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A killer of a day really may be one

Reviewed by: **Deborah Bowers**Posted: **02/9/2013 1:00 AM** | Comments: **0g** | Last Modified: **02/9/2013 10:24 AM** | Updates[Enlarge Image](#)

Author and doctor David Posen looks at workplace health in his new book, *Is Work Killing You?* (PHIL HOSSACK / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS FILE PHOTO)

DAVID POSEN, MD
National Bestselling Author of *The Little Book of Stress Relief*

Is Work Killing You?

A Doctor's Prescription
for Treating Workplace Stress



If you have ever been told to do more with less, worked with a bully, or checked email while on vacation, this book is for you.

Rife with ideas for stress reduction, workflow planning and work-life balance, this workplace health reference provides solid advice for anyone who wants to transform their current workplace, or is looking for new employment.

Author David Posen, an Ontario physician, has previously released such titles as *Always Change a Losing Game* and *The Little Book of Stress Relief*.

In this new outing he identifies three problems that contribute to burnout and low productivity: volume, velocity and abuse.

Volume covers how workload has increased to the point of overload. Velocity explores how the speed of the workplace has accelerated to a point where people have to run frantically just to keep up. And in the abuse section he takes a long, hard look at workplace bullies.

He engages the reader by addressing a core concern: chronic stress can affect your physical health in the form of high blood pressure and increased cholesterol. It can also zap your energy and affect your mental function.

Posen appeals to businesses leaders to care about employee stress and notes that absenteeism is the No. 1 concern affecting the bottom line.

He references a 2011 psychological study of workers that suggests employee burnout costs the U.S. economy an estimated \$300 billion a year in lost productivity and medical bills.

Posen is careful not to coddle would-be whiners who simply don't want to work, or envision the workplace as a Zen-like retreat. "Stress is a fact of life," he writes. "It's also necessary for top performance. But when it's excessive, it becomes a problem, and many companies crossed that line a long time ago."

[Enlarge Image](#)**BOOK REVIEW****Is Work Killing You?
A Doctor's Prescription for Treating
Workplace Stress**

- By Dr. David Posen
- Anansi, 256 pages, \$19

Posen admits that a certain amount of stress is needed for optimal performance. "An oft-used analogy for the relationship between stress and performance is a violin string," he writes. "If it's strung too loosely, it won't produce much sound. If it's strung too tightly, it will be too high-pitched and might snap."

The combination of his medical knowledge with stress management, lifestyle counselling and psychotherapy expertise provide Posen with a wealth of patient insight, anecdotes, stories of deplorable workplaces and research to support his claims.

He cites a 2011 study that found "the divorce rate among couples with no workaholic spouse was 16 per cent, whereas

the number for workaholic marriages was 55 per cent."

Refreshingly, Posen is open to sharing others' opinions and mentions leadership and organizational health experts such as Stephen Covey, Jim Collins, Linda Duxbury and Daniel Pink.

He also has his finger on the pulse of popular culture and believes that movies like *Horrible Bosses* and competitive reality shows like *Survivor* are not helping anyone set realistic expectations of appropriate behaviour.

Posen dares to attack an overused "must have" for most jobs: multitasking. He notes, "Multitasking is inefficient, slows you down, leads to mistakes and accidents, and is hard on the brain. If you think it's a good way to get more things done, the research -- and my own experience -- shows just the opposite."

He provides an interesting tidbit courtesy of one of the most renowned creative bosses of all time: Walt Disney. Says Posen: "Here was Walt running a big studio with lots of employees, yet he still gave them permission to take breaks when needed. More than 70 years ago, Walt Disney knew something that today's managers could learn from: taking timeouts pays off."

The pages burst with trivial yet effective sound bites. "Doing more with less leads to doing everything with nothing." "Being busy does not equal being productive." "People don't leave jobs, they leave bosses."

At times, *Is Work Killing You?* veers into territory beyond its cope. For example, Posen chastises CEOs (including poobahs at Exxon Mobil, JP Morgan Chase and Company and Goldman Sachs) for their bloated salaries and the general problem of "affluenza."

Even though these may be apt observations, they are preachy and off-topic.

Overall, though, he provides a lot of good ideas, including strategies to create more productive, harmonious and profitable workplaces.

The key to success will be getting taxed-for-time leaders to read his advice, let alone heed it.

Deborah Bowers is a marketing and communications director who truly appreciates her current workplace.

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