

Eric P. Bloom: **Exercise can help improve your team's productivity**



By Eric P. Bloom
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Did you know that certain types of exercise counteract the effects of poor posture endemic to people who work at desk jobs? Did you know that there are stretches you can do at your desk that can help improve your health? Did you know that exercise helps delay cognitive decline and hence, can help maximize the productivity of middle age and older workers? Well, I didn't either until I spoke with Ellen Cohen-Kaplan, an occupational therapist and personal trainer.

It's been well documented that an appropriate level of regular exercise aids overall health and life expectancy. What I didn't know, was that this same exercise can also help your productivity at work. That said, as a manager, encouraging and helping to facilitate athletic activities of your staff is not only good for them personally, it can also make them more productive in the workplace. For example, research has shown that exercise helps increase your mental processes, memory and so-called executive functions, which include planning, organization and the ability to mentally juggle different intellectual tasks at the same time.

Ms. Cohen-Kaplan went on to say that there are exercises you can do in just a few minutes sitting at your office desk or standing right next to it. For the exercises listed below, start at your neck and work their way down your body. Beforehand, consult your physician to assure you are of appropriate health to perform these exercises.

- Rotate your head from left to right and then up and down - these movements help stretch and relax your neck muscles.
- Raise and lower your shoulders, then move your shoulders forward and backward. Emphasize and stay in the “shoulders back” position for a count of 5. This loosens your shoulder muscles and helps reduce stress.
- Hold your hands behind your head and push your elbows back - this back extension helps further stretch your shoulders as well as your upper back.
- Place your left hand on your right hip while rotating your spine to the right and trying to look over your right shoulder. Then, perform the same move to the left side. These back rotations help stretch and relax your lower back muscles.
- Stand up, bend forward, bend your knees and put your hands flat on floor. Then, try to straighten your legs while keeping your hands on the floor. This stretch helps loosen your hamstrings which can become tight from sitting for prolonged periods.
- Perform leg lunges by putting one foot forward, bending your forward leg while keeping your back leg straight, and having your back heel up and your back toes on the floor. This position will help stretch your thigh muscles and loosen your lower body.

Some interesting points related to your workplace include:

- Sitting with hunched posture and leaning forward toward your desk can cause shallow breathing which causes your body to receive less oxygen, which can lead to fatigue and lower cognitive functioning.
- Ergonomically, placing your computer monitor at eye level, so your neck is neither flexed forward or back, is the best way to design your workplace.
- Sitting for more than half an hour without standing for a few minutes to stretch can tighten your muscles and reduce your productivity.

In the long run, helping to facilitate your staff’s health has true business benefits including:

- Reduced absenteeism due to lower occurrences of illness.
- Helping to prevent chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease helps decrease health care costs.

- Being seen as a boss interested in your team's health can help you attract and retain top employees.

In closing, encouraging your staff to exercise and exercising yourself is not only good for you and your team personally, it's also good business. It's a true win when your employees' goals and well-being directly align with business objectives. Physical exercise is a prime example of employee/employer alignment.

The primary advice and takeaways from today's column is to know that:

- It's been well documented that an appropriate level of regular exercise aids overall health and life expectancy.
- There are exercises you can do in just a few minutes sitting at your office desk or standing right next to it.
- Encouraging your staff to exercise and exercising yourself is not only good for you and your team personally, it's also good business.

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Until next time, manage well, manage smart, and continue to grow.

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