

work

CORPORATE CULTURE

Stress-Free Zone

People now work longer hours and more days a year than ever before, leading to an unparalleled rise in employee stress. So it's up to companies to take the initiative to promote workplace relaxation—for the good of both their employees and the bottom line.

Numerous studies show that office stress is associated with susceptibility to illness such as cold and flu and musculoskeletal disorders including carpal tunnel syndrome. Norwegian scientists recently presented research at "Work, Stress and Health '99," a conference sponsored by the American Psychological Association and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, demonstrating a way for employers to take the lead in creating a kinder, gentler workplace.

Aslaug Mikkelsen, Ph.D., of Norway's Rogaland Research Center, and Per Oystein Saksvik, Ph.D., of the University of Trondheim, asked employees at local health care institutions to identify factors crucial for pleasant working conditions. The researchers then created a "steering committee" of workers that met weekly to discuss these factors with their employers and submitted a report of their progress to co-workers each week for 12 weeks. Because employees were actively involved in determining sources of job stress, reported Mikkelsen, the stress decreased and their social support and office harmony increased.

Workers could labor more productively because they felt healthier and enjoyed being in the office—which only works to employers' advantage.—C.C.

SKILLS

Are Leaders Born Or Made?

Some people are born to move and shake the world. Their blessings: high energy, exceptional intelligence, extreme persistence, self-confidence and a yearning to influence others.

After 50 years of collecting data on the topic, most psychologists believe that leadership qualities are innate or genetic and thus impossible to learn. Yet this fall, my colleagues and I presented over a decade of research showing that leadership skills *can* be developed and mastered.

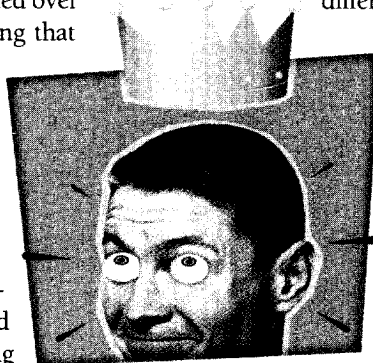
First, we found that Mom and Dad can instill us with the tools and drive to lead. Both senior VPs in high-tech firms and the military leaders we interviewed had very involved parents who set challenging goals, translated failure into "how to succeed next time" and lived by high standards of moral conduct—helping their kids to appreciate diverse views.

But even if you weren't prepared early in life to be a leader, we've discovered tech-

niques to help you take the helm: Visualize obstacles; set goals and find someone who will hold you accountable to them; seek and incorporate feedback from colleagues; reflect on your best and worst moments; train gradually; broaden your model of leadership to include a full range of styles; and honor high ethical standards.

In a series of five studies, leaders of different ages and levels of experience from around the world participated in workshops with other members of their organizations. Based on this model, the teams developed practical problem-solving techniques and leadership plans that they successfully deployed over the following six to 12 months. Regardless of whether their skills were

born or made, all got the job done equally well.—Bruce Avolio, Ph.D., director of the Center for Leadership Studies at SUNY-Binghamton and author of *Full Leadership Development: Building the Vital Forces and Organization* (Sage, 1999).



ADDICTION

The High Cost of Quitting

As health-conscious Americans try to kick caffeine, nicotine, alcohol and fatty foods, you'd think companies like Colt 45 and Philip Morris would lose money. But quitting our habits may actually up their profit.

It's true that if people completely abandoned their vices, then sales of these products would suffer. But consumer behavior isn't so simple, says Klaus Wertenbroch, Ph.D., a professor at

the Yale School of Management. He points out that our difficulty in overcoming addiction leads to two opposite buying styles: We either buy large, cheap quantities of a product when we feel like indulging our weakness, or we buy the smallest—but more expensive—package when we're feeling virtuous and are trying to wean ourselves off of it.

This schizoid purchasing pattern, says Wertenbroch, plays right into the pockets of marketers looking to increase sales. By targeting both the hopeful habit-breaker and the inevitable cheater, they can be sure to make a buck.—C.C.

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