



**DISABILITY MANAGEMENT EMPLOYER COALITION**

## EXTREME PRODUCTIVITY: Are Your Employees Hitting the Wall?



2008 Think Tank Executive Summary



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## EXTREME PRODUCTIVITY: Are Your Employees Hitting the Wall?

### Executive Summary

Productivity has become supercharged over the past ten years, as technology tools have made a 40-hour work week a thing of the past and blurred the lines between the workplace and home. White-collar workers are putting in even more hours, despite the cost to personal time, family, and even physical and mental health. Blue-collar workers are working longer in physically demanding jobs because they believe they cannot afford to retire. Some even are taking on two jobs to make ends meet, which can lead to sleep deprivation.

Companies, too, are facing challenges to maintain employees' full engagement in their work while reducing stress. Rather than push for the maximum productivity, which is unsustainable, companies must promote optimal productivity to help employees achieve a better balance between their work and personal lives. Employers that fail to meet these challenges will lose their most precious resource—their human capital—to burnout.

To address the topic of extreme productivity in the workplace, the Disability Management Employer Coalition (DMEC) convened its 2008 Think Tank. The group's charge was to explore the causes and consequences of extreme productivity, while offering examples of strategies that help keep employees healthy, happy, and productive in an economically challenging environment.

Addressing the impact of extreme productivity begins with acknowledging the problem. Employers will realize a competitive advantage if they are ready to identify workplace issues and put programs in place that improve resiliency, reduce stress, and promote employee work satisfaction.

### Asking the Excellent Questions; Seeking Unique Solutions

To address the issue of potential productivity burnout, employers must ask themselves the excellent questions that probe the heart of the issue – and prompt meaningful discussions about workable, effective strategies – unique to their environment and culture:

- Have your employees crossed the line into extreme productivity?
- What costs are you facing because of extreme productivity demands in terms of profitability, product and service defects, quality, employee health, workplace injuries, increased absenteeism, and more numerous safety issues?
- What can you do to keep your employees from hitting the wall?

### Employer Solutions

The Think Tank explored a variety of solutions put in place by employers, both big and small, across several industries. These programs provide compelling examples of how companies asked themselves the excellent questions that pertained to the specific needs of their workforce and found solutions – or tailored existing ones – to support their employees' health and productivity.

- To generate optimal productivity while promoting the health of its employees, pharmaceutical company **GlaxoSmithKline** (GSK) developed a global Energy and Resilience portfolio of programs and benefits, which includes three workshops: Team Resilience, Personal Resilience, and Energy for Performance. Each has a strong self-awareness component, which is key in GSK's leadership development objectives. For GSK, the key question to be considered was: **How do you sustain healthy high performance?** It answered with a resiliency program to help teams, individuals, and executives adopt and model healthier, more effective behaviors with measurable results.

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- Union Pacific Railroad initiated a comprehensive behavioral health intervention initiative to meet the needs of its workforce, a large percentage of which works shifts with irregular hours. Union Pacific established a behavioral-health promotion and prevention program called FOCUS that encourages resiliency and healthy coping mechanisms, which in turn address health risks including sleep apnea, post traumatic stress disorder or overeating. Union Pacific also implemented a care-coordination process, managed by its Employee Assistance Program, to support its employees who were called up for active military duty. For Union Pacific, the key question was, “**How do we support employees dealing with work and life stress?**” Its response was a comprehensive behavioral health intervention initiative to encourage resiliency and healthy coping mechanisms.
- As is common with any hyper-growth company with a younger employee base, **Crowe Paradis**, a benefit advocacy firm, needed to address employee turnover and morale. It instituted “daily huddles” lasting 12 minutes, which facilitated better organizational communication. To solicit more feedback from employees, Crowe Paradis conducted satisfaction surveys. In addition, every year Crowe Paradis identifies five priorities with specific goals and visually tracks each team’s progress toward achieving them. As Crowe Paradis identified its culture and values, it asked: “**Are we putting our values into action?**” In response, it launched initiatives that give employees more of a voice and greater recognition for their accomplishments.
- Family-owned retailer **H-E-B Grocery Company** embraces a “culture of caring,” which it telegraphs from top management to managers and front-line store employees, whom the company calls “partners.” Through its wellness, health, and productivity modules, H-E-B engages in a strong outreach effort to its partners, particularly to detect stress and depression. From a disability standpoint, every partner – whether or not a behavioral health issue was identified – receives outreach and a referral to EAP. H-E-B believes a culture that supports work-life balance is critical to having employees make choices that are healthier for them and, ultimately, more profitable for the company. For H-E-B, the key question was: **How can we help employees engage in their work without sacrificing personal time or family life?** It responded with programs grounded in its corporate culture.
- **USAA**, a financial services company to members of the military and their families, wanted to take its assistance to employees and their families one step further by promoting a healthier work-life balance. The result was the creation of a Personal Balance Tool (PBT), a web-based resource used anonymously by employees and their dependents to identify the employee personal and professional goals while meeting responsibilities at work and at home. For USAA, it started with the question, “**What can we do to help employees deal with stress in their lives?**” USAA’s unique response has been an innovative and practical tool that’s being used by 15,000 out of 22,000 employees over the past three years—a remarkable success rate.

*(For more details about the company initiatives, or to read the full report on Extreme Productivity, please see the DMEC web site at [www.dmec.org](http://www.dmec.org).)*

## Conclusion

Today’s workplace is highly charged, and the push to work harder and faster accelerates. A severe downturn in the economy will only add to the stress and anxiety felt by employees who already are being pushed to the limit. In order to take systemic action that is right for their industry, work environment, and corporate culture, companies need to first ask the excellent questions about employee health, safety, effectiveness, and satisfaction that are germane to the specific workplace. Unless companies address these issues, they run the risk of pushing for more than optimal productivity – and ending up with less output, efficiency, and profitability.

## Acknowledgements

DMEC wishes to thank the Extreme Productivity Think Tank sponsors:

Aetna  
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Crowe-Paradis  
Liberty Mutual  
MetLife  
OptumHealth  
The Hartford



**DISABILITY MANAGEMENT  
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**DMEC is the only nonprofit** national trade association dedicated to the Integrated Absence and Disability Management profession. Its mission is to provide educational resources and to provide guidance in the areas of workforce disability, absence, health, and productivity. This mission is met through national, regional and local conferences, e-learning resources, training programs, publications, and practical tools.

**DMEC currently** has over 2,500 corporate members in chapters across the United States and two international exchange programs. Both Employer and Supplier memberships are offered. DMEC strives to provide excellence in service and industry leadership by adhering to the highest principles of integrity, honesty, and ethical standards.

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