

# The organization is a body – keep it healthy



## LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

DAVE CRISP

An interesting and powerful way to look at healthy workplaces is to draw a parallel between organizations and healthy individuals.

It isn't a single program (such as jogging for weight loss) that will solve our problems and turn us into paragons of good health but, rather, a series of activities working together. While this isn't a brand new point, it's still a potentially useful way of presenting this concept to line managers who have limited time or interest in HR programs.

What does it take for an individual to be healthy? A variety of elements — healthy eating, sleeping, exercising, work-life balance and a purpose in life with supportive people. These complementary approaches have to work consistently together. Add in one major discordant element — drinking to excess or short-changing sleep for months on end — and trouble is brewing.

The same can be said for organizations. You need a goal

the whole body (the organization is a body, in much the same way as an individual) can get behind and accept as purposeful. A healthy body requires a supportive environment that challenges everyone to be better in a balanced, measured way. Those healthy ingredients can be disrupted by bad behaviour.

Astonishingly, more than 70 cent of organization have problems with executives who play favourites, curse or otherwise create unpleasant environments and refuse to follow reasonable process, according to a survey of 793 HR professionals by *Canadian HR Reporter* and the Human Resources Professionals Association.

Persistent bad habits will not only destroy the health of individuals but organizations — not overnight, but cumulatively over relatively short time frames. Seen in this light, it's perhaps easier to understand lots of programs contribute to overall health and ignoring any of them has the potential to sink the whole body.

Of course, none of us, nor any organization, will be perfect. But we have to strive continually to improve if we expect to function at high levels and produce great results with high productivity.

Can we tolerate some bad habits? Sure. But imagine the result if the majority of cells in the body are contributing to the problem with bad behaviour.

Most of the body had better be in good shape and functioning well if we expect to survive our relatively few bad habits.

Trillium Health Centre's examples rang especially true. It engages many leaders (not just formal ones) in coming up with continual improvements, similar to Toyota — and Trillium referenced using lean, a Toyota-originated concept applied to HR and the organization's wellness, management and business practices.

Will good health give us the energy to work better and produce superior results? Of course. Then why does it seem so hard to get this point across in organizations? The more tightly we can link this with clear measures of how it works synergistically with all management efforts in one bucket, the more we will get the right results.

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