



# ARE SENIOR EXECUTIVES DIFFERENT TO THE REST OF US?

The stereotype of the stressed-out, overworked senior manager is one big myth.

I was surprised recently when the senior HR manager of a large listed company told me she believed that executives and upper-level managers were all highly stressed and had problems with alcohol and other substances. We provided figures on her own senior staff to her that were quite contrary to her belief.

As a medical practitioner, I clearly recall perhaps six months after assuming my current practice that the individuals I was seeing were very different to the tens of thousands of patients I had seen over the previous 20 years as a doctor and finally as a consultant physician. We may be biased in that we have seen clients typically attending for health management with the aim of preventing problems and picking up medical issues at an early stage. The practice is in Sydney, and 85 per cent of the patients we see are male, with the average age being 55, ranging from the early 20s to late 80s. While my clients may not be representative of the general population, I strongly suspect they are typical of senior management nationwide. It is also worth noting that as a medical practitioner, having had an ongoing relationship with senior business people in excess of 10 years now, one gets a very personal and intimate view of their lives.

What struck me was that these individuals were typically very healthy, not stressed, do not abuse alcohol, don't smoke or abuse substances, and are successful in other domains of their life in addition to their health.

I think there are several key reasons. First, they know how to prioritise and they value their health as a key priority. They actively seek information on how to optimise and measure their health. Typically they also highly value their marriages and relationships with family. They value quality free time – they take and thoroughly enjoy their holidays, and are quite focused in terms of investments and wealth creation.

Second, they are numbers focused. They want to measure their health parameters (cholesterol, fitness and weight), and constantly compare these numbers to their own prior results and also to their peers.

They are also highly disciplined. When I meet the CEO of one of Australia's largest companies who exercises an hour a day, every day, and still manages to be the leader of tens of thousands of people, this is the best example of how these successful people form habits that continually ensure that their already prioritised fitness goals are met.

They also have good stress-management skills. When asked how they manage stress or unplanned events, they often point to the importance of exercise in managing stress. They focus just on the things they can control, and they refuse to get stressed by things they can't control. They are always looking for the positives or a manageable way out of a stressful situation, and are philosophical when they can't control the situation. That's not to say they are not as prone to significant adverse events as the rest of us, such as a death in the family or losing a job. I would also add that they have high self-confidence and self-belief.

When they do get stressed they sort problems out early. They often will seek help professionally. If physical symptoms arise, they get them addressed fairly quickly, and they are very resourceful, often independently seeking second and third opinions, and deciding on the best course of action for them.

I suspect these principles are integrated in other areas of their lives. For example, the rate of marriage breakdown is much, much lower than the national average. While they are on a high income, they also know how to wisely invest and grow the income by measuring, getting the best advice, and being disciplined in their investments.

So one immediate question is: are these people like this because of their fundamental personalities and style, which predispose them to success, or do they have these characteristics because their career has fostered and honed this type of thinking, discipline and measurement profile? I suspect it's a bit of both.

Two related studies (the Whitehall studies) have attempted to address the interaction between one's work and one's health. People in jobs characterised by low control had higher rates of sickness absence, mental illness, heart disease and pain in the lower back. In addition, the Whitehall studies showed that the association between low control and increased risk of heart disease was independent of a range of personal characteristics of individuals. So the work that you do is an independent predictor regardless of your personality style structure. **HRm**

## JUNE

Short Course Forum Conference

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
	<b>3</b> <b>ACT</b> OD&D network forum: Leadership capability – translating the theoretical to the practical 5.45pm–7pm <b>VIC</b> Change management 9am–5pm	<b>4</b> <b>NSW</b> Albury/Wodonga network forum: HR effectiveness and metrics, 5.30pm–7.30pm <b>VIC</b> Managing time and workloads, 9am–5pm <b>QLD</b> Strategies for attraction recruitment and retention 9am–5pm <b>VIC/NSW/WA/QLD</b> Business-driven HR 9am–5pm	<b>5</b> <b>QLD</b> Toowoomba network forum: Why did the 'system' fail? 5.30pm–7pm <b>WA</b> Thursday 5–Friday 6 Mediation and conflict management, 9am–5pm <b>VIC</b> Thursday 5–Friday 6 Creating high-performance teams, 9am–5pm	<b>6</b> <b>NSW</b> Assertiveness in the workplace 9am–5pm
<b>9</b> <b>ACT</b> Diversity and inclusion 9am–5pm	<b>10</b> <b>QLD</b> Cairns PD network forum: The future of work 5.30pm–7pm <b>VIC</b> Tuesday 10–Wednesday 11 Emotionally intelligent leadership, 9am–5pm	<b>11</b> <b>NSW</b> Managing people performance 9am–5pm	<b>12</b> <b>VIC</b> How to write a business case 9am–5pm	<b>13</b> <b>ACT</b> Thursday 12–Friday 13 Strategic workforce planning, 9am–5pm <b>NSW</b> Mindful employer: mental health in the workplace 9am–5pm
<b>16</b> <b>NSW</b> Influencing and negotiation skills, 9am–5pm <b>VIC</b> Monday 16–Tuesday 17 Project management 9am–5pm	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b> <b>VIC/NSW/WA/QLD</b> Recruitment and workplace relations 9am–5pm <b>TAS</b> Having difficult conversations – Hobart 9am–5pm	<b>19</b> <b>VIC</b> Geelong HR in Focus Conference 8.30am–2pm <b>QLD</b> Thursday 19–Friday 20 Internal HR consulting skills 9am–5pm <b>TAS</b> Having difficult conversations – Launceston 9am–5pm	<b>20</b> <b>VIC</b> Moving from HR to organisational development 9am–5pm
	<b>24</b> <b>VIC</b> Learning & development network forum: Psychometric assessments for development purposes – unlocking the potential of your employees 5.15pm–6.30pm <b>VIC</b> Investigating workplace misconduct, 9am–5pm	<b>NSW</b> Bullying and harassment 9am–5pm <b>VIC</b> Tuesday 24–Wednesday 25 Emotionally intelligent leadership 9am–5pm	<b>26</b> <b>ACT</b> Developing effective HR policies and procedures 9am–5pm	<b>27</b> <b>NSW</b> Newcastle HR in Focus Conference 8.30am–4.30pm <b>VIC</b> Success through coaching 9am–5pm <b>QLD</b> Managing people performance, 9am–5pm

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