
Zombie Employees Are Coming To Get You:

How Low Productivity Eats into Profitability



Be very watchful.

Despite their glossed-over eyes, lethargy, grunting and moaning, they somehow creep up on you unexpectedly and eat away at your productivity. I worked closely with one once. It was rough; I barely survived.

Go-getters, on the other hand, are great to work with. Expectations are exceeded, metrics are crushed, and optimism flows like dew from heaven. These same all-stars, however, are also often known for working through a cold, working insanely long hours, and glorifying their path to burnout under the guise of workplace championship. We love how freely they share their enthusiasm, ideas and expertise, but their presenteeism is deadly. Work-life balance benefits everyone.



Burned or Buried?

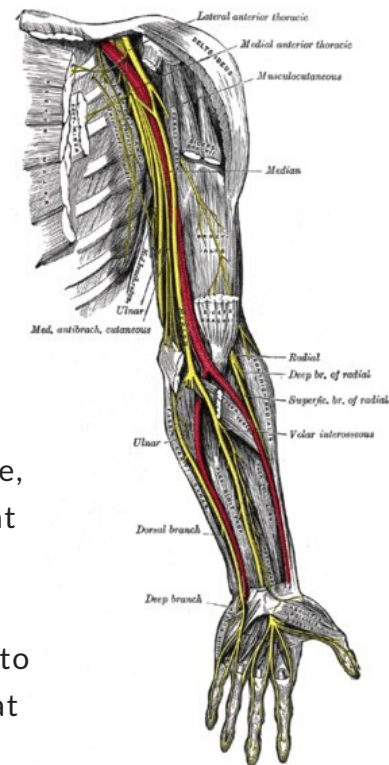
Teams of bright-eyed, engaged, creative, and optimistic people are my absolute favorite groups to work with. They are optimistic about the future, eager to take on new and exciting opportunities, and become management's go-to resource for any high-importance, critical, or difficult projects. Top performers are often rewarded with a crushing workload that would bury any of us.

Who can be surprised, then, that high-performers get burned out with frightening frequency? One of my peers, a great guy to work with, was once pressured into working remotely while he was with his family in Disneyland. Apparently the project was falling behind and no one else at the company could take over for him for even a few days. (Workforce planning, anyone?) I think that the Happiest Place on Earth meant a little less to him that day. Fortunately, he “forgot” his power cable and ran out of battery after only a few hours. I am confident that his family was grateful.

Musculoskeletal Deterioration

Our high performers are notorious for putting in consistently longer hours, working evenings, weekends, holidays, and vacations. The Journal of Business Economics states that these extended periods of stress or anxiety contribute to health issues such as chronic pain or depression. They then go on to indicate that the lost productivity associated with these mental health issues cost employers billions of dollars annually. Any productivity geek (like me) who studies their healthcare claims data will see a related trend: definite correlations between mental health and other costly conditions, such as musculoskeletal conditions, alcoholism, substance abuse, disability claims, etc. The potential return on investment for any effort mental health is readily apparent.

With this costly threat looming, this is the perfect time to evaluate your organization's culture and determine what initiatives to put in place to combat the zombie threat (also known as presenteeism).





Survival Strategies

- Well-planned, quantitative, actionable employee surveys coupled with stay interviews are low-hanging fruit when it comes to aligning employee goals with organizational objectives. It is important to note that employees will often give more honest and accurate feedback when the survey is administered through a third party.
- Leaves of absence policies, both in structure and administration, can be fine-tuned to ensure that employees are able to unplug from work and recharge periodically (without resorting to power cable subterfuge). All policies should be reviewed regularly, at least annually, to ensure that they are keeping up with employee needs and business interests.
- Providing relevant employee development opportunities is an amazing way to improve culture and increase an employee's' sticky factor, allowing you to not only retain employees, but also to build your bench strength when the time comes to expand and fill new roles. Job shadowing, training, workshops and industry conferences promote productivity, innovation, improved morale, and more opportunity to incorporate industry-wide best practices into day-to day tasks.

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