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When Work Becomes Too Much

Feeling overworked can lead to mistakes, anger, resentment. The next time you think of asking a subordinate to stay late at work or to come in on his or her day off, consider this: employees who feel overworked are much more likely to make mistakes, feel angry or resentful, and look for a new job.

A recent study by [Families and Work Institute](#), a nonprofit center for research on family and workplace issues, finds that nearly one-third of U.S. employees often or very often feel overworked or overwhelmed by how much work they have to do. The study says employers need to pay attention to these concerns or both sides will suffer in terms of job performance, retention, safety, and personal well-being and relationships.

"This study suggests that many American employees are near the breaking point. We hope that this will be the clarion call that brings the issue of overwork to the attention of business leaders and policy-makers throughout the country," said FWI President Ellen Galinsky.

"The fact that so many employees report feeling overworked is a warning sign that it is important to constantly reassess and recalibrate how we treat people in the workplace," added Carlton Yearwood, director of diversity and work-life quality at PricewaterhouseCoopers, which helped fund the study. "This study shows that the consequences of overwork for workplace safety, job performance and staff retention are clear and direct."

Feeling Overwhelmed

The report, "*Overworked: When Work Becomes Too Much*," was based on a survey taken in March of 1,003 working adults. It found that 28 percent of employees felt overworked or overwhelmed by how much work they had to do "often" or "very often" in the past three months. More than half (54 percent) felt overworked at least sometimes in the past three months.

One-quarter of employees (25 percent) do not take all of the vacation to which they are entitled because of the demands of their jobs, and 55 percent of these people experience high levels of being overworked compared with 27 percent who do use all of their vacation.

People who have poorer quality jobs - less job autonomy, more wasted time, fewer learning opportunities, less job security - also feel more overworked.

Other Findings

- Women feel more overworked than men. On average, they report being interrupted more frequently while working and having too many tasks to do at the same time.
- Baby Boomers (36-54) feel more overworked than Gen Xers/Millennials (18-35) and mature workers (55 and older).
- Managers and professionals feel more overworked than others. Not surprising, since they work significantly longer hours than other employees and are more likely to prefer shorter hours.

The Consequences of Overworking

What happens when employees feel overworked?

The study found that they are much more likely to make mistakes, feel angry toward their employers for expecting them to do so much, resent co-workers who do not work as hard as they do, and look for a new job.

Such feelings also take a toll on employees' personal lives. The more overworked they feel, the more likely they are to report problems with their spouse or partner, children and friends. They're also more likely to lose sleep and experience

health problems.

For employers, the findings have implications on safety in the workplace, job performance, employee retention and health-care costs, the study's authors say.

"Although feeling angry toward one's employer for being expected to work so hard and feeling resentful toward one's co-workers who appear to be working less may mainly affect employees' morale and levels of stress, there is also the possibility that employees will 'act out' their anger and resentment in the workplace," the study said.

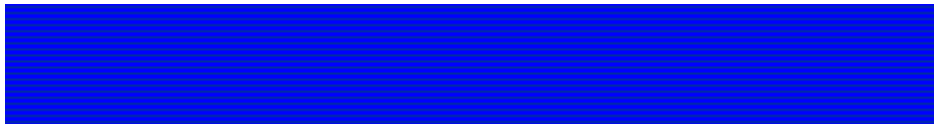
A Call for Change

The study says many of the job and workplace characteristics associated with feeling overworked are within the power of employers to change. The challenge for employers is in finding the right balance between the company's needs and employees' needs.

"Some employers believe that pushing employees to do more and do it faster is the only way to remain competitive in the global economy," the authors wrote.

"Still others may view our findings as an invitation to experiment with redesigning work to reduce wasted or low-value time at work, interruptions during the work day, or unnecessary demands."

The authors conclude: "Our findings strongly suggest that every employee reaches a point when increasing work demands simply become too much - a point at which personal and family relations, personal health, and the quality of work itself are seriously threatened. Today's 24/7 economy appears to be pushing many employees to and beyond that point."



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