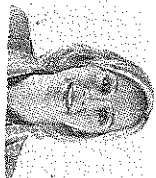


Do more – without blowing a gasket



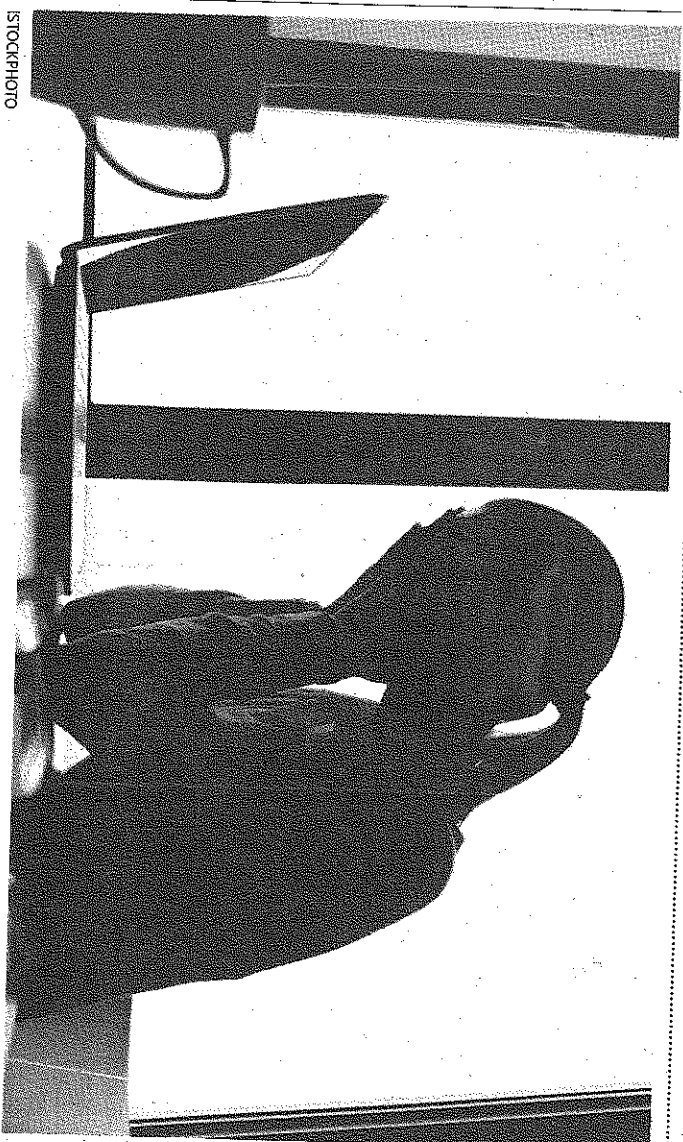
LEAH EICHLER
THE FUTURE OF WORK

I have a colleague who never sleeps.

He responds to my e-mails or texts late into the night, Eastern Time, despite living in Europe. Regardless of the hour, he always comes across as thoughtful and coherent. When I mention this to others, they often reminisce about the days when they, too, could pull off such superhuman feats. Like many workers of my generation, I feel the pressure to be productive 24/7, despite my belief that it can lead to personal and professional disaster.

This behaviour is not something we can easily fault, especially when it's a trend in Canada to do more with less. A recent study by recruiting firm Hays Canada showed that while 70 per cent of Canadian employers expect to increase their business in the coming months, only 38 per cent intend to add to their head count.

In practice, this can lead to long days, longer nights and a whole lot of exhaustion. According to Rowan O'Grady, president of Hays Canada, this doing "more with less" attitude is just getting worse. The theory, according to Mr. O'Grady, is that profitability rises when you push the same number of people to work more in an attempt to boost productivity. He says that



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companies are still suffering "a hangover" from the recession and are not adding permanent head count unless they really have to.

According to the report, the pressure on existing teams had led to a 31-per-cent spike in employee stress leaves, while 34 per cent of employers reported that staff morale had declined. If this "more with less" trend continues, Mr. O'Grady predicts that next year will see a greater incidence of stress leaves and even lower morale.

Similar trends are taking place in the United States, where the percentage of full-time workers has dwindled since the recession began in 2007, but the number

of hours they say they work each week has stayed at 47. While four in 10 workers put in a standard 40-hour workweek, most work considerably more, with nearly one in five working 60 hours or more, according to a Gallup Report.

If this is our new reality, how long can employers continue stretching their staff? While there is no easy answer to that question, Mr. O'Grady said that if an employee is given interesting work, with a purpose, and a clear line to advancement, then such actions can go far to boost morale. According to his survey results, the biggest contributor to employee turnover remained lack of career progression.

So how do you cope with work when you are constantly being pushed to do more? Or how do you manage a team with a "less means more" work ethic?

Dev Basu, founder of Powered by Search, a digital marketing agency based in Toronto, suggests setting priorities by asking yourself, "What is the one thing I could do today that would make all the other things on my to-do list irrelevant?"

Mr. Basu also advises focusing on work that lasts, so spending time on a training document or a process that can be reused in the future is of higher value than frantically multitasking in areas such as e-mail and social media. When his employees complain

they have too much to do, he said he sits down with them and helps them reprioritize their to-do list, analyzing what is urgent and important versus not urgent or not important. Our inclination may be to respond to an e-mail, but spending time on a marketing campaign that will yield more tangible results may be a better use of time.

"I've noticed that when you're put in a position to do more with less, very often it's a blessing in disguise," explained Maxxin Antipin, an electrical engineering student at the University of Toronto who is also an executive member of Institute of the Electrical and Electronics Engineers association in Toronto and the chief operating officer of an image-sharing platform, Dabble.

"You're forced to concentrate your time and energy on the most meaningful tasks, and you achieve the goals you set out for much more efficiently," he said.

Finally, the best way to do more with less is either to ask people to help or be ruthless in saying no to lower-value tasks, according to Jason Dea, the chief operating officer of online referral agency Forwards in Toronto.

"The biggest trap people fall into is doing everything and anything yourself," Mr. Dea said. "Pick high-value tasks and do them well. Don't be afraid to say no to others or call in help if you need it," he added.

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