

Balance: Don't mention the war!

By  Catherine Milward-Bridges

4 Mar 2014

We spend a significant part of our lives chasing a salary that'll enable us to afford to buy a home. Then we spend a significant part of our day **away from** that home, to earn enough money to be able to keep it.

It's this degree of irony that illustrates the conundrum we're faced with when it comes to [finding balance](#). Often our meagre output pales (discouragingly) in relation to our gruelling, long days of toiling.

So, what to do?



Return the cart to its rightful place

We fear loss more than we covet gain, says Harvard Business Review Blog's [Dorie Clark](#). Our fear of 'inevitable' career jeopardy due to reduced hours at work far outweighs us wanting a fulfilling family life.

Because excessive work allows for instant gratification in the form of an increased salary, a promotion or an accolade, we prioritise its success as a caveat for happiness. However: "Happiness is the precursor to greater success - success is a result of happiness, not the other way around," says Shawn Achor, author of *The Happiness Advantage*.

It's news like this that highlights our dire need for balance, or does it: "[Moritz Erhardt, 21, was found dead in his London flat on Aug. 15. He had reportedly worked 72 hours straight prior to collapsing in the shower and dying.](#)"

It's time to return the cart to the rear of the horse - where it belongs - and prioritise happiness over triumph at work.

Spanner, check!

It's common knowledge that we cannot make a good job of anything, if we don't have the right tools. It's no different when it comes to having the right skills.

According to a 2013 Grant Thornton [International Business Report \(IBR\)](#), "SA organisations are constrained from growing their businesses, and the economy, because we lack the right skills."

Our healthcare and technology sectors are hardest hit. On the back of this, social grants and government subsidies are reported to support up to 40% of our population, leaving little incentive for any upskilling.

When we are suitably skilled, we're more likely to take on projects with gusto and execute with excellence.

Efficiency vs effectiveness

It seems to be broadly accepted in business that efficiency is **doing things right**, while effectiveness is **doing the right things**.

Effective people tend to have a qualitative approach, like consistently producing sales. Efficient people have a quantitative approach, e.g. following up timeously on large volumes of leads - a prerequisite for sales.

Therefore, it's a no-brainer that anyone who's serious about getting to the top of their game needs to harness both effectiveness and efficiency in their output.

The voice of experience

The recent commemoration of the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster, which happened on 1 February 2003, seems rather apt in this context.

Business professor Peter Madsen from Brigham Young University (BYU) has been researching NASA's safety climate, unearthing insightful findings that are acutely applicable to business today.

NASA ticked all the boxes when it came to effectiveness, but not efficiency:

- they identified, but played down 'near-misses' (potential disasters that are narrowly escaped)
- the significance of the Space Shuttle Columbia project wasn't stressed to the team
- leaders failed to emphasise safety, as being **as important** as other project goals (like effectiveness)

NASA's inability to identify the foam debris that struck the orbiter as a near-miss, is what led to the demise of the Columbia. Sadly, these near-misses had occurred on at least seven prior launches, but with the intervention of luck, they were mistakably deemed 'successes'.

"NASA had conflicting goals of cost, schedule and safety. Safety lost out," says NASA's Columbia Accident Investigation Board.

Recognising and acting on near-misses, instead of mistaking them for 'successes', will not only avert disaster, it could propel ANY business on its path to efficiency.

In our quest to find balance, let's start with deciding what is (truly) important.

ABOUT CATHERINE MILWARD-BRIDGES

Catherine Milward-Bridges is a passionate communication specialist and founder of simplyput.co.za. Catherine guides her clients in taking their engagement efforts from good to great; and helps them optimise social media with strategic know-how.

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