

Opinion: Why you hate work

By Tony Schwartz and Christine Porath, New York Times

The way we're working isn't working. Even if you're lucky enough to have a job, you're probably not very excited to get to the office in the morning, you don't feel much appreciated while you're there, you find it difficult to get your most important work accomplished, amid all the distractions, and you don't believe that what you're doing makes much of a difference anyway. By the time you get home, you're pretty much running on empty, and yet still answering emails until you fall asleep.

Increasingly, this experience is common not just to middle managers, but also to top executives.

Our company, The Energy Project, works with organizations and their leaders to improve employee engagement and more sustainable performance. A little over a year ago, Luke Kissam, the chief executive of Albemarle, a multibillion-dollar chemical company, sought out one of us, Tony, as a coach to help him deal with the sense that his life was increasingly overwhelming. "I just felt that no matter what I was doing, I was always getting pulled somewhere else," he explained. "It seemed like I was always cheating someone – my company, my family, myself. I couldn't truly focus on anything."

Mr. Kissam is not alone. Srinivasan S. Pillay, a psychiatrist and an assistant clinical professor at Harvard Medical School who studies burnout, recently surveyed a random sample of 72 senior leaders and found that nearly all of them reported at least some signs of burnout and that all of them noted at least one cause of burnout at work.

More broadly, just 30 percent of employees in America feel engaged at work, according to a 2013 report by Gallup. Around

the world, across 142 countries, the proportion of employees who feel engaged at work is just 13 percent. For most of us, in short, work is a depleting, dispiriting experience, and in some obvious ways, it's getting worse.

Demand for our time is increasingly exceeding our capacity – draining us of the energy we need to bring our skill and talent fully to life. Increased competitiveness and a leaner, post-recession work force add to the pressures. The rise of digital technology is perhaps the biggest influence, exposing us to an unprecedented flood of information and requests that we feel compelled to read and respond to at all hours of the day and night.

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