Don't Let "Brown-Outs" Happen to Your Team

In a recent study in the *Harvard Business Review*, more than 50% of male executives and more than 80% of women executives working 60 plus hours per week said that they would not be able to keep that pace up for more than a year. In technology, where extended workweeks are the norm, your employees may experience mental "brown-outs", or periods of substantial creativity and productivity loss.

Brown-outs can have a significant impact on problem solving, innovation, and quality. It's no surprise that driving people to the point of burnout actually impedes your ability to meet deadlines and manage budgets, not to mention the negative impact on your retention and recruiting efforts.

Want to keep your team creative, focused, and productive? Try these ideas:

1. Use brainstorming to keep people mentally stimulated.

Brainstorming gives people a short break from their normal work and the opportunity to test their creativity and intellect. It also has the added benefits of producing higher quality solutions to problems while promoting knowledge sharing.

Use brainstorming as a means to find solutions to technical barriers, address challenges in teamwork or communication, develop new approaches to solving problems, and generate new product ideas.

When you're brainstorming, always remember to:

- Write all ideas down where everyone can see them (no matter how silly or outlandish the ideas may seem).

- Withhold criticism until after the brainstorming has ended.
- Encourage people to build on the ideas of others.
- Come back to the ideas list at a later time to organize and/or combine ideas. Sometimes the best ideas come from other people's "crazy" ideas.

2. Offer and encourage training, education, and other development opportunities.

According to Bob Nelson, the author of the best selling book *1001 Ways to Energize and Motivate Employees*, "When employees are given opportunities to learn and better themselves within the organization, it can electrify an otherwise stagnant group of individuals."

Training and development is especially important in the tech industry. The fast pace makes it a necessity to ensure that your staff is fully equipped with the latest information in order to stay competitive. To encourage learning, send employees to seminars and offer webinars as well as networking and other teaching opportunities.

3. A new workday model.

The old 9-5 routine does not work for all individuals. If feasible, offer flextime and the ability for staff to work from home on occasion.

In addition, stagger meeting times to meet the preferences of the entire team. Morning people may offer creative ideas early, while late risers will be faster on their feet later in the day.

4. Bring out the entrepreneur in everyone.

Allow time for employees to work on their own ideas and projects. This promotes creative freedom and personal growth. The following companies have had success from implementing this policy:

- Google allows workers to spend 10 percent of their time on their own projects and initiatives. This is where great ideas such as gmail and orkut came from.
- Researchers at electronics manufacturer Hewlett-Packard are given access to 24 hour labs and are also encouraged to spend a small percentage of their time on their own creative ideas.

Incorporating some or all of these ideas will not only help you hang onto your top talent, but will also positively impact your bottom line in the process.

References:

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