



A Shift of Attention In the Workplace

Each one of us has the ability to make our workplace a better one. Cultivating a healthy work environment requires the efforts of every person in an organization. Whether you're an employee or an employer, take time during Canada's Healthy Workplace Week (and beyond!) to *shift your attention* by trying some of these ideas to reduce stress, improve personal balance, and promote a healthy culture at work.

1. Catch Others Doing Things Right

One of the top complaints in the workplace is a lack of recognition from others. We can't always get our boss or colleagues to acknowledge and recognize us but we can become the kind of person who recognizes others. Catch others doing things "right" and cheer each other on. Give a word of praise or thanks to those you work with.

2. Wake Up to the Gifts

It is difficult to notice how we are *specifically* supported and helped by others or by "things". Instead, obstacles demand our attention. When things go right we often fail to notice them or simply take them for granted. When we wake up and see the support we receive on a daily basis, we see the world with new eyes.

3. Consider Others First

Devote a whole day to putting the convenience of others ahead of your own. Check this action against your normal habits. Notice when it is hard for you to do this. Discover how rich putting others first can make you feel. (*Improv Wisdom* by Patricia Ryan Madson)

4. Mindful Listening

Can you tell when someone you are speaking with on the phone is also checking their e-mail? Of course, we all know by the long pause, the sound, being asked to repeat ourselves and so on. Experiment with the practice of mindful listening. Give your caller your full attention until you say good-bye. When your mind drifts off to e-mail, the next appointment or what you will cook for dinner, gently bring it back to the conversation at hand.

5. Secret Services

Do something kind for one or more of your colleagues without anyone knowing that it was you. Notice the difference between doing something where we get social credit and doing something where we do not. Have fun.

6. Give and give until you wave good-bye

As long as you continue to show up in your workplace, bring your best effort to everything you do. Your employer, your colleagues, and your clients deserve your best and you will have no regrets when the time comes to say good-bye.

7. When is “Not-Doing” Doing?

Take time to sit in your garden, watch the sunset, wander along the shore, curl up and read a book or have a nap. Life is not always about work. We all need time to reflect and simply be present to the wonders of life.

8. Pay Attention

Become a keen observer. Use your senses to see the world around you. When we practice paying attention we see what needs to be done, we notice the ripple effects of our actions, life becomes more interesting and we get valuable feedback from reality. Increase your awareness in the workplace and take advantage of existing employee support programs that can help you to address your needs and concerns.

9. One Thing at a Time

There is a prevailing myth that multi-tasking is productive. As much as you can, bring your full attention to the one thing you are doing now. Then move to the next task and give *it* all your attention. You may discover that you get more accomplished and reduce your stress.

10. Manage Your Energy

When we don't take care of the basics: sleeping, eating and exercise, - we get sick; if not now, later. We also set a bad example for others, especially if we are in leadership roles. Productivity and health improve when we eat nutritious food, take a walk everyday (how about your lunch hour?) and get to bed before the eleven o'clock news.

11. Make Appointments With Yourself

Use appointments to your advantage. We make appointments all the time with doctors, dentists, and colleagues and for meetings of one kind or another. Yet seldom do we consider making an appointment with ourselves to complete a task. Book an appointment with yourself, block it off in your day timer to finish that report or get started on that project you need to do. Treat it the same as you would any other appointment, and let people know that you are not available between one and four today.

12. Have Set Times For Checking E-Mail

Be your own researcher. Turn off automatic e-mail notification. For one week check your e-mail four times a day at specific hours and reply, forward, defer, or delete. Resist the temptation to just check. Notice how difficult this research project is. What did you learn by the end of the week?

13. Make Mistakes Please

Be willing to make mistakes, try something new; experiment. Stick your neck out to make progress. Be willing to acknowledge your mistakes graciously and see what needs doing next. Mistakes are a necessary component of narrowing the gap between the idea and the action. Be generous with others' mistakes.

14. Full Effort is Full Victory (*Gandhi*)

We all want results. We need results to stay in business, to maintain programs and to keep the ship afloat. On the other hand, results are not completely controllable. There are variables from the weather, the economy, disease, war, and so on that can challenge the best made plans. It is a good idea to celebrate our efforts. When we bring our best quality of attention and effort to any task then we have succeeded no matter how it turns out. This deserves to be acknowledged even as we make changes to the "next steps."

15. Speak up

Even if you are anxious or shy, speak up about work-life balance issues when the occasion arises such as workplace discussions, performance reviews and so on. Do you want to see flexible hours, a limit on overtimes, or job sharing? Let your thoughts be known and work to turn your ideas into action.

16. Check It Out

When seemingly unreasonable demands are made, sometimes mis-communication can be the root of the problem. Ask questions. Clarify your goals and objectives. Let the person making the request know what is already on your plate. Open a conversation about what can come off your plate. Assume the best, and set yourself up for success by checking things out or asking questions.

17. What Are You Enthusiastic About?

"Enthusiasm is one of the most powerful engines of success. When you do a thing, do it with all your might. Put your whole soul into it...be active, be energetic and faithful, and you will accomplish your object. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm."
— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

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