A Better Way To Work

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DIGITAL DEPRESSION LEADS TO SKILLS AMNESIA

Mismanaged use of email, cell phones, pagers and electronic organizers in the workplace is causing "Digital Depression". This is a feeling of being powerless and unable to keep pace leading to skyrocketing stress levels and decreasing productivity, according to productivity expert Dan Stamp. "By the time we learn to use the latest software program or tech toy we feel pressured to upgrade to the newest version."

"Today's technology offers fantastic potential but many people find themselves controlled by it," explains Stamp, chairman of Priority Management, a worldwide training company. "If you aren't careful, technology can actually increase your workload rather than increase your productivity."

Stamp identifies five symptoms of Digital Depression:

1. Stressed by accessibility
Being constantly available by cell phone, pager or the latest wireless device, means being constantly interrupted. Each call or message you respond to is diverting your attention from your key priorities. The inability to "unplug" contributes to increased stress.

2. Insecurity due to Digital Darwinism
An anxious feeling based on the belief that a technological evolutionary process is taking place and only those who master every program, every upgrade and every gadget will survive.

3. Continuous partial attention
An inability to concentrate on one task until completion - brought on by a 24/7 world with shorter deadlines and a faster pace. Urgent matters take precedent over important matters and time isn't taken to reflect on decisions or "sleep on it". Personal productivity declines as a result.

4. Victim of Device Creep
The pressure to acquire the newest wireless all in one cellphone - digital assistant-remote control device - to augment existing collection of gadgets and toys, regardless of whether it enhances productivity.

5. Cognitive Interruptus
A state of permanent interruption. Whether it's the phone, pager or e-mail alarm, every interruption deters you from your daily plan, increasing your workload and sense of anxiety.

The root cause of Digital Depression, according to Stamp, is skills amnesia - in the rush to keep pace with technology trends, people are forgetting to apply basic management skills such as managing priorities, setting goals and delegating.

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DIGITAL DEPRESSION LEADS TO SKILLS AMNESIA (cont.)

"Without a solid foundation of these skills, the most sophisticated technology in the world will be of little use in terms of increasing your personal productivity," he says.

"The increased proliferation of technology in the workplace and the trend towards technology convergence means that Digital Depression will become more pervasive," Stamp predicts. He offers several "cures":

- Schedule time to unplug yourself from your job, to unwind and maintain a healthy balance in your life.

- Invest in new skills training just as you invest in new hardware and software.

- Always consider the cost/benefit and return on investment before purchasing new technology. You should be able to specifically define how the technology or device will make you more effective at your job.

- Identify your priorities every day. Use these as the basis of your daily plan and stick to it.

Technology use is growing exponentially both at work and at home. As the world becomes more wireless, use of tech tools will only increase.

- The number of households with e-mail has jumped from 34 percent in 1999 to 53 percent in 2001*

- It's expected that by 2007 more than 60 percent of Americans will carry or wear a wireless computing and communications device**

But how well are we coping with this influx of technology?

- The average U.S. worker handles a staggering 200 messages a day*

- Employees report spending an average of almost 50 minutes a day simply managing e-mail**

- 24 percent of people spend more than an hour a day managing e-mail; respondents say only 27 percent of the e-mail they receive requires immediate attention

*Pitney Bowes Inc.
**Gartner Spring Symposium/IT Expo

Priority Management is a worldwide training company with 75 offices in 15 countries. They have successfully trained more than one million graduates in Priority programs. These programs help companies and people be more effective in and out of the office by providing tools, processes and discipline. Clients range from small business entrepreneurs to Fortune 500 companies.