

# Whose life is it anyway?

At what cost will we “work ourselves to death”?

By Joanne Moss

**T**oxic corporate culture is taking its toll on the bottom line of more and more organisations through absenteeism (as an avoidance strategy) or high staff turnover due to employee dissatisfaction. The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index reveals that, of 94 000 workers across 14 industries, 77% were diagnosed with chronic health conditions like diabetes, heart disease and cancer. The total annual cost/loss due to low productivity, loss of wages, poor quality of services, time wastage and cost of other employees overloaded with additional responsibilities, was estimated at US\$84 billion (R884.41 billion) per year. This ultimately leads to frustration, resentment and decline in morale, which leads to additional negativity.

## *A sick workplace*

Do you recognise the signs of toxic corporate culture in your own workplace? Do you feel that your life is spiralling out of control and that the effects are making you depressed, angry and resentful? Can you relate to any of the following?

- **Infectious gossip and rumours** – office politics
- **“Us & them” mentality among peers and superiors** – breaking people down
- **Retention of poor talent** – not only poor performers but great performers with bad attitudes
- **Double standards** – leaders who do not walk their talk
- **Inconsistency** – favouritism and unfairness
- **Work overload** due to lack of resources (eg absenteeism) and cost-cutting as well as lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities/accountability.

*“Culture eats strategy for breakfast”*

– Peter Drucker



If you identify with these symptoms, what can you do to overcome them? Yes, we rely on leadership to protect us from toxic people polluting the environment – in the words of the famous social ecologist Peter Drucker, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast”. However, we also need to empower ourselves and take control of our own choices before they control and disempower us!

### Take charge

To find out whether your life has become unbalanced, evaluate the eight primary aspects of your life on a scale of one to 10 (one being least and 10 being most important); the result may be different to what you imagined. In professional life coaching we refer to the “Wheel of Life” by Paul J Meyer, which focuses on the following aspects: emotions, family/social, career/work, health, spiritual, partner/relationship, personal development and money. It is a powerful tool as it gives you a clear picture of areas that you need to prioritise in order to regain control over your life. (For more information on how to assess yourself, see [www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com))

### The blame game

In the words of Byron Katie, author of *Love What Is*, “Placing the blame or judgement on someone else leaves you powerless to change your experience. Taking responsibility for your beliefs and judgements gives you the power to change them.”

It’s so much easier to blame someone else – the boss, the company, your colleagues, your clients, your family – for all the pressures and stressors that leave you feeling overwhelmed, undervalued,

overworked and unrewarded. However, if you do that, you have completely given away your power and abdicated responsibility. You are left feeling disempowered, out of control and, most likely, angry and resentful.

You become the victim of your own circumstances, resulting in compromised self-worth, low self-esteem and possibly ill health – for example, anxiety disorders; depression (which often leads to substance abuse or overeating); high cholesterol, hypertension and other heart conditions; asthma; low immunity; and burnout.

### 10 steps to stay well at work

- 1 Take a brief walk during the day to detach and reconnect with yourself. Reinforce your own positive speak and stay in touch with your own great qualities
- 2 Socialise with uplifting and positive people
- 3 Read positive, inspiring and empowering material
- 4 Avoid the gossip mongers

- 5 You are only in control of your own thoughts and choices, which will either result in growth or drag you down and ultimately make you ill
- 6 Do not lower your vibration because someone else is unable to raise theirs
- 7 Your attitude will determine your altitude
- 8 You can choose whether to break down or break through – it is a test and a choice
- 9 Always conduct yourself with integrity. While you receive a salary you have a responsibility
- 10 It is easy to justify bad behaviour and blame it on the environment, but that moment can cost you. Don’t do something that might be permanently damaging just because you are temporarily upset.

Life is simple – everything happens for you, not to you. Everything happens at exactly the right moment – neither too soon nor too late. You don’t have to like it – you just have to learn from it. As Robin Sharma says, “Be the student of the lesson rather than the victim of life.” **HI**



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