

MANAGERS' TOOLS

Managers' Tools is the name of a website that is loaded with free podcasts giving practical ideas for managers to implement. The website hosts are American business consultants who have clearly come across every challenge a manager might face. As well as the more predictable topics like delegation and one to ones, you can also hear ideas on giving a staff member feedback on their attire and how to manage a disgruntled non-promoted direct report.

Mark Horstman and Mike Auzenne are American business consultants who produce two free weekly podcasts designed to give managers practical behavioural tools to improve their management skills. The podcasts are fun to listen to and focus on practical changes that managers can make today rather than on management theory. You can start with Manager Tools Basics which is a special collection of podcasts on the essentials of effective managerial behaviour including one to ones, feedback, coaching, delegation and effective meetings. You can then move on to look at things in more detail, for example 'How to manage a massive workload increase' and 'Resolving conflict'.



Manager Tools won the People's Choice Podcast Awards in the business category in 2006, 2007 and 2009. In 2008 it also won the overall People's Choice category. You can find all the Manager Tools podcasts here: www.manager-tools.com/podcasts/manager-tools and the 'basics' casts here: www.manager-tools.com/manager-tools-basics.

PROTECT YOURSELF BY TAKING CONTROL

For most of us the feeling of being in control will make it easier to cope with a high workload. Here are a few ideas to try that might help you to feel better when faced with excessive work demands.

For most employees the feeling of being in control is a protector. Even when workload is high it will not feel so difficult to cope if we have a sense of being in control over how and when we do it. Where workload has peaks and troughs our strategies for coping can be fairly simple, for example making a list of priorities and tackling the tasks in order or working longer hours from time to time to get on top of things.

However in many job roles the demands are consistently high and these techniques are neither sustainable nor effective. Of course it is worth saying that sometimes work demands are simply unreasonable and you may be able to re-negotiate what is required of you but these conversations may not be possible and so you will need other techniques to help you cope.

Here are a few ideas to think about.

1. Good enough: if you are inclined to be a perfectionist in all things then try only to be a perfectionist when it matters. Master the art of 'good enough.' For some tasks at work doing an adequate job is fine.
2. Goal setting: when workload is high it can often feel like you are simply responding to demands. Setting a goal and achieving it is very important for our sense of being in control. Try to identify something you are working towards and think of a small step that you might be able to take towards achieving it. Here the skill is making the step small enough to be achievable....sometimes very small indeed.
3. Getting into trouble: an idea that comes from one of the managers' tools podcasts described elsewhere in this newsletter is deciding which demand or demands you are prepared to get into trouble for by not doing. Once again this is

a judgement call and you will need to consider both the task itself and the politics relating to it.

4. Influencing the behaviour of others: the more we respond to an individual the more they will interact with us. Some people at work make high demands on us and whilst you may not be able to change them you can change how you respond to them. Think about whether it is possible to delay responding or even not respond at all to some individuals – of course it depends who it is. This approach can feel very uncomfortable but just keep in mind that our prompt response is probably encouraging more demands in future.

5. Responding to change: sometimes systems changes are useful and beneficial but sometimes they are not. When a change falls into the latter category the employees who cope best are the ones who recognise that a change is not deliverable and so only invest minimal energy in it. This is a tricky tactic but look around you at work and you will see it happening.

Managing a high workload is draining and these are just a few ideas. It would be good to hear from you if you have any more tips that would help. Just email jht@organisational-health.co.uk

TALKING AND LISTENING

The feeling of being properly listened to and understood is not as common as you might think, but when it happens it makes us feel good. Practising the skills of good listening will improve social support and have the added benefits of focusing our minds in the moment.

Regular informal conversations with trusted colleagues friends and family are vital for our mental health and well-being. It is through these exchanges that we get our social support and it is well established that social support and networking with others is a great protector for our well-being. Talking to others helps us to make sense of our experiences and normalise what is happening – the recognition that in many ways we are just like everyone else is a great relief.

Talkers need listeners and the skill of listening is worth working on. Try to resist the temptation to offer practical help and advice – this is not what listening is about. Listening is about properly understanding what a person is telling you. You can demonstrate this by summarising what you have heard, making sure you have understood and

checking out things you do not understand. Don't worry that you will use the wrong technique, just genuinely pay attention and try to understand what the person is telling you. Being properly understood is a great feeling and rarer than you might imagine. Try to practise the skill of proper listening every day if you can. It will support the development of good relationships and will have the added benefit for you of focusing your mind in the moment giving you a break from your other concerns.

WORK AND MENTAL HEALTH

The Royal College of Psychiatrists have developed webpages on the topic of work and mental health which aim to help not only employers and employees but also clinicians and carers.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCP) have just launched some new web pages called 'Work and Mental Health' which give information on the key issues that may concern workers, employers, clinicians and carers. The advice is practical and sensible and the layout enables you to get an overview of each area before getting into more detail about what interests you most. The links to additional resources give good coverage without being overwhelming. The pages also cover the role of carers which all too often is missing from work related advice. Access these pages at www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfo/workandmentalhealth/employer.aspx

One resource referred to on the RCP website is the 'Line Managers' Resource' developed by SHIFT which is a practical guide to managing and supporting people with mental health problems in the workplace. This booklet, which has been around for a while but was updated in 2009, gives excellent advice about the practicalities of working with a mental health problem and continues to be one of the best of its kind. Sadly it seems that the SHIFT webpages are no longer being updated but this booklet can still be downloaded: http://shift.org.uk/files/employers/lmr2009_web.pdf

Would you like to get together with other managers to share ideas about coping and supporting your staff when times are hard? Email jht@organisational-health.co.uk if this interests you.