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When you think about what impacts your job performance and your professional development objectives, what do you think about? Performance and ongoing development for most people are based on two categories of skills – soft skills and hard skills. Soft skills are general skills that apply regardless of role or position such as communicating effectively, working productively, and thinking strategically. Hard skills are role and domain specific skills such as marketing, engineering, and sales. Yet these two areas only address a fraction of the issues that prevent many people from reaching their peak potential.

If you're like most people, you've dealt with significant personal issues at home that have nothing to do with work, yet have significantly impacted your work. You have dealt with issues related to your health, marriage, children, parents, and extended family. You've been distracted from work either mentally or physically by circumstances that have little to do with work. You may have dealt with chronic stress, headaches, or fatigue while at work due to a personal matter. You've likely rescheduled or missed important meetings because of personal issues.

In looking at statistics related to personal issues, studies find that one in five spouses have an affair. One in two marriages end in divorce. One in four adults are affected by depression at some point in their lives. One in six people suffer from some form of mental disorder in a given year. Virtually all children, particularly teenagers, engage in risky behavior that leads to injury or other serious consequences. Add to these statistics adult addictions, caring for elderly parents, and physical health issues, virtually everyone deals with serious personal issues every year.

Workplaces provide many resources to help employees with personal issues. Wellness programs, extended maternity leave, and employee assistance programs are examples that continue to receive increased emphasis and investment. Yet statistics show continued declines in areas such as mental health, physical health, and relationship quality. With the increasing focus and resources, why the decline?

The problem is that workplace resources are only helpful if they are used. Even more fundamental, people's personal issues are only addressed when people give attention to them. Spouses in bad marriages only improve their marriages when they allocate time to improving their marriage. People only improve their health when they make fitness and nutrition a top priority. Parents only make progress with their troubled teenagers when they make parenting their priority.

The sad reality is that people routinely give more attention to working on their hard skills than their marriages. They work on their productivity skills instead of their health. They ignore their children and parents in favor of getting more work done. They work on their ability to think strategically and foster innovation while their families are falling apart. They try to "close one more deal" or "get through one more project" while their bodies are screaming for good nutrition and exercise.



The Most Neglected Area Impacting Work Performance

If you want to reach your peak potential in your profession, whether as an individual contributor or a manager, ensure your personal life gets the highest priority. Ensure your professional development plan includes taking care of your family. There is nothing more influential to your on-the-job performance than the quality of your personal life. The impact of improving your engineering, sales, marketing, or industry knowledge is minuscule compared to the impact of having a happy marriage, responsible children, and good health.

Here are a few simple suggestions to consider at home that can make you a higher performing employee at work:

- **Spouse (or significant other)** – Allocate time daily with your mate to share your thoughts and feelings. Make a regular habit of giving your spouse cards, flowers, massage certificates, dinners out, or whatever they enjoy to show you appreciate them. Care for them and treat them as you did when you first fell in love. Never take them for granted.
- **Children** – Allocate time daily with your children to talk about their day. Particularly during their formative years when peer pressure is high, talk about their social interactions. Help them with homework. Give them regular praise and encouragement to maintain their confidence. Reinforce your family values with stories and examples.
- **Parents** – Give your parents unconditional respect. Spend time with them as much as schedules allow. Help them establish a plan for retirement and the ultimate distribution of their estate. Discuss and agree on their wishes for decision making, health care, assisted living, and final resting place. As they get older, help them make good choices on financial, health care, and housing matters.
- **You** – Make relaxation, nutrition, and fitness a top priority. Realize that your mental acuity, productivity, and energy are directly related to your health and level of fitness. Establish daily eating and exercise habits that keep you fit and healthy. Allow time for relaxation and restful sleep. Pursue enjoyable hobbies. Participate in new experiences and learning opportunities. Your investment in yourself is more than repaid by increased levels of energy, productivity, and mental acuity.

If you are a manager, know the resources that are available to your employees to help them in these areas. Discuss with people in your 1-on-1s how to use these resources. Give support and encouragement to people when they have personal issues. Make accommodations to their schedule. Give them time off if needed. Don't be the manager who only focuses on the 1 percent of matters that impact people's performance. Give attention to the 99 percent that is most important to you and your employee's performance – personal well-being.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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