Know Your Limits at Work Meeting Kit

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

The classic definition of stress is the response our bodies and minds have to the demands placed upon them and the interpretations we assign to those demands. Stress can force us to prioritize our tasks in a way that allows us to begin to tackle the most important work first, triggering adrenaline to compensate for the perception that there's just too much on our plate and we do not have time to accomplish all our tasks.

LIMITS AT WORK

We often want to succeed and do well in our jobs or profession. Because of this fact we push our limits at times, whether that is physically or mentally, to try to do our best. While good things such as personal growth can come from pushing your limits, there is a point and certain situations when this is not appropriate. Any time you are pushing your limits to a point where you, someone else, or property is at risk, you need to stop work and seek assistance.

STRESS AND BURNOUT

When we experience stress for an extended period without being able to alter, change, or ameliorate it, we can begin to feel empty, numb, devoid of motivation, hopeless, and beyond caring. Burnout is a state of emotional and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.

There is a major distinction between stress and burnout—stress involves too much and burnout not enough. Everyone experiences stress in one form or another—in raising a child, in schoolwork, at our job, in having an ill family member, with financial

pressures, in marital problems, with addiction, and with being homeless. In the face of the day-to-day, constant stressors of anxiety, depression, and in many cases post-traumatic stress disorder, with no end in sight, we can see how someone can turn from thinking that their situation is temporary and resolvable to the helpless and hopeless thoughts that being burned out can bring. Without some form of intervention, it is easy to see how someone can remain stuck, apathetic, and lack any physical or mental energy to change their situation.

No matter the situation, burnout can occur if you are lacking the awareness as to what all that stress is doing to you.

EMPLOYEES MUST FACE THEIR LIMITS

Humans have built-in limitations. These limitations are physical, mental, social, and chronological. Until you recognize those limitations, you will never feel productive; you will always assume that you could be doing more. The first step to being truly productive is to have an honest assessment of what you are realistically capable of doing.

Physical Limitations: There are limits to what your body is capable of doing—both in one-time activities (e.g., pulling an all-nighter), and over weeks, seasons, and years. Your body requires regular, quality sleep to function correctly. You need to eat properly and allow your body to digest the food. You need to maintain your body with regular exercise.

Think about the times you thought you could just work through the night on a project, skip a meal, or relied on ridiculous amounts of caffeine or other drugs to keep going.

If you were to go back and judge your productivity during those times, you would probably find that you were not much more productive than seasons where you treated your body right.

Accepting your physical limitations means acknowledging that these shortcuts are detrimental to your productivity.

Mental Limitations: For most of humanity's existence, 'work' has meant relying on our body and mind working together, whether as a hunter-gatherer or an early farmer. Once the industrial revolution came about, our bodies were no longer a match for the machines.

Our brains have limitations. Just like the rest of the body, the brain is not meant to work for hours on end; it requires breaks, variety, rest, and maintenance.

When you add in the required breaks, it is unlikely that you have much more than five or six hours of highly productive mental work in you every day.

Accepting your mental limitations means acknowledging that you have a limit on how much mental work you can do in a day, and intentionally providing your brain with rest and other activities.

Social Limitations: You might be the mother or father of young children, or the child of rapidly aging parents, which both require a lot of time and energy. Your spouse needs you to spend time decompressing and talking about the day.

Emergencies happen and you may need to take a trip to the hospital or make a meal for someone. You promised the kids a camping trip over the summer. Your friends plan a week-long fishing expedition.

The truth is we cannot function without these human interactions.

Social limitations are a great reminder that we are much more than our jobs. You should not feel bad about not hitting your numbers at the office the same week that your cousin got married and you decided to fly out a day early to spend some extra time with family.

Chronological Limitations: In a world that feels infinite, it is easy to fall into the trap that we think our time here is infinite as well. But we need to constantly be reminded that we have time limits.

Living Within Your Limits: We believe we can push our bodies even further, that doing more work is just a matter of willpower, that we could get so much more done if it were not for the people around us, and that somehow our time supply is limitless.

FINAL WORD

It is important to have enough self-awareness to know when enough is enough. Taking the time to stop and seek out assistance when you know you are passed your limits may make the difference in whether an injury occurs or not.