



Corporate America – The Center of The Health Epidemic

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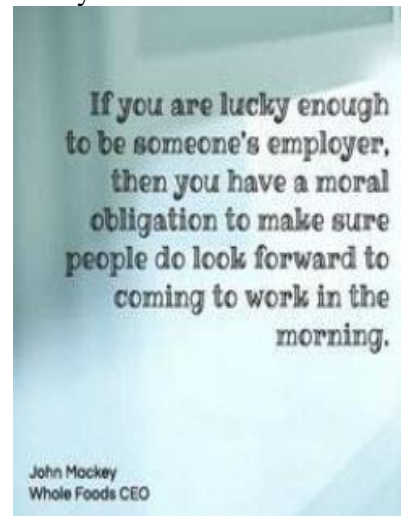
The first job I had when I was a kid was smashing aluminum cans. Not a job I chose or desired, but one my father imposed on me and my sisters to take on more responsibility and make money. He was always trying to teach us - if you worked hard, you were rewarded.

Once I grasped the concept that if I worked hard, I would get a monetary reward, I was driven to get better jobs making more money. I soon moved onto cutting lawns, and house sitting. Eventually, when I got old enough, I moved into retail, and stayed there until I graduated high school. I really wanted to go to college and move out of my parent's home as it was a toxic environment. My need for peace, contentment, and independence was my goal. Shortly after graduating, an older friend of mine helped me get into my first corporate job. I was ecstatic! They offered tuition reimbursement, benefits, and I would be making over three dollars more per hour than my retail job. By taking this opportunity, I would be able to go to school, and move out of my parent's house. After getting hired for the job, all was going well. I loved my boss, and the environment. I was working hard to prove myself, and within eight months I was promoted twice. Each time, I was making more money, and along with that came more responsibilities, and increasing hours. If I was working late, my senior leader would always tell me I should go home. He was very aware that although the work needed to get completed, it wasn't healthy that I was there all night trying to finish. I thought that was very commendable of him, and I respected him a great deal.

The company I was working for was small at the time when I started but began to grow. New managers were coming in, and the ones I had been working for were being shifted around or promoted. The management changes in the early stages didn't seem to be too bad, but that eventually took a turn for the worse. Five years into my tenure at this company, I started noticing the effects

on my health, well-being, and personal life due to the demands of my job and upper management. The first sign started out as me losing my hair and getting bald spots, so I went to the doctors to see what was going on. After giving me some injections in my head to try and bring some of my hair back, he told me I needed to reduce my stress as this was the cause. At first, I was in disbelief, but knew my job had taken over my life in all aspects.

Fast forward two years, I knew I needed to make a change in what I was doing. By this time, senior leadership was standing by the elevators when employees were trying to leave to go home at 5:00 pm telling them if they didn't have their work done, they couldn't leave.



When I heard this, I was in shock that leadership would think it was okay to do this to employees. I was stressed, tired of working almost twelve hours a day, and was no longer feeling rewarded or challenged. I decided to move out of my department and job and do something completely different. I stayed with the

company but went to a different department doing Internet Support for our website. I loved it, and my manager was great. I was not stressed, and really enjoyed what I was doing. I finally had balance back in my life. Unfortunately, eight months into the job, I was laid off. The company hit a hardship after 9/11, and I was part of the third set of layoffs. I was devastated to say the least.

I had been with the company over eight years, and just like that, I was gone.

My next job, the same thing transpired, only I was there almost fourteen years, and I took on many more health issues. As I continued to my next few jobs, I went right into management/leadership positions. I didn't have to work my way up like I did at prior companies.

Unfortunately, the stress, unrealistic demands, and expectations hit me right out of the gate. I became more and more sick and was not only threatened with my job if I didn't work the 14 plus hours a day, but also laid off from jobs where I was working 70-80

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hours a week. They used me up, got me sick, and kicked me out leaving me with even more health issues. By the time Corporate America got done with me, I had over 25 health diagnosis, had been on 14 different medications, had 11 surgeries, was almost 50 pounds overweight, and my personal life was nonexistent. I left a toxic home environment with the hope that a stable job, and adequate income would provide me the peace I so desperately wanted. Unfortunately, I ended up worse off than I had started. This was finally my wake-up call after 26 years.

What's going to be this country's wake-up call? What is going to make companies, and organization see that the way they are running their businesses are killing people? When are they going to realize they are the center of this health epidemic we are facing? When are they going to understand they play a huge role in the obesity, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, mental health, and many more health issues people are suffering from in this country?

Currently, the US population is around 328.6 million people. Of that, 128.8 million people are full-time employees. Based on reports, job pressure is rated as the number one cause of stress in the United States. 76 percent of the population is saying they are stressed out on a frequent basis due to money, and their jobs. That equates to almost 98 million people directly living and working with stress.

What does this actually mean? Stress has been shown to have detrimental impacts on individuals. "Medical journals and organizations cite stress as the cause of 60-90% of all illness, with job stresses being a major

contributor." The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (in 2016) estimated that the US- per capita- healthcare spending is more than twice the average of other developed countries. That means they are spending around \$9,024 per capita while the UK spends about \$3,971, France spends about \$4,506, and all other developed countries spend around the same. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' research findings are even higher. They "warn businesses that increasing job stress is responsible for an estimated annual cost of \$10,000 per worker and \$300 billion for the US economy. Among the nation's top executives, an estimated \$10 to \$20 billion is lost each year through absence, hospitalization and early death, much of it a direct result of stress." Keep in mind, the 98 million is who are *directly* impacted.

Now, let's talk about the population that is *indirectly* affected like the family members, and close friends of the employees working in these toxic environments. The stress they bring home, and unload on their family and friends. The spouses, and partners who never see their working counterpart. Who are feeling lonely, and depressed from barely connecting with them, and having to handle the workload of the home, and kids on their own? What about the kids who are let down because their parent never comes to games, spends time with them or has time to take an interest in, and nurture them? This ongoing neglect equally leads to health-related issues from depression to anxiety, to health-related diseases, to risky behaviors, to even suicide. If you add the *indirect* population that is affected by unhealthy work environments, that easily drives the number up to over two-thirds of the population dealing with the aftermath of these toxic working environments.

This corporate cultural mindset is killing this country. There is enough statistical data that shows how people are less productive after so many hours. "According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average American works 8.8 hours every day. Yet a study of nearly 2,000 full-time office workers revealed that most people aren't working for most of the time they're at work." They are only productive for about three out of the eight hours. This is in addition to high turnover, output inaccuracies, lack of creativity, increased stress-related illness, missed time from work, and the list goes on.

"The eight-hour workday is not based on the optimal number of hours a human can concentrate. In fact, it has almost nothing to do with the kind of work most people

do now: Its origins lie in the Industrial Revolution, not the Information Age”, states Melanie Curtin. It’s time to reinvent the wheel and design

To change this, companies must become less selfish, and more realistic with their demands, and expectations. They need to make sure departments are staffed adequately, and not only the jobs, but the organization is structured properly. Bottomline, they need to do the right thing at all costs because doing the wrong thing is costing people their quality of life. Furthermore, insurance companies need to hold these organizations more accountable. They have no real measures to force the changes needed to make the impact that is essential. Instead, they are giving employers and employees credit if people don’t smoke (smoking cessation). I find this amusing, and counterproductive considering people are most likely smoking because they are stressed due to their jobs. That is not fixing the root cause of the problem. Employers know employees need jobs, and they use this to their advantage when making demands.

Chick-fil-A could be making millions more by being open on a Sunday, but because the owner is a religious man, he lives to the standard that employees should not work on the Sabbath. We need more employee-centered companies who truly care about their employees, and are willing to do the right thing no matter the cost because with that mindset, everyone wins in the end.■

“The culture of any organization is shaped by the worst behavior the leader is willing to tolerate.”

Gruenter & Whitaker