating to the individuals who work with you (and for you). When employees, co-workers, or supervisors have to spend their time tracking you down for clarification, rather than getting you the communication from you that they need, productivity falls and creativity is stifled.

DO: Make concerted and proactive efforts to make sure that the right people are “in the know.” Whether it's letting your boss know that a client's daughter is getting more married or telling a co-worker that a vendor prefers to be contacted only via email, be sure to tell the appropriate people. You'll set your entire team up for success and ensure that your clients get the service they deserve. Also, make sure you copy the right people on emails, promptly return voicemails, and are clear about directions and expectations. If you say you are going to do something, mean it. *A big part of a successful work culture is having a relationship between employees and managers that is built on trust and collaboration. And that can happen only if a clear line of communication is established so that inspiration, encouragement, empowerment, and coaching can take place.*

The Disorganization Drag-Down

DON'T: Allow disorganization to impede productivity. If you're managing or leading a company, heading up a big project, or traveling non-stop, it's likely you've lost an email, important paper, phone number, or pie chart or two (or three or four) in your day. You're busy, and that's understandable. But constant disorganization can drain your employees and co-workers if they always have to cover your tracks. It may not always be possible, and accidents certainly

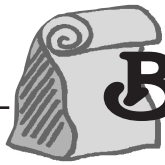
do happen – but not being able to find the quarterly report for the third meeting in a row sets a bad example, and it depletes others of the energy they could be putting towards other, more productive work. It's the type of thing that can cause your star employees to look elsewhere for work. Again, can you really afford the effect that will have on your bottom line?

DO: Make a concerted effort to keep up with your tasks and responsibilities. If you can't immediately put your hands on something you need, don't automatically ask others for help. Take a few minutes to try and find what you need on your own. Better yet, try to think of better systems and processes than the ones you're using (or not using) now. If you see that someone in your office has a particular knack for organization, ask him or her for some tips to help you out. For instance, some managers are still trying to rely on their memory to keep track of scores and scores of things, instead of utilizing pop-up reminders and other functions on PDAs (personal digital assistant) and computers. Having grown up in a non-technological workplace, they may be afraid to ask for help using them. Big mistake! As the saying goes, the only dumb question is the one that *doesn't* get asked. Don't be afraid to admit to a mistake either. Tell employees that between travel, a jam-packed schedule, and working on two computers, you've lost something you shouldn't have. If you are humble and honest about it, they'll be more sympathetic about your plight and more likely to jump in and help.

Summary

If some of the behaviors described in this article – and on page 4 – sound all too familiar, don't despair. The cusp between the year that's drawing to a close and the one that's nearly here, is the perfect time to take stock of what's draining energy and fostering ill will in your organization – and resolve to make it better in 2012. ■

Jon Gordon is a keynote speaker and best-selling author. His latest book is The Seed: Finding Purpose and Happiness in Life and Work. For more information, visit www.jongordon.com.



More Tips to Restore Energy and Productivity in 2012

The Low Performer Look-Away

DON'T: Let sub-par work slide. Simply put, low performers drag the rest of the team down with them. They are like a cancer in your organization, creating resentment and generating more work for everyone else. If you allow them to linger for too long, your best employees will move on to a more productive environment (and organization).

DO: Institute a zero-tolerance policy for low performers. Hold the entire team accountable for meeting goals and adhering to the same performance standards. If one person consistently misses the bar, you need to take swift action. Let your employees know that you value their hard work and that you will not allow others to do less and get away with it. In support of this initiative, strive for complete transparency. When a team knows exactly what's expected, they'll know where they stand – and you as a manager will be able to make sure that their fears, uncertainties, and questions aren't holding them back.

The Hasty Plate Clear-Off

DON'T: Sacrifice quality in favor of expediency. There's a lot of work to do, and you want to get tasks done. This is understandable – to a point. However, moving through assignments just to get them done can lead to jobs done *too* quickly, and people who are rushed are more likely to make sloppy mistakes.

DO: Take the time to do the job right. It takes less time to do a job right the first time, than to do it over. Doing your best work sets the rest of your team up for success. When people realize you're this kind of manager, they'll be more willing to take on projects with confidence and energy.

The Chronic Deadline Dodge

DON'T: Allow unmet deadlines to throw everything and everyone off-track. When people *chronically* miss deadlines, it's a sure sign of a cultural issue. Either employees aren't giving it their all – or they're truly overwhelmed. Either way, your company's productivity will suffer.

DO: Set reasonable, clear deadlines for everyone involved. Many managers have no idea how long it takes to perform a given job, and then they're surprised when a project isn't done "on time." Ask your most productive workers how long it takes to do a given job, and use this as a benchmark. When you set unrealistic deadlines, you are setting folks up for failure.

The Blame Game

DON'T: Point fingers at others in order to take the heat off of yourself. If your employees or co-workers don't think you shoulder your share of the blame or are unapproachable when it comes to constructive criticism, they'll start to "shut down" toward you.

DO: Accept responsibility for your actions. Nobody like to be the one at fault, but owning up to mistakes and learning from them are big parts of working together and being successful. If you make a mistake, be the first to own up to it and try to do things differently the next time. ■

Source: Jon Gordon is a keynote speaker and best-selling author. His latest book is The Seed: Finding Purpose and Happiness in Life and Work. For more information, visit www.jongordon.com.